Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium

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Abstract

Without wishing to deny the historical reality of processes of disenchantment, this paper challenges the classic Weberian account of disenchantment as a uni-directional and universalizing tendency of modernity. This argument has a number of stages. (1) Reason and rationalization are distinguished from each other. (2) The historical relationships between modernity, Reason and rationalization are problematized. (3) The scale and scope of rationalization are questioned (it is partial and unsuccessful, almost by definition). (4) Secularization and the 'decline of magic' are distinguished from each other. (5) Enchantment and re-enchantment are placed at the heart of modernity. Enchantment and re-enchantment are both distinctively modern and a response to modernity. While disenchantment has been a stimulus to (re)enchantment, enchantment may generate its own disenchantments. The two are opposite sides of one coin. This argument is exemplified by a brief look at the contradictions, alarms and damp squibs of the recent Millennium.

Keywords Weber, disenchantment, enchantment, rationalization, modernity, Millennium

When Max Weber borrowed the expression 'the disenchantment of the world' from Schiller, he was offering a sociological—perhaps even an ethical or moral—provocation which continues to resonate today. The challenge of Weber's choice of words, and of his analysis, is that he understood, better perhaps than most of his contemporaries, the complicated and contradictory nature of the times in which he lived, and we still live; that 'progress' is, at best, a mixed blessing, and that one of the definitive tasks of sociology—a job to which sociologists may, in their ability to juxtapose the extensively public and the intimately private, have a special calling—must be the exploration and better appreciation of that somewhat bitter mixture.

He is not, however, suggesting—in anticipation of the post-modern posture, perhaps—that progress is an illusion. Nothing so simple. One senses in Weber a keen appreciation of change; of the fact that history has some direction, in the sense of being cumulative and largely non-

reversible; and, not least, of the truth that, in some senses, things have improved (think, for example, of his account of 'Citizenship' in the *General Economic History* [1981: 315-37]). But alongside this, there is always something else too, something which distinguishes him sharply from both Marx and Durkheim. Although Weber was not a cynic, his work is characterized by pessimism and a weary acknowledgement of what the Jedi of *Star Wars* might call the 'Dark Side' of the Force of modernity.

For Weber the disenchantment of the world lay right at the heart of modernity. In many senses, in fact, it is definitive of his concept of modernity, 'the key concept within Weber's account of the distinctiveness and significance of Western culture' (Schroeder 1995: 228). It is the historical process by which the natural world and all areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious; defined, at least in principle, as knowable, predictable and manipulable by humans; conquered by and incorporated into the interpretive schema of science and rational government. In a disenchanted world everything becomes understandable and tameable, even if not, for the moment, understood and tamed. Increasingly the world becomes human-centred and the universe—only apparently paradoxically—more impersonal.

Disenchantment has two distinct aspects, each utterly implicated in the other. On the one hand, there is secularization and the decline of magic; on the other hand, there is the increasing scale, scope, and power of the formal means–ends rationalities of science, bureaucracy, the law, and policy-making. However, since Weber first discussed these issues, it has become increasingly obvious that disenchantment has, at best, proceeded unevenly, and, at worst, not at all (although one could easily substitute 'best' and 'worst' for each other in that sentence without either losing my meaning, or betraying Weber's).

In this paper I argue that the imperialism of formal-rational logics and processes has been, and necessarily still is, subverted and undermined by a diverse array of oppositional (re)enchantments. As a starting point—I will return to the definitional issue in more detail in closing—(re)enchantment will be taken to refer to two linked tendencies: one which insists that there are more things in the universe than are dreamed of by the rationalist epistemologies and ontologies of science, the other which rejects the notion that calculative, procedural, formal rationality is always the 'best way'. Among other things, the first encompasses everyday explanatory frameworks of luck and fate; long-established or 'traditional' spiritual beliefs; 'alternative' or 'new age' beliefs; and 'weird science'. The second, more diverse, includes

collective attachments such as ethnicity; sexualities; intoxications and ecstasies; the escapism of television, computer games, and the internet; and consumerist cultural hedonism.

It is also clear, however, that formal-rational logics and processes can themselves be (re)enchanted from within, or become the vehicles of (re)enchantment. (Re)enchantment can be a thoroughly rationally-organized business, particularly with respect to politics, consumption, and—arguably the ground of their intersection—the organization of large-scale events. In politics there is the ritual, symbolism and theatre of nation, the show-business glitz of party conferences and conventions, and the staged drama of international summitry. The organized production and consumption of 'culture' of all kinds, perhaps the most cynical 'disenchanted enchantment' (Ritzer 1999), includes everything from the entertainment industries to galleries, museums and exhibitions, to community arts, to night classes, to Disneyland—the last of which leads directly on to the 'bread and circus' organization of large-scale public events, such as the Olympic Games, World Fairs, the United Kingdom's Millennium Dome project, and so on (Roche 2000).

