A Collective Trembling: Apocalyptic Affective Practice

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Abstract

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Apocalyptic discourse, established as an emotional norm situated within the environment of belief of the late-modern era, is an affective expression of embodied anxiety. This thesis contends that the affective practice of apocalypticism motivates people to seek security in explanatory models, in attempt to make meaning, speculate on the future, and rationalize the present. Chapter one outlines the historical trajectory of Christian and secular apocalypticism and situates it within the American Protestant evangelical movement. Chapter two establishes that embodied anxiety is reinforced by turbulent social conditions which distinguish the current world order. Chapter three demonstrates that predictive misattributions, or errors in judgement, are valuable to emotional and ideological formation, exemplified through the case study of Pastor Jeremiah Johnson's "I Was Wrong" video series. An appendix suggests future directions of study and advocates for applications based in embodied and expressive therapies in order to regulate affect.

Acknowledgements & Dedication

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Introduction

This thesis argues that anxiety-based affect impels people to seek security in apocalyptic explanatory models in their attempt to construct meaning, speculate about the future, and rationalize the present. The primary goal of the thesis is to situate apocalypticism within a discourse of affective practice. It establishes that apocalyptic appeal is rooted in affective transmission, specifically anxiety, and makes a case for affective practice as a far-reaching analytical tool that can help elucidate motivations toward violent and destructive beliefs.

Affective studies are motivated by the desire to discover why people are moved to act and to understand embodied social life. In this thesis, "affect" predominantly functions as a noun, understood as the embodied manifestations of experienced emotion, but it can also function as a verb, understood as producing an effect upon something or influencing an outcome. This dual meaning intentionally disrupts the conventional dispute between theories of universalist inherent emotion versus culturally constructed emotion. Affective practice focuses on psychobiological processes of meaning-making and patterns of social engagement that give colour to life.

The context for this thesis lies in the contemporary prevalence of scientific skepticism, global health crises, racially and religiously motivated violence, public processes of decolonization, and the overflow of contradictory information in the media. Inevitably, this topic is multidisciplinary; affective discourse primarily relies upon the interaction of knowledge across the human sciences. The multifaceted body of affective studies recognizes distinctions between conscious and unconscious processes. The presumption of different levels of the human psyche allows for the

premise that affect also operates on multiple levels - cultural, social, political, psychological, and spiritual.

To engage in an affective analysis of apocalypticism means to communicate with and uphold embodied knowledge, decolonize methodology, release the hold on rationalist and deterministic assumptions, and be aware of the multidirectional nature of affect. By focusing on affect, this investigation is inherently rooted in an epistemological shift away from positivist and rationalist knowledge structures. Affective analysis alone cannot be the singular guiding principle in analyzing emergent religious groups. However, it can support the quantitative efforts in ethnographic and psychological assessments of group affiliation. This thesis challenges the tendency toward neurocentrism, the pathologization of social deviancy, and supports the efforts of counterbalancing prevalent anti-cult rhetoric. Religions, especially newly hatched religious beliefs, provide affective legitimation in searching for meaning, particularly in precarious social situations. By assessing the affective practice of apocalypticism, its reification through relational economies, and how it becomes established as a social object, this analysis is situated within community of interdisciplinary scholars engaging in an affective epistemological shift.

Affective analysis allows directed attention to the periphery of a social system by focusing on the surges of affect that diffusely connect and engage. If new religious movements (NRMs) – and by extension, the individual agents and their bodies – mirror shifts in cultural consciousness, they should then be regarded as barometers of considerable social change. A point on NRM's: although the included case study of Jeremiah Johnson's ministry falls into the larger designation of Protestant evangelical dispensationalist premillennialism, I contend that his dissemination of

rhetoric through a digital platform calls for analytical tools that consider the improvisational manifestations of contemporary religion. An analysis rooted in the study of NRM's speaks to the unique form of this ministry and the reification of anxiety-based affective practices that are spurred as a result.

Chapter one begins by outlining the current discourses on apocalypticism and highlights the social functions that it serves to attribute meaning to a volatile social reality. A discussion of the late-modern trend toward hyper-individualized spirituality follows, which foregrounds the digital revolution's impact on apocalyptic discourse. This thesis situates contemporary apocalypticism within American evangelicalism, the continuing appeal of the prophetic movement, and its ongoing influence on popular culture. Chapter one concludes by confirming that the enduring imminency of the "end times" is maintained through its links to the present political and social order.

Chapter two begins with a historical survey of affect theory, highlighting the foundational work of Spinoza and Deleuze. Various methodologies investigated at the outset of this project are presented and I explain why they fail to fully situate apocalypticism within an affective discourse. The typology of "affective practice," defined as embodied meaning-making, is determined to be the most suited for this investigation. Affective practice calls attention to flexible and shifting social and political phenomena, and the effects of these macro-changes on the body. American apocalypticism demonstrates an "environment of belief," understood in relation to ontological structures of power and social capital. By presenting psychobiological and neurobiological processes intrinsic to the affective practice of apocalypticism, I establish that

communal atmospheres are key to attributions of meaning and proscriptions for living. Through a sociological presentation of anxiety, I contend that apocalypticism is an emotional-norm, dependent on the imagined consequences particular to its affective niche. By presenting the constructed theory of emotion, chapter two concludes that affect shapes and constitutes a social reality.

Chapter three begins with an exploration of American televangelism and a study of digital new media, outlining the radical reconfiguration of the politics of communication and entertainment. Outlining the demotic and participatory structures of new media highlights the growing phenomenon of cyber-polarization: a consequence of the hyper-individualized late-modern ethos. Through an overview of charismatic celebrities and their connections to the faith industry, this analysis determines that the religious economy operates on a foundation of affective circulation. A textual analysis of premillennialist Pastor Jeremiah Johnson's "I Was Wrong" (2021) three-part video series, in which he justifies his false prophetic visions of Donald Trump's reelection, offers a case study. By appealing to the emotionality of his base, making existential connections with political and social events, and critiquing the prophetic movement at large, Johnson reaffirms his superiority in the prophetic movement through an apocalyptic appeal.

The attached appendix suggests alternate directions of study, namely through social network analysis and actor network theory, both of which run parallel to the study of affect. Applications of this analysis are identified through an appeal to psychosomatic and expressive-embodied therapeutic interventions. I suggest that intervening with the reverberations of anxiety-driven

apocalyptic discourse is best done by addressing the body first, through mediations that aid psychosomatic systems and consider spirituality as intrinsic to the regulation of affect.

Chapter 1: Apocalypticism

1. *DiTommaso and Others, Relevant Contemporary Studies*

In his 2020 discussion of contemporary apocalypticism, religious studies scholar Lorenzo DiTommaso establishes that categories of apocalyptic thinking largely shape the course of contemporary social dissent (316). Highlighting the ubiquity of apocalyptic discourse, he outlines the three primary expressions of an ideological "seismic shift," which gained its footing in the 1960's-1970's: 1) apocalypticism is established and expressed through popular culture, 2) there has been a resurgence of robust apocalypticism in religious groups, new and old, and 3) there has been a proliferation of the "illiberal revolution" and a subsequent normalization of apocalyptic discourse globally (2020, 316). His chapter focuses on the twenty-first century, which aligns with the limitations of the present analysis. DiTommaso's formulation of apocalypticism is theoretical and rigorous, rooted in historical and contemporary groups and their discourses. Therefore, his presentation of apocalypticism will be the guiding force of this project.

DiTommaso explains that an apocalyptic worldview is defined by "axiomatic propositions about the nature of space, time, and human existence" (2020, 317). In other words, nothing is apocalyptic independent of a distinctive apocalyptic worldview, which he defines in terms of space, time, and existential imperative. The apocalyptic conception of space presumes the persistence of radical and discrete realities. This ongoing antagonism between the transcendent and the mundane plays out through ontological binaries (i.e., good and evil, lightness and

darkness, spirit and flesh, etc.) which are reified through group identifications (i.e., the "elect" and the "other") (2020, 317). Apocalyptic time is linear, finite, and unidirectional. In these conceptions of time, history has a predetermined ending where the "elect" occupies a central position in a transcendent or heavenly reality (2020, 317). The existential dimension of an apocalyptic worldview purports the immediacy of the world's end, regardless of its embeddedness in theological or secular ideological structures. This existential dimension is articulated in simple terms, "the last days have come and the end is near" (2020, 318). Apocalyptic speculation is inherently tied to the inevitable human struggle with mortality.

In his 2016 publication, "'Spectacular Death': Proposing a New Fifth Phase to Philippe Ariès's Admirable History of Death," Michael Hviid Jacobsen affirms that death is integral to the human experience and crucial to understanding the individual life of the human being, the development of society, and overall human history (1). Jacobsen asserts that the knowledge of death drives human behaviour; that human culture acts as a contraption to make life-toward-death bearable (2016, 2). Just as human culture develops over time, so too does the social construction of death. Through changes in life conditions such as historical, social, economic, religious, political, and technological developments, Jacobsen contends that the collective "death mentality" has shifted through five major stages (2016, 3). Jacobsen relies on the seminal work of French historian Philippe Ariès, whose four initial stages occupy the bulk of Jacobsen's discussion.

Jacobsen describes Ariès's medieval "tamed death" as distinctly tied to a familiarity with death marked by a physical and spiritual proximity between the living and dead (2016, 4). During the medieval period, the proscribed rituals of death facilitated public mourning of what were often

short and unpleasant lives (2016, 4). The shift to autonomous death gradually took hold, marked by the rise of individualism in the Renaissance period. Ariès's "death of one's own" stage was concerned with the time of death as a moment of "maximum awareness," where individuals would strive to prepare for, confront, and reconcile with their final outcome (2016, 4). The "death of the other" of the romantic and Victorian periods embraced a new "intolerance of separation," where ceremonial expressions of sorrow exalted public pageantry that sought to reinforce the affective value of the family (2016, 5). Ariès's fourth stage of "invisible/forbidden death" is marked by the turn of the twentieth century, where two world wars, advancements in the medicalization of death, questioning of theological cosmologies, and the increasing reliance on communication technologies shifted the collective "death mentality" once more (Jacobsen, 6). Jacobsen stresses that the privatization, institutionalization, and professionalization of death facilitated its de-ritualization and reversed it from familiar and natural to dangerous and pathological (2016, 7).

Jacobsen concedes that although Ariès's abstract formulation may have an apparent Euro/ethnocentric bias, he acknowledges the value in building upon this theoretical structure to identify contemporary death practices and attitudes (2016, 9). Jacobsen asserts that the contemporary era is characterized by "spectacular death." Here mediatized visibility, commercialization, re-ritualization of death and a palliative care revolution with greater academic specialization, have facilitated a "partial re-reversal" of Ariès's death thesis (2016, 13). Jacobsen claims that death in contemporary society is spectacularly present despite its apparent absence. He asserts that through the affective banality of ongoing exposure to global violence and decay, the "neo-modern death mentality" is numbly indifferent to death, yet paradoxically

obsessed with it through public memoranda, rampant commercialization, and euphoric consumerism (2016, 12). Apocalyptic discourse, then, serves a distinct operational purpose within a late-modern context.

The primary operational function of apocalyptic speculation, DiTommaso asserts, is to reveal the true nature of reality via an information system "moderated by distinctive theories of knowing, history, justice and salvation, each a logical corollary of the underlying worldview" (2020, 318). Apocalypticism's primary social function, typically in the throes of crisis or threats to a group, is to maintain, reinforce, and validate elements of group identity. Apocalyptic discourse is intrinsically a reactionary response to external and/or internal challenges to a promised future (2020, 318). Encounters of the "apocalyptic" occur in the embodied, experiential dimension, through texts, art, cultural semiology, communities, and so on (2020, 318-319). I expand these examples of apocalyptic encounters to include the virtual modes of human existence, through the demotic participation in online worlds. The temporal and spatial dimensions of internet-based activity are undeniably faster in pace than processes in the natural world; the births and deaths of cyberspace are quick to spark and burn. Chapter three will address this in greater detail.

DiTommaso catalogues the history of apocalypticism and identifies its first appearance during the Maccabean Revolt (167-164 BCE). Early Jewish and Christian writings, such as the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John, set the stage for subsequent apocalyptic literature and speculation (2020, 320). He tracks the reification of apocalyptic discourse through the medieval to the romantic eras. He identifies that European colonization and particularly the establishment of American Protestantism became the principal catalyst for the apocalyptica of the modern

world. The material and ideological developments of the industrial, scientific and political revolutions further demarcated the boundaries between the religious and the secular, though each shared modern apocalyptic referents (2020, 318).

With a focus on the contemporary period, DiTommaso expands on the first apocalyptic shift from the late 1960s to the millennium. Diverse and expansive, this apocalyptic discourse was essentially reactionary and protest-oriented, largely in response to the "perceived impotency of traditional responses" to changing local and global phenomena (2020, 320-321). For the purposes of this analysis, the second "seismic shift" is more significant. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, apocalypticism has acquired a multifaceted global character. DiTommaso expands on the overlapping characteristics of this discourse, also noting the greater effect on audience retention and political leverage.

> This blurring of boundaries occurred not at the granular level – environmentalists still tend not to be political conservatives – *but on the deeper strata of emotional response and social function*. With no common agreement on the cause, there was a general sense that the world was getting worse in ways beyond human ability to fathom and beyond ordinary human means to retard or arrest (2020, 321, *emphasis added*).

Embedded in an ideological "seismic shift" is an affective dimension. DiTommaso's chapter hints at the affective reverberations distinctive to this era. He identifies four main events that precipitated this affective shift: 9/11 and the global refugee crisis, the 2008 recession and its

subsequent effects on the middle class, the democratization of media and multiform mass entertainment, and the illiberal revolution (2020, 321). Emotions of helplessness, anxiety, and overwhelm characterize responses to these events and processes, reinforced through the erosion of centrist liberalism and attached to the notion that world systems are irrevocably broken (2020, 322).

In varying ways, these events contribute to ongoing threats to the daily lives of many peoples, dissolving notions of continuity and existential wellbeing (2020, 322-323). The current global pandemic has undoubtedly contributed to experiences of loss, isolation, anxiety, overwhelm, insecurity, and distrust of social systems. Though frightening to reflect upon in a theoretical sense, these threats are real *and* psychologically perceived. In the case of the illiberal revolution, as DiTommaso explains, there has been a steady global increase in the adoption of extremist or fringe values that were once considered absurd, accompanied by a steep decline in civil liberties and political rights for more than a decade (2020, 323). Evidence of this decline, though definitely not the only example, is that in 2021, conservatives in the United States put forward more anti-transgender and restrictive reproductive health laws than any other year in history, drastically limiting the civil freedoms of the US population nationwide (Guttmacher Institute, 2021). 2022 is not far behind – as we see, for example, in the recent overturning of Roe vs. Wade.

In discussing apocalyptic popular culture, DiTommaso reports that approximately fifty percent of apocalyptic films, novels, and other media published since the late nineteenth century have emerged since 1995 (2020, 323). This popular culture trope clearly reflects recent cultural

sensitivities to a shift in ideology, steeped in a potent stew of emotionality. In DiTommaso's words, apocalyptic tropes act as a "barometer of existential ideological anxiety worldwide, reified through popular culture" (2020, 326). A significant conclusion is that apocalyptic speculation, and religious discourse at large is considered as genuine historical truth by those for whom it has meaning (DiTommaso 2020, 328).

In his article "The Uses and Abuses of Apocalypse," S. Brent Rodríguez-Plate reflects on the apocalyptic genre as represented through three contemporary novels. Rodríguez-Plate notes that the narratives reorient trauma to the present rather than focusing on the violent destruction of a future apocalyptic state. In other words, the apocalypse is not coming; it is here and now (2021, 231). These novels illustrate the survival of "the end" through redemptive and life-affirming tales of individuals overcoming life-threatening obstacles. Rodríguez-Plate establishes that the end of *the* world is actually about the end of *a* world (2021, 230) – which is no less tormenting for those within. Apocalyptic discourse, then, is inherently personal; it is a projection of anxieties of mortality and concomitant fears. Alongside the personal it is also social, as it channels fears into a collective trembling (2021, 230).

The social practice of turning to apocalyptic literature in troubled times, such as the current global pandemic, illustrates how well-worn the cultural groove is. Rodríguez-Plate states that prospective apocalypse has seeped into our collective unconscious; as a monomyth to which we keep returning (2021, 233). Partly, this is due to the dominance of Christian eschatology in modern cultures and the utopic theological foundations of the United States (2021, 235). From his analysis, Rodríguez-Plate determines four key conclusions: *the apocalyptic is personal*, "the

end" is also about subjective mentality and life changes; *the apocalyptic is social*, humans are mortal beings, "death will come, maybe I will not be alone when the end comes, maybe I am not alone now"; *the apocalyptic is a litmus test*, myth reflects the present, apocalyptic discourse is a projection of collective fears like contagion, war, and climate change; and *the apocalyptic is occasional*, it should be understood as a set of events that destroys worlds, worlds are multiple and so are their endings (2021, 237). In a serene voice, Rodríguez-Plate concludes "endings and survivings are all bound up with each other as the world spins on" (2021, 237).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century – the fifth religious "great awakening" according to DiTommaso – our current era has been defined through ideological individualism and self-determinism. Individual religiosity, spirituality, or "I-theism" represent the considerable degree to which individual meaning takes precedent above communal relation or group identity. DiTommaso summarizes the multiplex forces that establish this hyper individuality:

> The main characteristics of the Fifth Great Awakening are the unparalleled degree to which individuals are able to self-direct the channels of their religious expression and their spirituality more generally; the seemingly paradoxical way in which such expressions can coexist in an otherwise highly secularized society; the expansion and migration of fundamentalist streams in every traditional religion from the margins to the mainstream; the global scope of these trends and the dissolution of many of the old boundaries not only among traditional religions but also in the varieties of religious expression; and the extent to which the digital revolution has facilitated all these changes and hyper augmented their effects (2020, 334).

Both the Y2K millennium and the 2012 Mayan apocalypse are exemplary of the efficacy of the digital revolution. Though different in context and character, both phenomena demonstrate the intensification of "human eschatological instrumentality in apocalyptic speculation" (DiTommaso 2020, 334). The most recent global pandemic and ongoing climate crisis, both now enveloped in the global public consciousness, also contribute to this existential anxiety. Although social and news media continue to address these topics, few individuals are fully able to comprehend their complexity and scale (2020, 337). The role of the apocalyptic worldview, then, is revealed by the social functions it enables.

A prominent social function of apocalyptic discourse is to delineate the "elect" from the "other," as noted. In his 2010 article, "The Apocalyptic Other," DiTommaso argues that this differentiation operates through the opposition and interaction of epistemological poles, which he terms the *rational* and *emotive*. The rational pole is predicated on two propositions. First, humanity is structured through pervasive binaries, as outlined above. Second, our immediate reality is transitory and subordinate to a transcendental reality (2010, 223). Typical Protestant and evangelical theodicy-based justifications for worldly evils are rooted in this rationality; apocalyptic constructs give order to a chaotic reality. The emotive pole consists of elements of human existence beyond intelligibility. DiTommaso explains that apocalyptic logic directs the social functionality of emotions:

> We long to validate those whom this world tramples. We desire an antidote to despair and anomie and hunger, and to console and exhort those who must endure

> oppression and the menace of death. We pursue the hope of sanctuary and the dream of utopia. We seek a reality greater than ourselves, a high destiny with sublimity and purpose, which accords to life a meaning beyond the oblivion of the grave (2010, 227).

Many of the challenges and successes of life spur affective responses. The reliance on apocalyptic discourse as an ideological framework reifies vehement affectivity, particularly those responses with polarized valence and high intensity. For example, DiTommaso states that the contention that worldly phenomena are determined by a hidden force that governs existence can "nurture feelings of xenophobia and paranoia, particularly when one's lifestyle is threatened" (2010, 228). Of course, protectionism and lack of tolerance for others' views is a common response of any group under threat. DiTommaso clarifies that apocalypticism amplifies these responses, entrenching those with a totalizing view into their stronghold, where group cohesion is further reinforced through the sharing of affect (2010, 228). This cyclical feedback loop, often leading to forms of social encapsulation, is commonly reinforced through charismatic leadership (DiTommaso 2010, 229).

As a reaction to social pluralism in the contemporary era, apocalyptic discourse cannot operate in dialogue, communities, and institutions that demand realist exchange (DiTommaso 2010, 237, 240). Inherent in the apocalyptic worldview is a logic that absolves individual and group responsibility to achieve an amicable and sustainable solution. In other words, *the world will end, I know this, I don't have to fix that....* This slippery slope easily feeds into ideological extremism, radical dualism, and determinism, "whereby eschatological others are subject to

persecution in the present" (2010, 240). A potent example of this form of rescinded accountability is demonstrated through the general trend of American evangelical groups to lessen the veracity of the ecological crisis on the expectation of immanent redemption (2010, 243). Rather than considering the ills of the world as discreet events intimately linked to human agency, the apocalyptic worldview strings together events, such as political upheavals, natural disasters, and social struggles, as part of a pre-ordained series of events leading to the ultimate end (2010, 243).

In "The Challenges of Ideal Theory and Appeal of Secular Apocalyptic Thought" (2017), political scientist Ben Jones introduces the term "cataclysmic apocalyptic thought (CAT)." Jones claims that within his formulation, the path toward an idealized society is through a crisis (2017, 2). Apocalyptic discourse takes on a secular form when the belief that human or natural forces will direct crisis toward utopia instead of the forces of divine intervention. A crisis can evoke meaning and create a sense of urgency to act (Jones 2017, 3). Jones tracks the rise of secularized apocalyptic discourse from the mid-twentieth century, coinciding with the rise of national socialism and communism and the subsequent ideological tensions spurred in the West (2017, 6). The secular apocalyptic mindset, he argues, takes advantage of the fear that is promoted through crisis and mobilizes it as a disruptive event necessary to overcome evil, dismantle corruption, and perfect society (2017, 4). The power of secular apocalyptic discourse, then, is its ability to heighten the importance of social and political events by infusing them with transcendent meaning (2017, 5). In his conclusion, Jones notes that although crisis has the power to direct attention to societal failures and urge action and readiness, CAT also freights the very risky

potential to lead to entrenched apathy, especially when crisis fails to produce redemptive social change (2017, 19).