Thus, in respect of disenchantment and (re)enchantment, modern societies are an array of opposing tendencies, themes, and forces. Scepticism about the disenchantment of the world thesis does not, however, require that the entire notion should be dumped. Absolutely not. While this is not the place for a comprehensive discussion of Weber's foundational contribution to our understanding of rationalization and modernity, its depth and subtlety are not to be denied (see Brubaker 1984; Schroeder 1992: 112-40; Whimster and Lash 1987). Having acknowledged that, however, the two themes of rationalization and bureaucracy, and what might loosely be called (following Keith Thomas) the decline of magic, remain problematic and still require our critical attention.

Rationalization and Bureaucracy

Weber's existential and political despair about the accelerating constraints upon the expressive dimensions of human social life, which he saw as an inevitable consequence of the rationalized routine demanded and produced by bureaucracy and policy-governed regimes of authority, is familiar in the phrase 'the iron cage'. Regardless for the moment of whether this is an acceptable rendering of the original German (Chalcraft 1994), the point to bear in mind—it is clear from the context in *The Protestant Ethic*, if not from Parsons' translation of

the expression *stahlhartes Gehäuse*—is that if we are in such a cage, we have, at least in large part, imprisoned ourselves. The impositions of modern bureaucracy are both external and internalized.

To say this, however, begs two important questions: how constraining and imposing is bureaucracy, and how rational? There are many complementary grounds for doubting the existence—let alone the penal efficiency—of the bureaucratic iron cage (for an expansion of the following points, see Jenkins 1996: 172-74).

In the first place, Weber underestimated the capacity of humans to routinely resist or subvert, in many ways, formal bureaucratic rationalities, in terms both of their objectives and procedures. What is more, the bigger and more complex the organization, the greater the potential and opportunity for the disruption of its rules and structures, the more dark corners exist in which to escape surveillance, and the more difficult it may become to rationalize and communicate procedures or monitor adequately their execution.

In the second, formality and informality are only conceptually distinct. Practically speaking, each is simultaneously a presence and an absence in the other, needing the other to make sense (Harding and Jenkins 1989: 133-8). Formal procedures *of necessity* create the informal, just as informality cannot exist without formality. Bearing in mind the 'formal rationality of economic action' which lies at the heart of Weber's understanding of bureaucracy, not everything is capable of quantification or susceptible to formal rationalization, anyway.

Third, formal rationalization is demanding of actors in terms of cognitive and social competences. However, *in*competence of both kinds is widespread and there are limits to the remedies that training or education can provide. In addition, and incompetence aside, one of the few societal laws of relatively universal application—'Sod's Law'—predicts that whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. And *everything* can (go wrong).

Finally, even within the most efficiently rationalized of bureaucracies, 'irrational' dimensions of social life—symbolism and myth, notions of fate or luck, sexuality, religious or other ideologies, ethnic sentiment, etc.—necessarily influence organizational behaviour (e.g. Douglas 1987; Herzfeld 1992). Formal organizations are not insulated containers of rationality. What is more, as institutions with boundaries, authority structures which require legitimation, and memberships which have to be recruited and retained, bureaucracies are themselves constitutive of a broad panoply of collective enchantments, in the form of rituals, symbols, legends, traditions and so on (Jenkins 1996: 139-153).

The Decline of Magic

The last point brings us back to disenchantment as the eclipse of a magical and moral universe. From the key essays in which he discusses this, *Science as a Vocation* and *The Social Psychology of the World Religions* (Gerth and Mills 1948: 129-56, 267-301), Weber seems to have had two related things in mind.

The first is the shattering of the moral, cognitive, and interpretive unity which he believed characterized the enchanted pre-modern world-view. As a result, 'the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations' (Gerth and Mills 1948: 155). Meaning no longer resides in the axiomatically shared and publicly inscribed beliefs and understandings which constitute an epistemic and moral community.

Second, Weber is drawing our attention to the decline of magic *per se*, to the presumption that, in principle at least, the world is embarked on a path at the end of which there will be no more mysteries. All things are taken to be potentially capable of explanation in terms that are acceptable to the rationality of science, and susceptible to intervention the outcomes of which are predictable. As a result, religious and magical understandings of the world become at best charming, at worst, ignorant and backward.

No matter which version one adopts, there are good reasons for challenging Weber's diagnosis of these dimensions of disenchantment. It is, for example, questionable whether the 'enchanted world' was ever as unified or homogenous in its cosmology and beliefs as Weber's argument seems to presume. Even if we disregard the rich variety of communities and ethnies in the pre-modern world, there is every reason to suggest that the European world, at least, has been disenchanted, *in the sense of epistemically fragmented*, for as long as we can perceive it in the historical record. Scepticism, heresy, and pluralism are plain to see. Similarly, it is now conventional anthropological wisdom that homogenous 'primitive society' is a fiction which reflects a set of tacit presumptions about modernity (Kuper 1988) and the equally tacit epistemological presumptions of anthropological fieldwork (Boon 1982; Bourdieu 1990: 1-42).