In her article "Modern Ecological Concerns, the Persistence of Apocalyptic and the Signs of the End" (2014), theologian Anne Gardner utilizes Jewish and early Christian literature to position the motif of natural disasters into a broader set of imagery and theological convictions (4). Through analyzing a wide range of canon, but particularly Fourth Ezra and Revelation, Gardner suggests that the use of apocalyptic imagery in relation to contemporary ecological concerns is misguided (2014, 4). She notes that the "signs of the end" covered a wide spectrum of concerns, such as the dissolution of national relations, as well as the disintegration and ruptures of familial structures (2014, 5). She regards oppressive abuses of power and inequality as overwhelmingly Western, capitalist and colonialist, and "the yardsticks by which the climate crisis worsens." Gardner explains:

> One therefore has to ask to what extent the 'signs of the end' are valid symbols of climate change. If the latter is brought about by humans then it is not a manifestation of God's presence, neither is it a punishment for the perpetrators, for they are the powerful, they are the wealthy. They can afford bottled water when lakes and rivers are polluted; they can afford houses on higher ground and so gain immunity from the effects of rising seas. It is the poor and those without power who suffer and who will continue to suffer. If climate change is not caused primarily by humans but is a natural phenomenon then, and only then, does the possibility exist that it is legitimate to characterize it by the 'signs of the end.' But even so, it should only be represented

> in such a way if abuse of power and oppression, symbolized by the beasts in ancient apocalypses, precede it and there is an expectation of a glorious future when God's special figure comes to judge and to rule the righteous remnant (2014, 27).

Put simply, apocalypticism is a hostile, polarizing, paralyzing, and unhealthy worldview. I agree with DiTommaso's assertion that "[a]pocalypticism cannot be salvaged. It cannot be allegorized, spiritualized, or sanitized into what it is not. It cannot be made healthy by quarantining the unpalatable passages or by resetting its timetables" (2010, 236).

To this point, this presentation of apocalypticism has mainly been theoretical and historical. In order to specify the affective practices of apocalypticism in relation to the contemporary charismatic Pentecostal movement, a discussion of this discourse in the context of the United States and American evangelicalism follows. By investigating and presenting the socio-discursive and cultural forces that create the conditions for the development of apocalytpticism, one can better understand how affective responses are situated within an environment of belief.

2. *Evangelical Apocalyptic and Millennialist Prophecy*

In his foundational work, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture,* which assesses the historic trajectory of apocalyptic and millennialist thought, Paul Boyer (1992) documents the continuing appeal of prophecy in the modern United States. Boyer claims the enduring engagement with prophecy for evangelicals testifies to its value as a quasi-empirical, quasi-scientific validation of their faith (1992, 293). The more prominent lines of

contemporary evangelical apocalypticism and millennialism are tied to post-Cold War anxieties and uncertainties that Boyer identifies lie within the texts of prophecy writers, who also saw themselves as patriotic Americans (1992, 241). These writers echoed earlier sentiments of the 1960-70s, expressing their anxieties of the fall of the US to a greater global superpower (Boyer 1992, 252). Commonly evoking the biblical story of the fall of King Nebuchadnezzar, prophetic writers of this time made connections to the fall of democracy as indicating the final stages of governance before the rise of the Antichrist (Boyer 1992, 248). This rhetoric persists today in the discourses of contemporary prophetic televangelists.

Boyer explains that prophecy requires a precise fit with historical realities in order to be maintained, a feat that requires consistent ingenuity (1992, 295). Premillennialism denotes the belief that Christ will return just before the millennium, thereby causing a sudden and dramatic new beginning. In a discussion of evangelical dispensational premillennialists, Boyer highlights the impetus of these groups to become involved in the political realm:

> Insofar as the moral order of the fundamentalists sought through political mobilization would be more conducive to winning souls to Christ, their political involvement could be justified as a legitimate extension of their evangelistic mandate and rationalized in premillennialist terms. …[They] justified *their* position on the grounds that such issues were important *in the present age*, even though human society and earth would fall under God's judgement (1992, 30,1 *emphasis original*).

The belief in the Rapture – which spans across religious and secular divisions – dilutes the evangelical impetus toward social justice or progressive political activism. Instead, issues of conservative political activism occupy the foreground (1992, 299). However, Boyer cautions the reader against sweeping generalizations of premillennialist eschatology:

> In assessing premillennialists' social views, one must bear in mind the truism that most human beings act from a complex tangle of motives, impulses and values; absolute consistency is rare. The understanding of prophecy was *one* powerful influence shaping the outlook of premillennialists, but many other factors entered the equation as well. What one saw in practice was an amalgam of motivations and theological perspectives, rather than the unmodified application of premillennial eschatology to every decision and every issue (1992, 302, *emphasis original*).

Social issues that prevail today include the apocalyptic concern of the decay of the environment and the political upheaval in global interrelations. Many premillennialist prophets of the recent past, as well as those of the current age, see the environmental crisis as a prelude to the seven tribulations leading to the Rapture (Boyer 1992, 331, 337). The evidence of fulfilled prophecy, such as governmental turmoil or global health crises, validate the evangelical enterprise of their justified belief that prophetic fulfillments would continue based upon Biblical inerrancy (1992, 295).

In his chapter on "Apocalypticism in the United States," minister and religious scholar Bruce David Forbes (2010) assesses the interplay of influence between popular culture and organized

religion. By investigating the *Left Behind* series (1995-2007), Forbes establishes that popular culture acts as a more accurate expression of public belief than elite formal theologians or scholars (2010, 211). Through unpacking the history of the term "millennialism", initially established in reference to Revelation 20:2-7, he defines millennialism as a strain of thought that looks ahead to an idealized future without turmoil (2010, 216). Sociologists have expanded the term to allow its application to include religions and cultures that are not Abrahamic, though it is most prevalent in Christianity (2010, 216). Forbes tracks the ebb and flow of millennialist apocalypticism throughout the history of Christianity but identifies that it played a major role in the ideological underpinnings of the founding of European colonies in the "New World," and the development of the United States into a nation with a religious calling (2010, 217). Premillennialism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and became the predominant perspective among American fundamentalist and evangelical groups (2010, 218). Premillennialism can be overtly pessimistic, Forbes claims. Inherent in this belief is the expectancy that before the second coming, human life will deteriorate into warfare, immorality, and corruption, necessitating divine intervention (2010, 217).

In his essay "American Evangelicals and the Apocalypse" (2020), historian Daniel G. Hummel traces the developments of dispensationalist premillennialism in the United States. The increasing popularity of this form of theology has coincided with major ruptures in American politics and sociality, resulting in a distinctly American apocalyptica (2020, 291). For example, Hummel expands on the cultural landscape during and immediately after the American civil war, which demonstrated an increase in the prevalence of apocalyptic groups. A formative influence on contemporary manifestations of apocalyptic evangelicalism, was John Nelson Darby (1800-

1882), a charismatic bible teacher and member of the original Plymouth Brethren (2020, 292). Now considered the father of modern dispensationalism, Darby divided biblical history into "dispensations," each marking a period of God's relationship and judgement upon humanity (Hummel 2020, 293). Central to Darby's rhetoric was the belief in seven years of tribulations, leading to the imminent rapture. This belief has since expanded in varying ways to encapsulate seven periods of tribulations, no longer tied to a yearly timeline. The flexibility in this discourse allows for an ongoing generational application to local and global ruptures (Hummel 2020, 293). As with the adaptations made during and after the Civil War, dispensationalists retooled their discourse throughout WWI and again during the reemergence of modernized American evangelicalism in the post WWII landscape (2020, 296). Hummel summarizes the improvisational nature of premillennial dispensationalism; he contends that it maintains cultural relevancy because "it offers theological explanations to pressing intellectual and social challenges of each era" (2020, 294).

Hummel argues that although dispensationalism does not have a cohesive message, it makes up for its lack of formal academic or theological respectability in its adaptability and marketability of cultural anxieties in modern America (2020, 300). In this way, this discourse is applicable to virtually any crisis. Through prophetic interpretations of worldly events, charismatic actors instrumentally benefit from the cultural anxieties that they foster. This is supported by the increasingly decentralized and consumer oriented religious economy, which shapes the proliferation of apocalyptic discourse itself. Hummel contends that because apocalyptic discourse reflects the demands and fears of cultural consumers, it is less tethered to systematized seminary authorities or traditional teachings (2020, 302). Institutional recognition, authorial

credentials, or theological orthodoxy have become overshadowed by the ability to effectively market prophetic messages with a dramatic emphasis on entertainment value (2020, 307). It is through this "perpetual imminency paradigm" that apocalyptic discourse can withstand failed prophecy or socio-political shifts (2020, 305).

In an exploration of what he terms a "prophetic politics of dominion," religious studies scholar Joseph Williams tracks the historical development of apostolic and prophetic ministries involved in highly experiential, supernatural brands of charismatic-Pentecostal religiosity (2021, 427, 457). Through the merging of transnational sensibilities and dominion-oriented language, this "prophetic politic" emphasizes participation in a national and global "body of Christ" (2021, 428). In a similar presentation as other authors already canvased, Williams discusses the loose organizational structure of individual ministries that characterized the early twenty-first century, which has contributed to the substantial diversity in charismatic-Pentecostal eschatology. Williams identifies the most salient feature of the movement is its increasingly visible connections to political power (2021, 453). In the 2016 Presidential election, for example, Williams discusses the merging of the prophetic politics of dominion with religious nationalism despite evangelical transnational sensibilities. Portrayed as an end-times Cyrus figure, whose shocking victory reinvigorated faith-based belief in divine providence, Trump was anointed by God despite all the ways in which he seemed to contradict evangelical sensibilities (2021, 453).

3. *Salvific Demand, Riesebrodt and Reed*

In *The Promise of Salvation* (2012), sociologist Martin Riesebrodt sets out to define a universalized theory of religion. He regards one conceptualization of religion as affect, and relies on the work of philosopher and anthropologist Robert R. Marett (1912) for his investigation. He summarizes some of Marett's complex conclusions, whereby he explains that religion is an emotional, affective reaction to the "experience of awe inspiring powers" (2012, 58; cf. Rudolf Otto's concept of the "numinous"). Riesebrodt outlines that this conception is closely aligned with that of William McDougall's (1908) social psychology, in which McDougall claimed that coping with worldly problems or crisis is not centered upon the individual, rather "social coping strategies are organized, regulated, and traditionalized" (2012, 59). The "existential situation" of humanity, Riesebrodt summarizes, is always culturally and socially shaped (2012, 60).

In his assessment of modern American dispensationalism through a literary analysis of John Hagee and Tim LaHaye, the philosopher and religious studies scholar Randall Reed (2020) assesses the socio-discursive mechanisms by which these writers propagate their messages. Much like Hummel, Reed tracks the historical course of dispensationalism and explains that, like fundamentalism, modern dispensationalist thought has been spawned by urbanization and socio-economic changes that threaten traditional family structures and gender relations, as well as an increase in leisure time with a turn toward consumerism (2020, 469). With prominence in televangelism, dispensationalism was established in mainstream culture through a combination of institutional support, widespread cultural anxiety and burgeoning commercial distribution (Reed 2020, 470). With the institutional buttress of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN),

evangelical dispensationalist authority is reinforced through online or TV ministries, that can be conceptualized as “para-church organizations” (Reed 2020, 470).

Reed describes the difficulties of studying a non-denominational group like dispensationalists, as their charismatic appeal is conveyed through publications and televangelism - they do not speak to a defined congregation (2020, 470). He establishes that his study requires a method that can “elucidate the discursive mechanisms through which a cultural milieu attains ideological coherence and an appeal that reaches beyond the fundamentalist subculture” (2020, 471). I see a connection between Reed’s call for a flexible methodology and Wetherell’s affective practice, as will be presented in chapter two. By identifying apocalyptic anxiety that is distinct to the contemporary American cultural milieu, ideological coherence is maintained through the recurrent affective cycles that this discourse fosters.