We should also be sceptical about the other side of this coin, the supposed normative and cognitive fragmentation of the modern world. Take, for example, the notion of the 'civilizing process' (Elias 1993). In many ways this is an alternative version of the disenchantment thesis. However, Elias suggests that our world-view has become

more, not less, unified with the gradual emergence of modern society from antiquity, and the 'breaking of the spell' that bound the pre-modern world (Spierenburg 1991). Gellner's analysis of nationalism, as a consequence of the development of industrial society and a response to its functional needs (1983), is also arguably a version of this model of European history (although, to further confuse matters, nationalism can also be understood as a species of re-enchantment, what Llobera [1994] has called the 'God of Modernity').

Further grounds for arguing that the modern world is in some respects becoming more homogenous can be found in the progress of globalization. One of the unifying and, indeed, reassuring threads in the experience of even a modest amount of long-haul travel—and it doesn't much matter in this respect where you end up—is that the similarities between destinations, and between arrivals and departures, may increasingly be as striking as the differences. This is not simply a matter of scientific and technological convergence (although that is significant). The globalization of business, tourism and, to some extent, culture, politics, and social policy, are all phenomena to be reckoned with. In terms of values, bureaucratic (if not legal) frameworks, and the operating presumptions of daily life, the cultures of the world may now be at least as much divided by what they hold in common as by their differences from each other.

Although too much can be made of the homogenizing effects of globalization, they cannot be dismissed as trivial. On the other hand, we cannot deny that pluralism and fragmentation are real, either. This, of course, is another aspect of supposed post-modernity which, in some senses, the disenchantment thesis might be thought to have anticipated. In this respect, however, as in so many others, the notion of post-modernity does not seem to possess much explanatory power. More straightforward and obvious social processes can be appealed to for that.

Thus, as Hannerz argues (1992: 217-67), the 'global ecumene' involves convergence *and* polycentric variety. If nothing else, for example, it should be recognized that local primary colour is at least as marketable a commodity as the pastel tones of soothing international uniformity. There is, however, more to it than that. The homogenizing effects of globalization necessarily produce a response in the (re)invention, valorization, and assertion of locality and distinctiveness. Homogeneity and heterogeneity can no more be divorced than the formal and the informal, or similarity and difference. The one entails the other, logically and in everyday social life. Acknowledging this paradox—if that is, indeed, what it is—forces us to recognize the

complexity of a world that is neither definitively enchanted nor disenchanted (and which was probably ever thus).

Coming on to the other side of magic's supposed decline, the progressive banishment of mystery in the face of 'objective' knowledge is an idea which was more defensible in Weber's day than it is today, as was a vision of an unproblematic and authoritative explanatory field called 'science' (see Schroeder 1995). The important issue here is not whether or not the scientific paradigm is 'true', but how it is understood, interpreted, received, and experienced.

One challenge to the empire of science comes from increasing scepticism with respect to our understanding of the medium- to long-term consequences of the human impact on the planetary environment, and increasing disquiet about the damage that we have done. Similarly, in medicine, triumphal upward progress, epitomized by antibiotics, vaccines, and advances in public health, is beginning to look increasingly fragile and uncertain as bacteria acquire resistance, viruses mutate, hospitals become dangerous, infective places again, and new human diseases appear. Apropos healing, the Western scientific model is faced with competitors—such as acupuncture or homeopathy, for example—which, although they may be rooted in radically different cosmologies, are widely believed to 'work'.

Even within the scientific community, the frameworks of Newtonian physics are now widely understood to apply only up to a point, beyond which other interpretive models are required. There seems no longer to be a wholly unified epistemological and explanatory framework for understanding the natural world. That framework—which gradually gathered authority after the Enlightenment, assumed unchallenged hegemony in the West during the nineteenth century, and began to fragment in the twentieth—may, with benefit of hindsight, prove to be the historical exception rather than the rule.

And within the sphere of 'normal science', sociological and confessional accounts of what scientists actually do suggest that innovation, discovery and theory-building are less 'rational' processes than might be expected.

Thus the 'objective' knowledges of Western science are becoming increasingly understood as (at best) contingent rather than permanent verities. Ever-expanding knowledge is no longer, in itself, believed to be enough. The world may actually be becoming somewhat more mysterious rather than less. This should not necessarily be understood as an erosion of the authority of science, but rather as a potential shift in its centre of gravity towards greater epistemological pluralism.

On the other hand—and regardless of whether or not one accepts the triumph of science—there is very little evidence for the decline of magic, anyway. Superficially, of course, this does appear to be the case. Most of us, for example, no longer seek the curing powers of a wise-woman or a cunning-man if we are ill. We go to our doctor. Or, at least, *most of us* go to our doctor *first*: the certainties of scientific medicine are routinely challenged by everyday explanatory frameworks such as fate or luck (institutionalized in astrology and the like), by increasing resort to the alternative treatments which are colonizing some of the spaces previously occupied by 'conventional' medicine, or by scepticism and refusal deriving from a variety of sources. And whether the trust which we place in scientific medicine differs radically from the faith which our forebears had in their available remedies is another matter, a point which in some respects Weber himself seems to have understood (Gerth and Mills 1948: 139).