Reed relies on the theoretical work of Riesebrodt (2010, 2012) who claims, “salvific demand” is predicated on religious propaganda that involves both “discursive practices” and “behaviour regulating practices” (2020, 468). In *The Promise of Salvation*, Riesebrodt expands:

> By “discursive practices” I mean interpersonal communication regarding the nature, status, or accessibility of super human powers, their manipulability, and their will, as well as techniques of self-empowerment. Discursive practices hand down and revise religious knowledge concerning interventionist practices and stand in a dialectical relationship to that knowledge. They are the foundation of religious interpretive cultures. “Behaviour-regulating practices” pertain to the religious reshaping of

> everyday life with respect to superhuman powers. These usually concern the avoidance of sanctions or the accumulation of merits (2012, 75-76).

Apocalypticism is rooted in tangible precedent for salvation. As a combination of fear and promise of rescue, the salvific demand of dispensationalist narratives stimulates a perceived need for salvation (Reed 2020, 477). This promise of salvation, Riesebrodt contends, is what primarily distinguishes a formal religion: “It is the promise of salvation offered by religions and their ability to engender belief in their control of the means of salvation and the paths toward it that constitute their potential to exert authority. The promise of salvation is not a latent function of religious practices; it is the meaning inscribed within those practices” (2012, 89).

Reed explains that salvific demand is produced by legitimation strategies that reinforce the apocalyptic vision and transfer divine authority. Through the discursive practices of correlating current events with biblical prophecy, these narratives produce a growing sense of impending doom (2020, 472). Viewers are increasingly convinced by the veracity of apocalyptic prophetic models through the plausibility of the stories that are told. As a result, behavioural regulation takes hold - usually in the form of financial contribution (2020, 478). Riesebrodt contends that the prophetic and millenarian discourses of the Abrahamic traditions explicitly reinforce the central meanings of the religious promise of rescue and salvation. Within these established traditions, the overcoming of crisis and establishment of an ideal order is not related to the “vague beyond” but to the immediate social and political order of the present or foreseeable future (2012, 166). Prophecy, especially apocalyptic or millenarian, occupies a significant role in the perpetuation of salvific demand:

> Under the rubric of prophetic propaganda I am subsuming the ideologies of messianic, millenarian, apocalyptic, or fundamentalist movements that promulgate a religious message of salvation in which conversion or radical change is called for. As a rule, the fate of political or religious communities is at stake. What these ideologies have in common is a view of the present as a time of calamity and corruption, as well as the proclamation of a future state of salvation either for a people or for the elect. Salvation is usually produced by a saviour or messiah, usually after a period of destruction (2012, 162).

Reed adds to Risebrodt's "interlocking and mutually reinforcing" model, suggesting that issues of status and legitimation are particularly pronounced when dealing with prophetic actors (2020, 479). For prophetic charismatic evangelicals, the method of legitimation becomes a combination of grounding in, and thorough reconfiguration of, biblical texts (Reed 2020, 479).

Reed justifies the use of Risebrodt's model, claiming that the current scholarly discourse on fundamentalisms emphasizes concepts of individual identity and the ideological nature of apocalyptic rhetoric. With its overemphasis on individual subjectivity and psychological categorizations, both Reed and Risebrodt question the ability of popular fundamentalist discourse to develop into a robust analysis of a large and multifaceted social movement like dispensationalism (2020, 471). Instead, Reed echoes Risebrodt's suggestion to focus on the "artifacts of religious production" (2020, 472). As will be addressed in detail in chapter two, Reed's "artifacts" ring in similar tone to affective practices. Though differing in scope from

Reed, Wetherell shares his concern for theories in social science that emphasize individualized psychological and ideological phenomena, without considering the affective power of social phenomena.

Chapter 2: The Journey to Apocalyptic Affective Practice

1. *A Case for Affect*

This chapter seeks to establish apocalypticism as a social object (Fee 2000, 75) by identifying anxiety as an affective practice of apocalypticism. The following canvas of authors Jenna Supp-Montgomerie, Brian Massumi, James M. Jasper, Thomas J. Scheff, Margaret Wetherell, Valerie de Courville Nicol, Lisa Feldman Barrett, and Victoria Pitts-Taylor will lay the foundation for this theoretical examination of affect. In my opinion, Wetherell's theory of "affective practice" has the most to offer for an application to apocalypticism. De Courville Nicol and Feldman Barrett both incorporate Wetherell's theory into their methodology, allowing for a cohesive analysis of neuro-psycho-social integration.

This is by no means an exhaustive expedition; rather, it is a risky course that navigates these texts with careful consideration of how apocalyptic discourse weaves through the lived experience. Affect theories can be difficult to navigate. The following sections chart some paths not taken and discuss why certain formulations are not expansive enough to host a thorough investigation of the cultural prevalence of apocalypticism as reified through affective circulation.

Religious studies scholar Jenna Supp-Montgomerie in her 2015 essay, identifies three main developments in the field of inter-disciplinary scholarly work utilizing affect theory, which is predominantly influenced by the philosopher Baruch Spinoza. According to Spinoza, the mind is subject to the passions, which arise in response to an idea. This conception of affect identifies the

intertwined and reciprocal relationship between passion and cognition (2015, 336). Spinoza also suggested the conceptual turn away from the individual as the bearer of emotion and focused instead on the social lines that emerge as a result of exchange between bodies and things. With an emphasis on corporality and materiality, the analysis of affect should be placed on the non-representational creative energies that flow between agentive forces (2015, 337).

Contemporary affect theory in the study of cognition, emotion, psychology, and religion is also heavily influenced by Gilles Deluze's (1978) reading of Spinoza. The Deluzian interpretation posits that affect refuses firm boundaries between things, and instead points to the forces that run among us; while emotion may be conceptualized as belonging to the internal body, "affects territory is the in-between" (Supp-Montgomerie 2015, 337). Through the distinction between emotion and affect a cultural form of life develops, in which the religious scholar can investigate the social, corporeal, and energetic components of social living. In its application to the study of religious movements, affect theory emphasizes the circulation of energies between and within social groups. This examination of social life extends beyond the sum of people that participate in it (2015, 338).

Interdisciplinary scholar Sara Ahmed assesses how affect constitutes and is constituted by power. In her revised 2015 publication of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed discusses an "affective economy" that runs through social and political phenomena, which emphasizes the flux and exchange of affective resources. From this perspective, religious expression should not be considered as coincidental or abstract, but rather a circulation of particular and culturally validated forms of enthusiasm (Supp-Montgomerie 2015, 339). This sociality of affect

illuminates the consideration of certain embodied emotionalities, especially where particular religious actors are validated, discounted or disciplined (2015, 340).

To assess emerging social groups is to analyze the forces behind the evocation of movement, the links of association and the "structures of investment" (Supp-Montgomerie 2015, quoting Grossberg 2010, 341). In an attempt to understand the objects, modes, and modalities of investment to social structures, affect theory can aid in the deciphering of broader cultural movements of energy.

2. *Massumi, Felt Realities*

Through his extensive work on the ontological structures of affect, philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi establishes that affect is a "shimmering presence" that circulates through social bodies. In "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat" (2010) Massumi discusses "felt realities" and breaks down the concept of threat in the context of the War on Terror during the presidency of George W. Bush (2001-2009). He claims that felt realities legitimate preemptive actions, insofar that the "gut feelings" that arise in response to a real or perceived threat make themselves known in the body of the person (Massumi 2010, 55). In this way, threats are legitimated in a present reality, regardless of their future manifestation. In other words, "threat has an impending reality in the present. This actual reality is affective" (54). Preemptive actions can produce the object toward which its power is applied and do so without contradicting its own logic and undermining its own legitimation (2010, 56).

In the case of religious movements, when one's spiritual obligations and self-identity are at risk, this threat must be addressed through various forms of novel compensators. As many of the American NRMs that emerged in the 1960's operate on reinforcing various atmospheres of fear and anxiety, preemptive security responses reinforce the production of insecurity (Massumi 2010, 61), which act as a contagious affective tool to maintain group affiliation. Massumi champions an ecological approach; he advocates for the necessity of situating preemptive power in a "field of interaction with other regimes of power, to analyze their modes of coexistence as well as their evolutionary divergences and convergences" (2010, 62).

Massumi has published an extensive collection of work over the last few decades, and at the onset of this investigation I was particularly inspired by his interpretation of Deluzian methodology and his consideration of effects of political phenomena. In *The Politics of Affect* (2015) Massumi presents a collection of interviews in which he discusses the political ramifications of affective circulation. However, the philosophical foundations of his work relegate these interviews to remain complex and elusive. If the present analysis relied on Massumi's canon to explore the affect of apocalypticism, the discussion would have remained abstract. Although the apocalyptic deals in the ontological and metaphysical, this thesis is more concerned with how apocalypticism is intertwined with the lived experiences and bodies of believers. In order to operationalize and establish apocalypticism as a social object, Massumi's theory needs to take a back seat.

3. *Scheff, The Deference-Emotion System*

The chapter "Shame and Conformity: The Deference-Emotion System" in *Microsociology* by Thomas J. Scheff (1990) assesses communal reinforcement of shame through emotionality and sociality. Scheff argues that in his deference-emotion model, communal solidarity is the most vital force in human affairs while its absence plays a central role in social conflict and turmoil (1990, 73). Conformity, as Scheff explains, is encouraged through a system of sanctions (1990, 74), not unlike Riesebrodt's model. He establishes that the deference-emotion system occurs both within and between individuals as a primary social emotion (1990, 76). Generated by the virtually constant monitoring of the self in relation to others, affect is undoubtedly present in social interactions and covertly active in solitary thought (1990, 79).

In classic Christian theology, shame is deeply implicated in notions of salvation. As a cognitive solution to an uncomfortable reality permeated with suffering, apocalypticism is rooted in the tangible precedent for salvation. Viewing this through Scheff's deference-emotion model, it is clear that shame develops an insidious influence, where actions and behaviours are pressured by shame motivations even when shame is unacknowledged (1990, 93). Conformity-driven apocalypticism may be a discourse that serves the purpose to regulate embodied affect, in this case, an emotionality that is ominous and cyclical.

Scheff's chapter is a discernable example of the operationalization of affect as applied to social phenomena. His deference-emotion model illustrates the power of conformity through shame, though does not fully explicate individualized apocalypticism. Importantly, contemporary

apocalyptic rhetoric exists on digital platforms, where appeals to conformity are not as clear and increasingly complicated by the politics of new media. Shame, although surely implicated in apocalyptic speculation, does not seem to be the strongest affective pull toward this social practice. This conclusion spurs another line of inquiry, toward a sociological theorization of emotion that encapsulates physiological and psychological manifestations of apocalypticism.

4. *Jasper, Feeling-Thinking*

In his essay, "Feeling-Thinking: Emotions as Central to Culture" (2013), James Jasper establishes that feelings play a critical role in the meaning-making of social movements (2013, 24). Jasper claims that culture is meaning shared by individuals and im/material manifestations of those meanings. He asserts that objective structures of meaning influence social life only when they are objectively felt (2013, 25). Jasper asserts that a cultural model of social movements must acknowledge the central role of emotional processes in feeling-thinking (2013, 26). Through outlining some neurobiological phenomena of emotion, he demonstrates that informational processing - the interactions between cognition and emotions - arise from the same physiological arousals (2013, 227). He claims that this can manifest in the individual as urges, reflexive reactions, moods, attachments or aversions, or moral emotions (2013, 28). Jasper demonstrates that shared emotions: oriented to outside the group, and collective emotions: shared with other group members, both interact to create a dynamic and fluid affective exchange (2013, 30-31).

In the case of apocalyptic discourses, certain symbolisms, rituals, and modes of communication are legitimated and reified in ways that serve the affective transmission generally more powerful groups. Signs and symbols increase in affective value correspondingly with their increases in transmission, implying a cultural conditionality of affective commodification. A sense of belonging can be understood as both a product of the affective economy that is encapsulated within a community, and the affective rhetoric that circulates around it. Affective signs accumulate in power and are repeated not because they positively contain affect but because of the effects of histories that have stayed open over time (*see Ahmed 2015*). For instance, the tendency of millennialist groups to attribute cosmic meaning to political and cultural ruptures reifies their apocalyptic message. Therefore, shared ideologies are conceptualized as shared perceptions of the nature of social life, with values and norms relevant to resisting and promoting change (Jasper 2013, 31). By outlining external engagements, emotional aspects to recruitment, and the moral dimension of emotions, Jasper explains that social movements utilize emotion to unify collective affect, reify collective identities and provide motivational thrust (2013, 34, 37, 39). Jasper concludes by reaffirming the embodied nature of emotions, appealing to the somatically felt modes of cultural life (2013, 41).

Jasper's presentation is a strong foundation for an affective analysis of apocalypticism, though some of his terminology remains problematic. Apocalypticism goes beyond "thinking" or "feeling" - it speaks to broader cultural epistemologies. Thinking and feeling are ambiguous terms that persist to be the subject of lengthy discussion in social sciences. Participation in these discussions is beyond the scope of this thesis, and so, a conscious choice has been made to avoid these terms all together. A strength of Jasper's theory though, is its encapsulation of the somatic

body within affective exchange. Ideally, this thesis seeks to find a theorization of affect that has a multidirectional application, encapsulating the dynamic exchange between internal, embodied processes and external cultural forces.

5. *Wetherell, Affective Practice*

Margaret Wetherell's formulation of affective practice sheds much light on the subject of apocalyptic anxiety and thus the subject of this thesis. In *Affect and Emotion* (2012) she calls for an epistemological shift in the social sciences (3). Wetherell highlights the complexities of affective practices, asserting that they call attention to the shifting and flexible figurations of social phenomena rather than direct lines of causation, simple character determinations, or neat categorizations (2012, 4). She identifies the current complications in affective discourse, claiming that the discipline struggles to deliver work that is consistently productive and generative (2012, 4).

By limiting her scope of affective practices to human emotion, Wetherell focuses on issues of embodied meaning-making (2012, 5). Though she admits it is a challenging pursuit, Wetherell navigates through semantic, discursive, historical, social, cultural, psychological, and somatic bases of affective activity (2012, 4). Her interdisciplinary intention aligns with the scope of the present project. Exploring various case examples of affective action, she establishes that her goal is to account for the unpredictable psychosocial actor, to consider the ways human existence is suffused with feeling and the ways in which actors are non-consciously connected (2012, 10-11).

For example, in her discussion of the "dancing plague" the early sixteenth century, Wetherell affirms historian John Waller's (2009) designation of the seemingly spontaneous movements as instances of mass suggestion (Wetherell 2012, 5). She unpacks the historical context of the dancing plague, situating it within the era's "environment of belief" (2012, 5-6). As outlined above, the contemporary prevalence of apocalyptic discourse is also situated within its own environment of belief - local and international political turmoil, ideological shifts in global consciousness, health and ecological crises, etc. She concludes that the dancing epidemic was an "overdetermined symptom of the times" whereby embodied expressions were intensely located in a nexus of relations (2012, 6).

I speculate that the state of the contemporary world, and the democratization and overabundance of access to global media, also cultivates affective fear and collective moral panic that manifests as apocalyptic discourse. By highlighting the work of other affect theorists, Wetherell also hints at this phenomenon, claiming that an affective epistemology could potentially elucidate the "panicky rhythms of current politics and recurring waves of appeal to terror and security" (2012, 9). The embeddedness and enmeshment of the body within social repertoires and histories cannot be ignored, insofar as the implication of the body within social phenomena reifies the durability of affect. Wetherell explains:

> These components and modalities, each with their own logic and trajectories, are assembled together in interacting and recursive, or back and forth, practical methods. Pattern layers on pattern, forming and re-forming. Somatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and

> historical patterns interrupt, cancel, contradict, modulate, build and interweave with each other (2012, 14).

Wetherell highlights the entanglement of affective practices in media representations of human phenomena, and states that affective flows are enmeshed within large-scale social changes (2012, 13). She affirms that the study of affect is inextricably linked to the study of pattern, recognizing that affect is

> …dynamic, intersecting, sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal. Patterns are sometimes imposed, sometimes a matter of actively 'seeing a way through' to what comes next, and sometimes, like a repertoire, simply what is to hand, relatively ready-made and 'thoughtless'. It is a case of recognizing too, though, that affective phenomena can often remain simply ineffable. Attempts to find order can break down as the dynamism of the phenomenon, the fuzziness and instability of any descriptions of affective states, and sheer exuberant and excessive possibilities of the body become apparent (2012, 16).

To comprehend apocalypticism through the affective embodiment of anxiety, it is useful to identify patterns of this discourse. Chapter one has addressed the recurrence of apocalyptic discourse across many eras and in consistent relation to social turmoil. These affective reverberations vary in form, but also in scale, largely proportional to the social group in focus. Wetherell explains that affect can be distributed across populations, and engage amorphous groups in "collective moods," akin to what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (1997) has termed a

"national present tense" (2012, 16). As the population of study and subsequent scale of affect increases, so too do questions of the reification of power, the regulation of transmission, and the realities of uneven distributions of affect. In other words, who experiences what, and why?

Returning to Ahmed's "affective economy" (2015), Wetherell contends that it is crucial to understand power in terms of emotional capital (2012, 18). The demographic of evangelical apocalyptic groups in the US is predominantly Caucasian (73% in 2018) and middle or upper class (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Much scholarship has been dedicated to investigating emotional lives and the variability of emotional labour across populations (see Skeggs 2004). This subject is worthy of a dedicated investigation, but its breadth extends beyond the present discussion. It is a logical conclusion that the prevalence of apocalyptic discourse should be understood and qualified in relation to broader ontologies of race, class, and social and political influence.

By establishing affect as a practice, contemporary scholarship has the opportunity to focus on processes of developmental sedimentation, routines of emotional regulation, and relational patterns (Wetherell 2012, 22). In the concluding pages of her first chapter, Wetherell turns to the embodied nature of affect, claiming that affect is about sense as much as sensibility (2012, 19). The individual, she affirms, thus becomes a site of potential and activation in affective networks (2012, 23).

In the second chapter of her volume, Wetherell discusses the psychobiological scholarship on affect, cataloguing and debunking prominent formulations. Through relying on recent decades of

functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) studies, Wetherell explains that neuroscientific research is heading in a new direction, with a consideration of developing socially and culturally situated models of analysis, and attempting to create contextually inclusive accounts of human emotion (2012, 28). In what she terms the "embodied flow of affect," Wetherell expands on how affect circulates through the individual and collective body through physiological changes that are accompanied by subjective feelings, cognitions, evaluations, images, memories and appraisals (2012, 30-31). She explains that during a sharp burst of emotion, the body pumps out somatic signals such as autonomic nervous system activation, changes in blood flow, muscle and posture modulation, central nervous system and neural activation, hormone and neurotransmitter releases (2012, 29). Her main point is to identify that emotions do not exist in a vacuum, rather affective bursts exist within the somatic body, as well as through cognitive, motivational-behavioural, and subjective-experiential existence (2012, 27, 28).

Wetherell explores prominent neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's (1995) conception of "affective cascades." In brief, Damasio's theory encapsulates the belief that emotions are part of the ongoing process of organismic homeostasis and survival, which Wetherell denotes as a product of Darwinian theories of evolution (2012, 30). As a result, "bodyscapes" are constantly being structured and reconstituted through cascading affective activity (2012, 31). Damasio's theory is somewhat problematic and can tend toward an essentialist understanding of emotion, leading to false beliefs that discreet emotions can be mapped onto the cortex. Nevertheless, it is a valuable contribution toward understanding the biological unfolding of affect and the necessity to relate emotional experience to an everyday functional continuum (2012, 35).

Wetherell concludes her exploration of the psychobiology of affect by surveying the field as it stands, and settles on a subtle, relational, and reciprocal interweaving of brain/body/mind (2012, 50). She is sure to also note that this interweaving extends beyond the body, that the individual's affect is implicated in complex figurations and assemblages of the person in daily life (2012, 50):

> One of the main difficulties with the basic emotions thesis is that, paradoxically, attempts to provide a natural history of the emotions end up denaturing affect as an object of study. … [A]bstracting an entity - such as 'anger', 'love', 'grief' or 'anxiety' - to try to study it, also reifies it. What can be found in actual life are not anger and fear per se but angry people, upsetting scenes, sentimental episodes, grieving families, anxious parents pacing at midnight, and so on. *In other words, body states are always situated and always taking place in the midst of some activity, and the medium in which they are situated is culturally and socially constituted* (2012, 42 *emphasis added*).

Wetherell asserts that the flow of affect is located within individual bodies, but also within the flow of everyday life. She establishes that through normative sequences and affective performances, situated affective activity requires background conditions that are material, spatial, physiological, and phenomenological. Semiotic connections, she affirms, are psychosocial. They depend on resources of shared language and sign systems, as well as historical repertoires, but are worked out through personal histories (2012, 129). Wetherell posits that the dominance of neo-liberal doctrines in American society produces a specific dynamic

unconscious and psychological style. By relying on the work of psychoanalyst Lynne Layton (2002), she explains that the American ideological environment places extreme and unhealthy emphasis on the free and independent individual (2012, 137). The neo-liberal ideological context creates a landscape in which "dependency on others, lack of agency and autonomy, relationality and connection must be repudiated" (2012, 127). Though Wetherell notes that Layton's formulation is plagued by the essentializing gaze of psychological typology, she notes that it may be useful to consider the personal affective trajectories that reinforce certain social practices (2012, 138).