More generally, one can point to a wide range of substantial (re)enchantments which are decidedly modern: religious fundamentalism, whatever its hue; alternative life-styles, many of them explicit resistances to urbanism and capitalism; neo-paganism and other invented spiritual traditions; and psychoanalysis/psychotherapy. More transient—even, one might say, superficial—are such minor (re)enchantments such as the dreams of alterity inspired by tourism, particularly in its self-consciously alternative modes; the mundane daydreams of advertizing and consumption; cinematic escapism; science fiction and fantasy; and, not least, the virtual attractions available on the internet.

The list is long if not actually endless. Many of the enchantments on it are rooted in desire and/or playfulness, however one might define either of those apparently very human impulses. And neither desire nor playfulness are necessarily at odds with the schemes and strategies of organized, utterly rationalized and disenchanted, capitalism: witness the National Lottery, and television shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*. We are back to disenchanted enchantment again (Ritzer 1999).

Apropos sleight of hand, if not actually magic, and in its own way no less related to desire—why else does it seem to be so intertwined with sex?—politics, in particular, continues, as it probably always has, to generate secular enchantments in the shape of futures (if not utopias), ideologies, rituals, symbols, myths, dark fantasies, heroic figures, and demonic enemies. To pluck out of the air some more Weberian themes, legitimate domination is often, perhaps even always, underwritten by at least a modicum of enchantment, charisma is utterly enchanted, and power has always cast its own spell.

Turning to religion in its own right, the secularization of 'Western civilization' seems to be well-advanced and advancing: participation in formal, organized, religion has declined markedly. This cannot, however, simply be taken to mean either that 'supernatural' or 'irrational' beliefs have necessarily declined in importance—there is a welter of evidence that they have not (Bennett 1999)—or that established Christian religion has necessarily been supplanted by other spiritualities. Secularization and disenchantment are not the same things, although they are easily confused.

A definitively modern movement of (re)enchantment that runs through many of the above, but deserves mention in its own right, is the diverse portfolio of perspectives and practices that developed as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and which shelters—or lurks—under the broad umbrella of Romanticism. Across a wide range of cultural and intellectual fields, Romanticism's imagining of, and yearning for, a mythical pre-modern, un-rationalized past perfect remains influential. It is also, these days, commoditized, routinized and organized, if not thoroughly rationalized. It is big business. Industries such as cinema, television, and heritage are major contemporary conduits of the Romantic theme. To take a recent and very visible example, the cinemas of the globe witnessed during the summer of 1999 a coordinated, commercially successful—and, thematically, classically Romantic—assault in the shape of *Star Wars, Episode One: The Phantom Menace*.

Nor is the Romantic voice only to be heard in the arts and entertainment. Within the academy, tensions between Romanticism and Rationalism have been formative and remain definitive of the identity and perspective of disciplines such as archaeology, cultural studies, folklore, history, literary criticism, and anthropology. Some of these have been—and indeed still are—heavily involved in nation-building projects. The connections between nationalism and Romanticism are many, obvious, and important.

Doubt can be cast on the modern victory of disenchantment from other directions, too. In this respect, more needs to be said about globalization. There is, for example, the challenge to the rationalist ideologies of the West posed by non-Christian belief systems, and the cosmologies of the industrially powerful—if recently temporarily financially embarrassed—Pacific rim. Furthermore, in politics around the globe charisma never really seems to have gone out of style (although it has probably never been particularly common either). The emergence of globally charismatic and enchanting figures—Nel-

son Mandela, the present Pope, Princess Diana—has been materially aided by the globalization of the media.

However, to reiterate my earlier point, that we have grounds for scepticism about the impact or scope of disenchantment does not mean that we should abandon the notion, or the wider concept of rationalization. There is much too much evidence of both, in our own experience and in the social science research literature, to encourage such recklessness. If Weber was even half right in suggesting that a plurality of visions and understandings was threatened by an ever-widening and totalizing 'objective' knowledge of the world, then this is, indeed, a matter of 'world-historical significance' (Schroeder 1992: 160). It is certainly the case that the rational–bureaucratic–scientific model has been taken up and successfully transplanted into an enormous range of soils and environments. This has been possible because it is a way of doing things—and a vast array of things at that—which, in important ways, *works*.