Affective activity also demands collectivities that recognize, endorse, and circulate the affective practice (2012, 79). Therefore, affective practices are also reinforced through communal histories (2012, 79). By relying on prominent psychiatrist Daniel Stern's 2004 publication, Wetherell explores the phenomenal sense of affective episodes and their temporal architecture in specific contexts. She establishes that affective experience works through a flow and duration not exactly equivalent to chronological time (2012, 85). If one is to consider the affective assemblages and cascades, as described earlier, as occurring within the body, this temporal architecture of affect makes sense. Stern suggests that "present moments" have an extended timeline beyond the immediate stimulus (2004, 36, as cited in Wetherell 2012, 85):

> There is likely to be some gap between how we inhabit the microseconds of social interaction and the subjective phenomenological sense of the passing moment. Perhaps we 'live' not quite in the active chronological moment of the turn-by-turn, but most strongly and personally in the narratives ruminating on some outburst of

> affect after it has taken place, whether these are narratives told to others, or narratives rehearsed internally to ourselves? And, if not there, then do we mostly live in a more extended present moment? (2012, 85)

I contend that Stern's "extended present moment" has a strong connection to apocalypticism. The aura of impending world destruction pulls the body out of the present moment, and the repetitive reinforcement of this discourse reifies subjective existence in a separate reality. Stern suggests that our nervous systems seem to be designed for the co-creation of affective episodes, and subsequent intertwinement of subjectivities (Wetherell 2012, 88). This intertwinement contributes to affect's multimodal qualities, as affective movements require the "recruitment, assemblage and entanglement of huge social, cultural and material infrastructures" they are inherently impacted by social and historical changes. As infrastructure changes, so too will the cultivated affective practices and their meanings (2012, 89-90).

In the seventh chapter of her analysis, Wetherell focuses on the transmission, circulation, and "contagion" of affect. She relies on the work of the interdisciplinary scholar Lisa Blackman to unpack communal affective atmospheres:

> Affective transmission is never simply something one 'catches' but rather a process one is 'caught up' in. Its complexity is revealed through the linkages and connections of the body to other practices, techniques, bodies, energies, judgements, inscriptions and so forth that are relationally embodied (Blackman 2007/2008, 29, as cited in Wetherell 2012, 140).

Wetherell contends that the circulation of affect and its propensity for contributing to communal fortification, is crucial to understanding the possibilities of sociality, polity and collective action (2012, 143). She explains that people construct contexts for mutual action by orienting their conduct to each other, and by doing so develop shared foci which guide behaviour (2012, 143). Framing affective circulation through the terminology of "contagion" removes members of a group from their social and political contexts and obfuscates their social practices, rendering affective expression as pathological (2012, 147). For instance, considering those who participate in the affective practice of apocalypticism as individuals plagued with neuroses or delusion does nothing to intervene with this discourse. By focusing on elements of shared identity among individuals, and the communal frames of reference that are generated through affective exchange, it is possible to understand the directions that crowds may take. In this way, identity, affect, legitimacy, and social practices are tightly woven (2012, 148). Wetherell nearly anticipates the present analysis by stating, "what can look like from the outside chaotic and indiscriminate rioting, as an example of a mob running wild, makes a lot more sense from this perspective" (2012, 148). The January 2021 siege of the US capitol serves as a strong example.

In the fifth chapter of her volume, *Structures of Feeling*, Wetherell's analysis is concerned with how affective practices sediment within/as social formations (2012, 103). She qualifies that social class is relevant when considering how affect solidifies groups, and that contemporary investigations of affect call for an intersectional analysis. She explains that class is relevant in a broad way; put simply, it is easier for those with more cultural or economic capital to tolerate forms of short-term suffering in the service of a long-term goal (2012, 113). Wetherell's main

emphasis is to recognize that people are likely to mobilize based on a wide range of affective practices, intimately linked to their social context (2012, 118).

Through a reconstruction of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* (1998), Wetherell establishes that social life is simultaneously subjective and objective. She explains that past practices become embodied in social actors, whereby they acquire a "sediment of dispositions, preferences, tastes, attitudes, skills, and standpoints" which all influence and guide future conduct (2012, 105). As some lines of habitus - action and reaction - are practiced internally and in social life, others become atrophied and decay, and become less and less imaginable (2012, 105-106). The body becomes an "memory jogger" and an accomplice of social reproduction, propelling the individual toward some imagined futures while muting others (2012, 106). I maintain that in the context of apocalypticism, when there is a disruption to an imagined social trajectory (i.e. social turmoil, im/material insecurity, etc.), an intense, embodied anxiety results. As anxiety imagines failure and rehearses anticipated outcomes, it reinforces the disposition toward habitus and increases compliance to one's particular social order (2012, 107).

In the final analysis, affective practice for Wetherell is "as a moment of recruitment and often synchronous assembling of multimodal resources, including, most crucially, body states" (2012, 159). The participation of the emoting body is intrinsic to the designation of affective practice, as opposed to a designation as another form of sociality (2012, 159-160). Affect must be located in the body, and in the person as a social actor, who evaluates, negotiates, communicates, and relates with the world that spins through them.

6. *De Courville Nicol, Anxiety and Emotional In/Capacity Theory*

In *Anxiety in Middle-Class America: Sociology of Emotional Insecurity in Late Modernity* (2021), sociologist Valérie de Courville Nicol classifies anxiety as an embodied phenomenon that demands attention as a means to acquire moral insight into life's problems (10). Throughout her volume she establishes that in our contemporary age, fundamental needs of security are not being met across three dimensions of being. De Courville Nicol identifies these dimensions as social, cognitive, and affective (2021, 9). She explains that anxiety is ubiquitous, and demarcates the late modern world as the "age of anxiety" (2021, 3).

De Courville Nicol identifies four main attributes of anxiety: 1) it reflects a personal interest in one's ability to effect outcomes for the better; 2) it involves a personal investment in painful outcomes that necessitate personal responsibility; 3) it demands a moral-emotional effort at wrestling with recurring and undesirable feelings of in/security, and 4) it is motivated by the intent to problem solve, which can promote individual and social transformation (2021, 11). She explains that the key feature of anxious suffering is its appeal to a moral reality, through the social reinforcement of personal responsibility to address emotional in/security (2021, 5). The urge to objectify unarticulated threats of in/security results in a social reclassification of anxiety to moral-emotional problems (2021, 12).

De Courville Nicol identifies six sociological categories of anxiety: 1) identity anxiety; the urge to conceptualize individuality, 2) status anxiety; with an in/secure focus on social value, 3) perception anxiety; the intent to reflexively investigate the nature of human life, 4) motivation

anxiety; conceptualizations of existence with future orientation, 5) sensibility anxiety; with a focus on energy management, repair, renewal and self-care, and 6) aptitude anxiety; the desire for success and powerfulness (2021, 12-13).

The present analysis contends that apocalypticism incorporates elements of all six of de Courville Nicol's categories. When a world and existence is threatened, one seeks to understand how they fit into the social order in a multitude of ways. Instances of emotion must be understood as points of contact between the ultimate motivations of behaviour (i.e., instincts, basic needs, tensions, and moral commitments) and inner constructs that are generated through life experience (2021, 18). She establishes embodied in/capacity theory (de Courville Nicol, 2011) as a primary means to investigate relational consciousness through the identifiers of emotives, emotional-norms, and emotionality (2021, 17). Emotives encapsulate the boundaries between inner and outer culture (see Reddy 2001); emotional-norms act as felt forms of problem solving, addressing the boundaries between inner cultural constructs and ultimate concerns (2021, 17). Emotionality deals with the boundaries between emotives and emotional-norms:

> Emotionality has been described as a moving structure of felt experience in that 'the body is in the mind, society is in the body, and the body is in society'. It is the relational consciousness – the bridge, the assemblage, or interface – that connects and blends the personal and the social, movement and sedimentation, agency and structure, and the sociological, the psychological, and the biological as distinct dimensions of the emergent reality of human being (2021, 15).

De Courville Nicol relies on the work of neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017), who asserts that emotional-norm concepts aid the individual in reconciling patterns of pain and pleasure (2021, 21-22):

> In everyday experience, we organize affects of pain and pleasure and high and low arousal into embodied concepts of danger and security. These concepts are dynamic simulations (i.e., internal representations) of contextual instances of affect shaping our concerns and aims. They are evolving, perceptual-affective filters with which we predict reality and generate a course of action to pursue emotional security. We correct, refine, and transform them through our interactions with internal and external forces. Their outcomes can punish and reward us. We can develop an awareness of them when they become a problem. It is as such that they generate anxious suffering and the possibility of personal and social change (2021, 22).

In discussion with de Courville Nicol, I have determined that apocalyptic discourse can be mapped onto this theory (personal communication, 2022). I contend that anxiety-driven apocalypticism is an emotional-norm. Apocalyptic speculation fosters a predictive reality, whereby the individual is invested in structures of power that guide their actions in daily life. In an effort to pursue emotional security, the individual engages with external and internal forces, such as consuming or participating in apocalyptic discourse, in order to assuage embodied anxieties. Engagement with the apocalyptic only partially addresses de Courville Nicol's three domains of being, insofar as it provides cognitive, rationalized solutions to a multiplex problem. The social domain is partially addressed, in that the circulation of apocalyptic discourse coheres

group identity, while simultaneously isolating and radicalizing the in-group in comparison to the out-group. I contend that the affective domain is in a state of insecurity, as apocalyptic discourse cyclically reinforces low valence/high arousal emotionality, intensifying anxious suffering in the body.

In her chapter, "Generalized Anxiety," de Courville Nicol primarily categorizes by its chief concern of unwarranted stresses (2021, 132). In the cognitive domain, generalized anxiety manifests as an attempt to control mental phenomena (2021, 131). De Courville Nicol explains that the democratization of knowledge that characterizes the late-modern period has produced the moral need to reconfigure personal perceptions through self-reflexivity (2021, 133). Through self-observation, cognitive reframing, and coping/problem-solving, individuals can move away from a reflexive consideration of mental disorder to subjective mental control (2021, 134).

De Courville Nicol outlines various late-modern approaches to conceptualizing generalized anxiety across the latter decades of the twentieth century. In the 1970s, coined the "age of anxiety," self-help literature was characterized by a focus on realism, positivity and neutrality (2021, 145). The 1980s, in which anxiety discourse focused on ubiquitous worry, suggested strategies such as the rational "reprogramming" of negative self-attributions (2021, 149). The literature of the 1990s emphasized choice, the inevitability of anxiety as an inherent element of life, and the impetus to expose and confront individual anxieties (2021, 152, 156). By contrast, the 2000s, with a focus on typology and symptomology, encouraged individuals to detach from fears through objectification, identification, and management of anxieties (2021, 157). With a new emphasis on mindfulness techniques and influence from traditions such as Buddhism,

individuals were instructed to acknowledge their fears of the unknown and subvert future-oriented rumination by focusing on the present moment (2021, 162).

De Courville Nicol expands on prominent sociologist Ulrich Beck's (1992) notion of "imagined consequences". Beck argues that in the post-industrial world, threats to wellbeing have moved from the material to immaterial. During industrial modernity, concerns of scarcity and production of wealth were prominent stressors. In the late-modern age, concerns have shifted to focus on managing the risk associated with the forces of production, and the subsequent management of generalized anxiety (2021, 135).

> Risk exposure is socially stratified, as is the ability to deal with such exposure, but even the rich – whether individuals, groups, or nations – become vulnerable through a 'boomerang effect 'in which perpetrators and victims become one in a global world. While extreme poverty attracts extreme risk, argues Beck, pollutants, deadly viruses, and environmental catastrophes do not care about national boundaries, and those whose basic needs are not fulfilled cannot be held to care about environmental degradation. In post-industrial risk societies, 'I am afraid' replaces 'I am hungry' and 'anxiety' replaces 'need' (2021, 135).