Ritzer's recent use of the fast food restaurant as a metaphor for contemporary processes of rationalization, in his notion of 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer 1993, 1998; Smart 1999), has been such a successful development of Weber's thinking precisely because of the degree to which rationalization continues its progress through the modern world. But McDonalds and McDonaldization are also interesting because their ultra-rationalized approach and method have not been introduced in the same way everywhere. Their core simplicity permits the flexibility with which to adapt, in a properly self-interested capitalist manner, to the demands and preferences of different markets. Nor has McDonalds simply been foisted on a world of passive dopes; it is used and taken up by its customers in different ways in different localities (Watson 1997). And, as events in southern France during 1999 demonstrated, McDonaldization can provoke significant—and successful—popular resistance. Most tellingly, from the point of view of this paper, as Ritzer has recently begun to explore (1999), the relationship between disenchantment and enchantment in McDonaldization, and in contemporary consumption more generally, is neither unidirectional nor straightforward. 'Disenchanted enchantment' is thus not the paradox it might, at first sight, seem.

Which Takes us Back to Rationalization…

Perhaps before it is anything else, rationalization is an intellectual process: 'the process of intellectualization which we have been undergoing for thousands of years', an 'intellectual rationalization, created

by science and by scientifically oriented technology' (Gerth and Mills 1948: 138-9). While this is spectacularly the case with respect to the historical development of the discourses and practices of government and large-scale economic activity, the proposition also applies—at the other end of the spectrum—to the micro-pragmatics of the preparation and delivery of everyday mundane commodities such as fast food and car exhausts.

Rationalization is not, however, the *only* historical process which one can see at work in modernity. As I have already suggested, globalization is one such, and it relates to rationalization in interesting and perhaps contradictory ways. Talking about the 'world system', *pace* Wallerstein, is all very well—it certainly makes for fine rhetoric—but we do not know whether there really is a world *system* or, if there is, what its limits might be with respect to rationalization. Size and complexity will, once again, have to be considered here. What, for example, if there are in reality a number of world systems? And what too, if one inevitable accompaniment of globalization—to return to the comment from Hannerz quoted earlier—is localization? Or even 'glocalization' (Robertson 1992: 173, although he takes it from Japanese marketing discourse). Increasing homogenisation may produce its equal and opposite reaction: similarity and difference as sides of the same coin.

Shifting the grounds of the discussion somewhat, rationalization and Reason are interestingly polysemic words. They almost deserve to be called slippery. They encompass complex, and in each case different, relationships between the *technical*, the *intellectual*, and the *moral*, a multi-faceted complex of meanings that has been consistently explored and represented in the works of one of the great twentieth-century champions of the rationalist cause, Ernest Gellner (see, for example, Gellner 1992). While Gellner was clear that rationalism had its roots in the local specifics of culture—that it was indeed the gradual historical product of a place (Europe) and a time (the Enlightenment)—he argued that, once let loose in the world, it transcended those particularities, disembedding and detaching itself from its monotheistic roots and assuming an autonomous and demonstrable authority. Based in investigation and proof—evidence and logic—the rationalist impulse aspires to a non-theological universalism. And the proof of this particular pudding has always been in the eating.

If that is so, there may be a need to distinguish, more clearly than we often do, the general notion of rationalization from the grand narratives of Reason. As Bauman has argued, technical rationalization—the scientific and bureaucratic pursuit of efficiency—can be harnessed

to the pursuit of objectives that, on the face of things, pervert our image of modernity as civilizing and progressive. In addition to being a product of the specificities of German history, the Holocaust was a product of modern bureaucratic rationality, for which the severing of technical means and moral ends—which is such a seductive and dangerous dimension of the modern domain of policy more generally—was a vital prerequisite. Rationalization bereft of Reason: a truly frightening prospect (and retrospect). The Holocaust is thus not to be understood as atavistic barbarism—although the Nazi state was in part an exercise in re-enchantment rooted in German Romanticism—but, rather, as 'a legitimate resident in the house of modernity; indeed, one who would not be at home in any other house' (Bauman 1991: 17). To return to Weber, borrowing this time from Nietszche, this is forcefully redolent of the 'specialists without spirit' evoked at the end of *The Protestant Ethic* (1976: 182).

Bauman's argument is right, but it may not go far enough. We do not have to swallow whole Foucault's Orwellian model of the panoptic society to appreciate the potential for utilitarian social control that lies at the heart of modern rationalization (Cohen 1985), or to accept, with Ritzer, that the balance sheet of McDonaldization shows more costs than benefits. Further useful contributions to critical thinking about these issues can be found in Hacking's exploration (1990) of the tyrannical possibilities opened up by statistical models of probability and normality—quintessential products of scientific rationality—and Moore's account (1987) of legitimate persecution in late mediaeval and early modern Europe as integral to the concentration of control in the bureaucracy of the state and the administrative centralization of moral authority. Wherever one looks it seems, similar stories unfold.

There is still much theoretical and empirical work to be done, however, in integrating insights such as these into a demystification of the conceited enlightenment of modernity, of Reason, and of rationalization (an unholy Trinity indeed). As a beginning, (re)enchantment must, perhaps, be recognized as an integral element of modernity. Not just as a consequence, or a reaction, but right at the heart of the matter. Acknowledging this encourages an appropriate scepticism with respect to the bureaucratic 'iron cage' and its supposed efficiencies. Acknowledging the limits and limitations of Reason suggests that we should do no less for rationalization.

At which point there is an interesting new dimension—gender—to add to the argument so far. Roslyn Bologh has argued (1990) that the definitively masculine character of Weber's thought is most strikingly revealed in his argument that the pursuit of rational action in the

public sphere is conditional upon affect being quarantined (by implication, with the women) in the private domain. Without having the space to do the issues justice here, an array of interesting questions, which are central to the matter under discussion, suggest themselves in respect of gender. The role of modernity in the public enfranchisement—social, political and economic—of women may, for example, seem to be somewhat contradictory. With women coming into the public sphere, specifically into employment and politics, does affect follow them, and what are the implications of this for public rationality? How (re)enchanting might that be? And what about the changing nature of the articulation between the private and the public in the modern world? Is it really true that the private sphere is a definitively modern phenomenon? Finally, what about the impact of feminisms upon the changing character of modernity? Apropos the (socially constructed) masculinity of rationalization, does 'the standpoint of women' have the potential to be another countervailing tendency, weighing in the balance against rationalization and disenchantment?

These, then, are some elements of the general position I am proposing. I want now to develop them further, and consider briefly what we can learn from a specific case of disenchantment and (re)enchantment, in the shape of the Millennium. This particular example has been chosen in part because of the stunning sociological silence that has so far attended the Millennium's anticipation, arrival and, now, atrophy. Sociology seems to deal best with the recurrent, rather than the exceptional, event. It has also been chosen, however, because of the intriguing mixture of themes relevant to the argument that the Millennium presents: spirituality and belief, technological dread, politics, and, not least, rampant capitalist consumerism.

What's Going on at the Millennium?

In what we call the Western world, we are approaching one of the fascinating rounded numbers: 2000. This already has more than numerical significance, for by the reckoning of the Christian era it is the second millennium, and such counting is loaded with cultural significance. The first millennium brought many expectations of the ending of the world and the second coming of Christ. In the extending irrationalities of our own time, many of them flourishing in the most developed centres of advanced industrial civilisation, we can already see some signs of this happening again, as the arbitrary date approaches… And beyond those who believe or half-believe in these arbitrary numerical significance's, there is a deep habit of using some mark in time—a new year, a birthday, a millennium—to reflect and to look forward, to try to see where we are (Williams 1985: 1).

'The extending irrationalities of our time': that is, I suppose, one attitude—and indeed a widely held attitude—to the enchantment and re-enchantment that is this article's theme. Regardless of its actual timing—at the beginning or the end of the year 2000—the Millennium is upon us as I write. We are in its midst. If anything, its likely social significance and cultural importance have increased since Raymond Williams wrote the above (if only because of the massive, almost unprecedented, sense of anti-climax that attended the dawn of 1 January 2000). From the viewpoint of the here and now, however—from one or other side of the Millennial threshold—we can actually assume less than Williams could. There is a need to begin by asking, what is the Millennium?

The first thing to note is that the Millennium has been a social phenomenon of considerable diversity, complexity, and duration: not one thing, but many. We should not expect that they will all fit easily together. In other words, although the usage is too well established to dispense with at this late stage, to talk about *the* Millennium is, in important senses, somewhat misleading. Nor did 'it' arrive suddenly and punctually, as the clocks in our local time zones struck the appropriate midnight, and nor will it depart precisely twelve months later. The Millennium had already been upon us, for years in some respects, long before the first fireworks. As a 'chronological' event, its indeterminacy betrays its social construction. It is many-faceted and difficult to pin down.

'The' Millennium has, for example, been a major focus of rationalized activity in its own right. It became both subject and object of a vast amount of organizational effort and coordination by international organizations, governments, organized capitalism and voluntary organizations. There has been administration, bureaucracy, policy formulation and implementation, and planning: in a word, rationalization. Money has had to be made, catastrophes averted, contingencies allowed for, popular enthusiasm managed, and so on.

The Millennium has also been a catalyst or focus, in itself, for political controversy and activity. In Britain, for example, voices were raised in public about the plans for the Millennium Dome at Greenwich, and the exhibitions it would house, long before it opened. Several themes relevant to this discussion were visible in these conflicts: the relationship between the sacred and the secular or the profane; the relationship between the resident and established enchantment—Christianity—and recent interlopers in the shape of the faiths and beliefs of modern multi-ethnic British society. This was perhaps best encapsulated in the Archbishop of Canterbury's threat, as the head of

the established Church of England, to boycott the Dome because its 'Faith Zone' did not sufficiently emphasize Christianity. In a wider geo-political context, this is a debate about the place of organized Christianity in Western society. The Dome continues to create controversy, not least because of its failure to attract crowds and pay for itself. On a wider stage, the manner in which charitable Millennium funds have been and are being spent is not a settled issue, either. Matters such as these suggest more prosaic questions about the relationship between Domic Millennial enchantment, New Labour political calculations, and capitalism.