De Courville Nicol contends that some risks in the late-modern age are invisible, and their consequences "unpredictable, irreversible, unintended, and uncertain" (2021, 136). Because these risks are unknowable, we collectively rely on imagined consequences - social constructs that make sense of risk (2021, 136). Mass-mediated culture favours perceptual distortion and

manipulation of spatial and temporal landscapes. The processes of abstraction and infiltration into the sensory consciousness of the individual weaken the basis of what we can determine as real (de Courville Nicol 2021, 139). This “hallucinatory landscape” caters to entertainment and voyeurism, while neglecting to consider the ramifications on the general health of the population based on their consumption and participation (2021, 139). De Courville Nicol summarizes interventions to generalized anxiety as it stands. She explains that an increase in adaptive “common sense” and therefore a detachment from maladaptive cognitive patterns, is required to cultivate the capacity for mental control (2021, 164). This thesis asserts that the apocalypse is an imagined consequence of our current social order. The abundance of apocalyptic discourse reinforced by the democratization of popular media, reifies generalized anxiety within a social order that demands individualized quests for self-actualization.

In chapter six, “Existential Anxiety,” de Courville Nicol suggests that the confines of the late-modern social order have made individuals responsible for determining their unique and immanent purpose within a finite lifetime (2021, 169). Notions of mortality are reaffirmed by the pressures and social obligations of a fast-paced, self-referring society, where emotional perceptions of perplexity, emptiness, crisis, and loss are common (2021, 169). de Courville Nicol establishes that the chief concerns of existential anxiety are limiting stress, countering the painful perceptions of mental disorientation, and addressing the lack of individual purpose (2021, 170). Existential anxiety, therefore, expresses the desire to promote subjective motivation through self-actualization (2021, 171).

Inspired by sociologist Anthony Giddens' (2013) presentation of a "new social reality", de Courville Nicol establishes that existential angst is perpetuated by the contemporary separation of time and space, the disembeddedness of social institutions, and the continuous monitoring and revision of new intelligence (2021, 171). The pressures of choice within a highly specialized and consumption-driven world elicits painful feelings of disorientation, overwhelm, and paralysis, and continual reappraisal of social circumstances (2021, 177). Apocalyptic discourse becomes a rationalized solution to this embodied problem. de Courville Nicol establishes that self-discovery, self-direction and self-change are the catalysts to the search for personal meaning:

> These efforts develop one's moral compass and are a painful process of maturation in orienting oneself in the world. This quest arises as individuals struggle to make sense of their existence as finite and in the absence of an ultimate map or 'how-to 'manual. The authors view the freedom of goal-setting in post-traditional life as both a gift and a burden. We are ultimately responsible for decisions about how to make the best of the time we have. We must come to terms with the power that we have and do not, in a struggle to best develop and use our power based on what most matters to us (2021, 199).

Apocalyptic discourse is reinforced by the social structures of the late modern age; in light of the need to establish a unique purpose, grapple with mortality, and process feelings of anomie.

7. *Pitts-Taylor and Feldman Barrett, Emotions as a Social Reality*

The following sections are composed with the intention of disrupting the stereotype of apocalypticism as pathology. This thesis' reliance on psychological and neurobiological theories of affect are intrinsic to constructing an account of emotionality that spans across academic disciplines and reaffirms the interconnectedness between brain/body/society.

In *The Brain's Body* (2016), scholar Victoria Pitts-Taylor explores theories of somatization - the notion that the physical body and health bear on conceptions of self, personal identity, and citizenship (2016, 4). With an emphasis on systems-oriented approaches, somatic workings, and embodied appraisals, Pitts-Taylor advocates for a material-semiotic notion of brain/body/world (2016, 10, 4). Pitts-Taylor identifies major problems with the current field of reductionistic neuroscience, insofar as it can impose universalized conceptions of biology onto mind and cognition, which only considers non-normative phenomena through pathology (2016, 5). Rather than contributing to the naturalization of social inequalities, Pitts-Taylor claims that individuals and their brain-bodies are historically situated, socially stratified and differentially experienced (2016, 7, 8). Pitts-Taylor calls for investigation into *complexly embrained embodiment,* where attention is paid to the concepts of plasticity, sociality, and embodiment (2016, 11). She attests that by focusing on agential realism, interdisciplinary brain scholars can grasp ontological and epistemological phenomena in tandem (2016, 12). Pitts-Taylor concludes by restating the importance of conceptualizing social interactions through a dynamic, embodied paradigm, where interpersonal misattunements are not isolated events but complex assemblages of multiple actors and intersecting conditions (2016, 86).

In *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (2018), prominent psychologist and neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett discusses the origins of feeling. Feldman Barrett unpacks the notion of interoception, which she explains as brain-based representations of internal sensations (2018, 56). She states that emotions may commonly feel like they happen *to* a person, whereas upholding the constructed approach of emotion determines that a person is the *source* of emotion. Through neurological analysis, Feldman Barrett introduces the reader to "intrinsic networks," which she explains as collections of neural networks that are consistently activated together. This firing is based on prediction, past experience, and interoceptive cues (2018, 58, 59). Through what Feldman Barrett coins as "prediction loops," a globally activated process takes shape, whereby the individual predicts, is neuronally stimulated, makes conceptual comparisons, resolves errors, and makes further predictions (2018, 63).

Feldman Barrett claims that the human brain is wired for error as individual and social development occurs between predictive states and sensory input (2018, 65-66). Mis-attributions or errors in judgment are valuable to emotion processes (Feldman Barrett 2018, 69). This dynamic exchange impacts a person's "body budget," their physiological energetic resources; therefore, any event that has a significant impact on one's body budget is determined to be personally meaningful, which results in an instance of emotional attribution (2018, 70). Feldman Barrett concludes her fourth chapter by discussing "affective realism." Much like naïve realism, affective realism centres on the belief that one's states of valence and arousal provide an accurate and objective representation of the world (2018, 72). This "affective niche," Feldman Barrett explains, is individually and socially determined through individual interoceptive processes and

socially affective exchange (2018, 83). Feldman Barrett aims to dispel the myths of pure rationality, which lead to theories such as the “emotional limbic system” or the “truine brain”, rather she establishes that no action, thought, or decision is free of interoceptive or affective processes (2018, 82).

In chapter seven, “Emotions as a Social Reality” Feldman Barrett discusses the constructed elements of emotion and likens this to the infamous “tree in a forest” adage, a metaphor for experiential blindness. *For an emotion to be felt, an experience must be constructed* (2018, 129 *emphasis added*). Feldman Barrett asks if emotions are real, which she explains confronts the nature of reality and the humans' role in creating it (2018, 130). Through a discussion of flowers versus weeds, Feldman Barrett explains that bodily changes and behaviours become functional instances of emotion only when they are perceived to be meaningful based on their conceptualization and categorization (2018, 133). Feldman Barrett explains that the distinction between “real in nature” and “illusory” is a false dichotomy, therefore instances of emotions have a social reality (2018, 133). It may be better to ask, Feldman Barrett posits, “how do emotions become real?” (2018, 134). For this thesis, it is even better to ask, “when does the apocalypse become real?”

The functions of emotion rely on collective intentionality. Feldman Barrett identifies these functions as meaning-making, prescription of action, body budget regulation, emotional communication, and social influence (2018, 138). Emotional concepts presuppose emotional experience or perceptions through the necessity of prediction (2018, 143). In other words, if emotions are constructed through prediction, and prediction happens only with possessed

concepts, the human brain is a cultural artifact (2018, 143-144). Specific cultural-emotional language will have greater currency and increased circulation in comparison to others (2018, 146). In contrast to the classical Darwinian views of emotion, Feldman Barrett summarizes the predominant contemporary perspective, the theory of constructed emotion:

> The theory of constructed emotion explains how you experience and perceive emotion in the absence of any consistent, biological fingerprints in the face, body, or brain. Your brain continually predicts and simulates all the sensory inputs from inside and outside your body, so it understands what to do about them. These predictions travel through your cortex, cascading from the body-budgeting circuitry in your interoceptive network to your primary sensory cortices, to create distributed, brain-wide simulations, each of which is an instance of a concept. The simulation that is closest to your actual situation is the winner that becomes your experience, and if its an instance of an emotion concept, then you experience emotion. This whole process occurs, with the help of your control network, in the service of regulating your body budget to keep you alive and happy. In the process, you impact the body budgets of those around you, to help you survive to propagate your genes into the next generation. This is how brains and bodies create social reality. This is also how emotions become real (2018, 151).

Work like Feldman Barrett's allows for the field of human studies to move away from predominant neurocentric assumptions, a body of knowledge championing the belief that human behaviour and social deviancy can be fully elucidated through advancements in neurobiology. In

the case of certain NRMs that address embodied states such as Transcendental Meditation, popularized in the 1960's and now incorporated into mainstream therapeutic practices, states of biological hypo/hyperarousal are addressed and rectified through ritual actions. The field of human sciences now distinguishes between conscious and nonconscious processes and espouses that conflict between these embodied states results in disease. Apocalyptic believers may therefore be following an affective pull to ameliorate embodied irritants and balance affective energies.

Considering the application of Feldman Barrett's findings to apocalypticism, I speculate that the predictive (mis)attribution of imminent doom or world-destruction is based on an affective niche that is influenced by a dynamic and volatile social reality. Undoubtedly, the impact that these anxiety-driven emotional attributions have on one's body budget are intense and burdensome. The social influences of membership in an apocalyptically oriented group, legitimate its collective intentionality. When this discourse reaches across distinct groups, and seeps throughout cultural consciousness, what results is a population with dysregulated affective states. As Feldman Barrett puts it, "it takes more than one brain to create a mind" (2018, 154).

Chapter 3: The Youtube Prophet, A Case Study

In his analysis of religion and/in/as television, Elijah Siegler discusses the prophetic turn of American popular culture and the trajectory of television as a religious medium (Siegler, 2015). Siegler explores television's prophetic characteristics, predominantly established in the 1990s. With Christian televangelism increasing in popularity, Protestant ethics became cultural products; individual preachers gained prophetic status, with the expansive reach of the television medium validating their religious significance (2015, 58). Siegler caps his assessment in the mid-2010's, but comments that television's religious qualities extend beyond the breadth of his analysis. He establishes that scholars of religion and popular culture must look past the scope of late 20th century television to assess other digital mediums, such as YouTube and other on-demand viewing (2015, 59).

This chapter investigates the role of prophecy in contemporary American popular culture by using Jeremiah Johnson's "I Was Wrong" three-part video series as a case study. Johnson's prophetic ministry, which he describes as part of dispensationalist charismatic evangelicalism, is examined through new media studies and studies of celebrity and analyzed through scholarship on apocalyptic and premillennialist prophecy. Through assessing the democratization and prevalence of participatory structures of digital new media, considering the reification of charismatic celebrities in the faith industry, and identifying the connection to contemporary conspiracist rhetoric and action – it is demonstrated that Jeremiah Johnson's ministry, and specifically his "I Was Wrong" video series, reveals a significant shift in the popular American charismatic-Pentecostal movement.

1. *Televangelism, Democratization and Participatory Media*

In his assessment of American televangelism and participatory cultures, author Denis Bekkering claims that contemporary televangelism is synonymous with the commodification of American religion (2018, 3). He establishes that solely conceptualizing viewers of religious media as "consumers" artificially limits their agency. Rather, he seeks to emphasize the ways in which viewers engage with and rely upon the messages of televangelism to shape the actions they take in their daily lives (2018, 4). Relying on John Fiske's (2010) definition of "cultural industries," Bekkering identifies two economies that work in tandem to establish social significance: the interrelated financial and cultural economies (2018, 5).