Which leads directly on to the Millennium as the symbolic backdrop or trademark for various political projects. It became, if you like, a means of enchanting new projects and re-enchanting existing ones. Something of the perceived enchantment of the conjuncture would, it was hoped, rub off, like fairy dust, onto other things. Globally, perhaps the most obvious has been the, not wholly unsuccessful, campaign to 'break the chain' and write off the debts of developing nations. In addition, a heterogeneous range of political projects have been energized by the Millennium or have hitched their wagons to its very visible sign: the Global Meeting of the Generations, Pole to Pole 2000, the Millennium Children's Conference, World Peace 2000 Network, World Action for the Millennium, Earth Day 2000, the UN Millennium Assembly... the list is potentially a very long one indeed. In Europe, the two most obvious were European Monetary Union, and the re-emergence of Berlin, with the resumption of its status as the capital of Germany, as a legitimately consecrated (enchanted) political centre. In the British context, one could add to this the less visible—it did not actually 'catch on'—(re)enchantment of the nation, a Blairite attempt to 're-brand' and market a renewed sense of British national identity (see Leonard 1997).

The Millennium was also a looming technological catastrophe, looking for a place and waiting for a time to happen. That it didn't happen is probably due, in at least some part, to the seriousness with which it was taken. Global concern about Y2K computer failures ('the Millennium Bug') generated a good deal of epochally diagnostic secular anxiety and doom-mongering about the reliability of technology, its systematic and central place in securing our routine lives, and the dangers to which this dependence exposes us. At one level, and the pragmatics of the case aside, this can be read as a reflexive debate about risk, rationalization and objectivist science. It might also in part be a debate about Reason. The Y2K scare can also be read, however, as an opportunist and grand-scale business opportunity, created by and for

the computer industries. However one reads it, this is a different species of disenchantment.

As might have been expected, the Millennium has been a stimulus to religious enthusiasm, revival and foreboding. This, after all, is what Christian Millennia are all about. Here one can see a combination of apocalyptic millenarianism and evangelical fervour leading to a range of potential excesses. Enchantment and (re)enchantment are at the heart of it. Among the more scary groups that poked their collective heads over the parapet were the Concerned Christians of Denver, Colorado (deported during 1999 from Israel, accused of plotting Millennial violence to hasten Christ's Second Coming), and the Russian Church of the Final Testament. Nor has all of this apocalyptic activity been Christian: witness the genuinely global—if, from a detached viewpoint, somewhat risible—fascination with Nostradamus, and the activities of groups such as Sukyo Mahikari and the House of Yahweh (for further examples of late twentieth-century apocalyptic millennnarianism, see Lamy [1997], Robbins and Palmer [1997], Strozier and Flynn [1997], and Thompson [1996]). Touch wood, so far, the apocalypse has, of course, been postponed. Nor has all the Millennial religious activity been apocalyptic, anyway. The Pontiff's dedication of the year 2000 as a Jubilee for Catholics globally may yet, particularly at a time when the papal succession is openly, and most unusually, a topic for public discussion, turn out to be the most significant Christian expression of the Millennium.

Turning our attention from the sacred to the profane, it was always to be expected that the Millennium would be an opportunity for commercial exploitation on a grand scale. This takes in everything from the proofing of computer systems against Y2K failures, as already mentioned, to special turn-of-the-millennium package holidays, to the use of the Millennium as a trademark and logo, and so on. One of the more entertaining examples could be found in the autumn of 1999's Egyptian tourism advertising campaign, extolling Egyptian civilization's celebration of its *seventh* millennium. Less exotically, this category also included negotiations about special rates of pay for those working on Millennium Eve and disputes over the prices that were charged for food, drink and entertainment on the night.

On the one hand there is evidence of the use of enchantments of whatever sort as marketing devices and strategies (something which we have also seen in politics). On the other hand, enchantments—no less than idols—can often be guaranteed to be clay up to at least the knee. The money-lenders have always had a business eye on the Temple. Most optimistically, perhaps, the commercial side of the Millen-

nium has provided ample evidence that the pecuniary promotion of enchantment is an uncertain art, which may require a minimum of authenticity before it works. The ease with which consumers have managed to resist being parted from their money has been heartening.

Finally, the Millennium has been the occasion for a vast amount of public and private, commercial and non-commercial, jollity, celebration and festivity organization (see, for example: Hanna 1998). To quote The Artist Formerly Known as Prince, when he was known as Prince, 'Tonight we're gonna party like it's 1999'… Only in this case it was 1999–2000. Desire and playfulness must have their day and will always find their excuses. In retrospect, the partying may come to be seen as the most authentic voice and spirit of the Millennial ethic: fleeting kisses at midnight between strangers, on a grand scale.

Space as well as time has been blurred: the Millennium did not 'happen' in any *one* place, although there was a lively debate—on the internet and elsewhere—about precisely where in the Pacific Ocean, allowing for the International Date Line, the Millennium would be first ushered in. The Millennium has been everywhere, and, of course, *nowhere*. This one of the ironies of globalization. Although the world can be thought of as a *space*, it is not yet, not really, a *place*.

To return to the original point of departure—many Millenniums, not one—the Millennium has meant, and means, many different things to different people, depending upon their points of view, frames of reference, and situations. (Re)enchantment is neither uniform, consistent, nor even. Nor has every aspect of the Millennium—as I have suggested above—been necessarily (re)enchanting. Ethnicity, religion, class, and other social identifications are obvious sources of variation, and one of the most important factors has been affluence. Globally, a significant proportion of humanity, probably a majority and regardless of religious affiliation, have had little in the way of extra resources *or* interest to invest in the occasion.

Even in the rich nations, levels and degrees of engagement with the Millennial spirit have been uneven and uncertain. One of the most interesting things to ponder about the Millennium is whether it has, in fact, meant very much at all to most people, or to put it differently, *what* did it mean? What, for example, did people do 'on the night'? Anecdotal and media evidence seems to suggest that, although the event was very far from being a damp squib—unless, perhaps, you were a celebrity who had to wait up to four hours to get into the Dome's celebrations—it wasn't epochal either. A combination of secular disinterest in the religious aspects of the jubilee, anxiety about computer failures at midnight, consumer resistance to the premium

prices being charged for entertainment and eating out, scepticism about the hype, and the power of long-established tradition, seems to have conspired to ensure that most people celebrated the Millennium privately, as, at best, a 'special' New Year's Eve. Pre-Millennial scepticism found its voice in the United Kingdom in the press coverage of the Millennium Dome. Was it a massive waste of money? Would it, in the end, attract sufficient customers to pay its way? Will it be one of the most visible and costly flops of the Blair government's first term of office? This all adds up to a further potent cocktail of disenchantment.

What does this brief overview of the Millennium suggest about disenchantment and enchantment? First, it indicates that, if disenchantment, historically, has been a stimulus to (re)enchantment, then perhaps—and this is no more than one might expect—the reverse is also true. Enchantment and re-enchantment may, necessarily, generate disenchantment. Second, it emphasizes that enchantment, re-enchantment and disenchantment are anything but total in their impact or scope. Finally, it highlights the centrality to these processes of space and—particularly—time. If one of the defining aspects of disenchantment was the rationalization of space and time into straight lines (e.g. Thompson 1967), enchantment and re-enchantment represent its subversion. The Millennium has been every and nowhere: an anniversary, the end of time, a new beginning, and chronological indeterminacy, all rolled into one. In a telling commentary on the nature of affluent capitalist modernity, if this is the way that this particular world ends, it is with a private bang and a public whimper.

An Agenda for Discussion

The complexities and apparent contradictoriness of the situation with which we find ourselves confronted, in looking at modernity from these points of view at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are impressive. On the one hand, we cannot deny the undoubted realities and effectiveness of rationalization, or its extensive scope. On the other, however, rationalization seems to have more holes in it than a sieve. While rationalist science has, in some respects, and for the moment, triumphed, and secularisation has been one of the dominant themes in modern societies over the last two centuries, the decline of magic—whether traditional or more recent—is less easy to demonstrate. Disenchantment has indeed been the fate of the world, but this has only served to open up new vistas of possible (re)enchantment. To repeat an earlier suggestion, it may be high time to think about

(re)enchantment as no less diagnostic of modernity than disenchantment.

At which point we need to return to the definition of enchantment and re-enchantment. The literature, particularly, but not exclusively, the anthropological literature, contains many definitions of magic, typically defined in opposition to religion. But magic and enchantment—in the sense that the word is being used here—are clearly not the same thing. As a preliminary stab at defining enchantment, therefore, may I offer the following tentative definition as grit in the oyster of debate:

> Enchantment conjures up, and is rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable; in which the philosophies and principles of Reason or rationality cannot by definition dream of the totality of life; in which the quotidian norms and routines of linear time and space are only part of the story; and in which the collective sum of sociability and belonging is elusively greater than its individual parts.

This is deliberately a loose and catch-all definition; anything else would disenchant the issue before we had even begun to consider it. It suggests a further comment, and raises a further question.

By way of comment, it is defensible to suggest that the world has *never* been disenchanted (which is not to deny the strength of modernist forces of disenchantment). The historical record suggests that disenchantment—no less than power and discipline—provokes resistance in the shape of enchantment and (re)enchantment. It is thus sensible to ask, is a disenchanted world even a possibility? There is a discussion to be had here about the place of enchantment—specifically spirituality, desire, and playfulness—in whatever it is that we call human nature, but that must be for another time. The prospect is not only a better understanding of the relationships between disenchantment and (re)enchantment, but also, perhaps, a more nuanced understanding of modernity.

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