The financial economy involves the manufacture, marketing and distribution of "cultural commodities" that individuals treat as "cultural resources" and shape them into their own sources of meaning and pleasure. Bekkering asserts that these constructed products may drastically depart from the uses intended by commodity producers (2018, 5). It is these secondary products that circulate in the cultural economy, which functions parallel to, but semiautonomous from, the financial economy. It is in this "shadowed cultural economy" which televangelism blossoms, mirroring features of for-profit mainstream culture (2018, 7). The present analysis contends that the shadowed cultural economy operates on affective exchange, which commodifies emotionality so that it accrues meaning and subsequent value.

In his analysis of prominent American televangelists, Bekkering reports that they are commonly recognized as "religious fakes" due to their "purportedly unholy combination of capitalism,

religion and mass-media" (2018, 9). He explains that the association of televangelism with fakery stems from mainstream cultural anxieties about the sincerity of such preachers and the religious authenticity of their gospel (2018, 9). Concerns of sincerity and legitimacy do not necessarily negate the impact that these prophetic actors have; their ability to tap into the affective currents of American culture may be their foremost skill. Bekkering addresses the common tendency to dismiss individuals who follow televangelists as participating in "personality cults"; he establishes that this rhetoric serves to delegitimize impactful relationships between TV ministries and their viewers (2018, 10). Though the focus of Bekkering's work is on the superstars of the TBN, notably Joel Osteen, Tammy-Faye Bakker-Messner and Robert Tilton, his observations also ring true in an assessment of YouTube prophets more generally.

In his chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Global Culture* (2015), Graeme Turner discusses the democratization of digital "new media." Turner highlights the political potential of new media and argues that it has the power to generate social and cultural transformations (2015, 57). Included in Turner's assessment of new media is digital TV, social media, online user generated content like YouTube, forums and blogs, e-commerce platforms and video aggregators/search engines. He asserts that this major cultural transformation lies in the "differentials which now structure power relationships between media and consumers" (2015, 58). Since content production and distribution were predominantly controlled by mainstream media corporations, the new capacities for consumers, as well as the blurring of binary distinctions between production and consumption, can be seen as a "radical reconfiguration of the politics of media" (2015, 59).

Conventionally, “user-generated content” is implicitly associated with an alternative and progressive politic. It is important to note that this is not the case, “DIY citizenship” takes many forms and often reflects the participants ideological base (Turner 2015, 60). Turner warns his readers of claims to the neoliberal democratization of media, that it risks becoming indistinct from ideologies of market meritocracy which appropriate the “rhetoric of equality and opportunity to disguise and sustain massive inequality” (Driessens 2010, as cited in Turner 2015, 60). Even though it is more ordinarily accessible, Turner asserts that it is crucial to de-mythologize digital media, to expose its maintenance of dominant actors and outlets. He explains that as a product of monopolizing media conglomerates, the “online celebrity” or “influencer” appeals to the individual but continues to promote popular or mainstream ideologies (2015, 60). Turner aptly renames this *demotic* rather than democratic, as new media accessible to a larger proportion of the public, yet it does not result in a proliferation of democratic politics (2015, 60).

Early studies of new media established the expansion of consumer choice as a basis of enthusiasm, laying the groundwork for a sweeping “digital optimism” (Turner 2015, 61). This orthodoxy is now in question. Turner explains that the shift from an “era of scarcity” to an “era of plenty” brought with it a fragmentation of the demos, shaped by individualist marketing to personal preferences that create a false sense of empowerment. He claims that it is no longer viable to rely on the sharing of a common media culture, instead focus should be shifted to an assessment of the satisfaction of niche groups (2015, 61). This “narrowcasting” and “cyber-polarization” have significant consequences (Turner 2015, 62). Turner expands on the dangers of listening to this kind of ideological echoing:

> …the fragmenting of common culture as fractions of the market - constituted through taste, social or political preferences - draw [individuals] more and more toward the same, personalized but nonetheless restricted, diet of media sources for their supply of news and information, thus limiting their exposure to views and opinions different to their own - something broadcasting had always offered as a social and political benefit (2015, 61).

Turner explains that the influence of mainstream media monopolies continues to lurk behind the scenes. He relies on Matthew Hindman's (2009) empirical analysis of media marketing, clarifying that there is a concentration around a limited group of sources that reinforce socio-structural hierarchy (2015, 63). Turner leaves no room for digital optimism in his conclusion, maintaining that there is little evidence that the current popular media structure provides any routes into a progressive political culture; as he states, "democracy is the loser in this scenario" (2015, 62).

I share Turner's sentiment; the previous discussion has clarified that hyper-individualized forms of media reify existential anxieties as presented through the work of de Courville Nicol. DiTommaso's presentation of the contemporary state of apocalypticism clearly demonstrates the tendency for groups to polarize on the basis of belief. Therefore, the interaction of hyper-individualized and apocalyptic media is a precarious mixture, resulting in instances of emotion that are clouded by isolation and polarization.

In her chapter in the same volume, author Marisol Sandoval echoes Turner's sentiment that the emancipatory potential of digital media has been overstated. Rather than separating the effects of user engagement and social power structures, Sandoval argues that it is worthwhile to examine their complex interrelationship (2015, 69). To support her argument, she relies on Jim McGuigan's (1992) theory of "critical populism" which accounts for both ordinary people's everyday culture and its material construction by powerful forces beyond immediate comprehension (2015, 69). Establishing that popular media as it stands is not sufficient to create a truly democratic or participatory culture, Sandoval calls for a reformation in "net citizenship" (2015, 74). To be a responsible "netizen" would mean to acknowledge that the power to control information flow lies with the audience. Sociologist Manuel Castells (2012) theory of communication power is helpful to understand this nature of control. Castells establishes that, 1) people and social movements are networked in many forms and can break the control of mass media, 2) emotionally laden content can spur affective appeals to action, and 3) although online content may be non-violent, it can lead to violence (as cited in Rantapelkonen 2014, 2).

2. *Charismatic Celebrities in the Religious Economy*

The charismatic appeal of televangelists is widely recognized as integral to the maintenance of their ministries. Through the power of appeal, rather than the authority of ecclesiastical positioning, televangelists assemble multi-million-dollar ministries and world renown (Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 2). Gaining celebrity status, prominent televangelists sustain commercial viability by perpetuating media recognition and manufacturing their own publicity to bring attention to their selected causes (Wilkins 2015, 129). With the ability to construct and mediate tragedies to

their following through the narratives they create, celebrities can amplify situational alarm as well as exaggerate the possibilities of individual action (Wilkins 2015, 130). Celebrity status also facilitates an urgent appeal to the necessity of financial contribution. As author and communications scholar Karin Gwinn Wilkins states, “given the sanctified imperatives for intervention, celebrity roles are celebrated in ways that contribute to their fame and social legitimacy” (2015, 133). This “philanthrocapitalist” narrative reinforces the nobility of intervention, where celebrities garner status as heroes in a classic rescue narrative (Wilkins 2015, 130, 134). With weak or no denominational ties, televangelists are free agents who make their mark on the “faith industry” as they see fit (Einstein 2008, as cited in Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 2).

Though a somewhat biased liberal analysis in her overt critique and disparagement of the religious right, author Mara Einstein (2008) proposes “faith brands” act much like their secular counterparts in making and maintaining personal connections to a commodity product (xi). Religion, therefore, is a product that must be marketed. This necessitates “spiritual shopping,” and with the increased likelihood to shop, there is a simultaneous increase in the likelihood to market, resulting in the goal of expansion and growth - which is related to the enduring popularity of evangelical megachurches (Einstein 2008, xi). The consumer focused, “personalized economy” encourages faith brands to alter their messages toward providing frequent and consistent maxims that spark individual identity formation (Russell 1993, as cited in Einstein 2008, 72). The late-modern age is structured upon the individualization and personalization of consumption. De Courville Nicol’s theorizations are based in data gathered in a thorough investigation of best-selling self-help publications over the past fifty years. Therefore,

the present analysis contends that these "spiritual shoppers" are a popular demographic likely similar to those in her study.

In their analysis of prominent televangelists such as Paula White, T.D. Jakes, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen and Brian McLaren, Shayne Lee and Phillip Sinitiere claim that these actors possess social, cultural and spiritual dexterity (2009, 29). Lee and Sinitiere utilize the theory of religious economy to support their analysis. They claim that within the social sciences, religion is recognized as requiring innovative leadership to exercise mass appeal, much like the commercial entertainment industry (2009, 159). The unregulated Western economy allows these "Holy Mavericks" to compete in a spiritual marketplace of ideals and draw market share as religious suppliers (2009, 176). Their ability to thrive in the faith industry can be attributed to their decisive and flexible reactions to changing conditions, offering spiritual rewards that "resonate with the existential needs and cultural tastes of the public" (2009, 3). Through carving out a niche in the spiritual marketplace, religious suppliers can offer a specified array of spiritual goods and services that match the tastes of their clientele (2009, 3). Acting as barometers of American popular culture, televangelists spiritual vitality becomes their economic vitality (2009, 10). I argue that within this context, the translation of spiritual vitality to economic vitality relies on the affective dexterity of these actors. The common monolithic portrayal of American evangelicalism is refuted by the success of many mavericks; their social ascendency attesting to the multifaceted, elastic, complex and contradictory theology that exists in the United States (Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 6).

As presented above, the shift to a prophetic popular culture in the 1990s coincided with an "impressionability of American religion" that became more dramatic with the emergence and establishment of an evangelical style of American Christianity. Lee and Sinitiere liken this to the morphology of jazz, that has adapted to the unique tastes and contexts of each participatory geography (2009, 12). A participatory geography can be likened to Wetherell's discussion of the affective "environment of belief". The contemporary manifestations of American evangelicalism can be traced to George Whitefield, recognized as "America's first religious celebrity" in the first Great Awakening of the 1740-1760s (Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 14). Though evangelicalism lacks a single creed or authoritative dogma, it can be recognized as a coherent form of Protestant Christians with support for biblical authority, missionizing, identifiable conversion and devotion to Jesus (Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 12). Through crafting persuasive re-definitions of faith for new generations, social change sparks vitality in the ministries of charismatic evangelicals. These innovators collapse the distinction between religion and culture by offering updated and more appealing messages than their institutional counterparts (Lee and Sinitiere 2009, 18). By employing the affective practices of apocalypticism and connecting their discourse with worldly phenomena, their followers are provided with flexible and dynamic solutions to embodied anxieties.

3. *Jeremiah Johnson's "I Was Wrong" Video Series*

In 2020, Jeremiah Johnson founded *The Altar Global*, a premillennialist ministry based in Charlotte, North Carolina, centered on the Christ-as-bridegroom narrative and preparation for God's deliverance. Johnson is a graduate of Southeastern University Florida, where he earned a

BA in Biblical Studies and Missions ("Founder Bio," 2021). Johnson has published ten books on apostolic and prophetic ministry, with appeals to apocalyptic and premillennialist theology. Through thealterglobal.com, YouTube and other forms of social media, Johnson's congregation has abundant access to his message. On YouTube alone, there are approximately seventy published videos with 150 hours of content. Johnson's gospel commonly circulates around the themes of the impending rapture, theological sickness in America, end-time lifestyles and apostolic ministry ("YouTube: The Altar Global Uploads", 2021). In early 2021, after the election and inauguration of American President Joseph R. Biden Jr., Johnson released a video series entitled, "I Was Wrong", which addresses his unfulfilled prophecy of Donald Trump's re-election. The first of the three videos received 176 thousand views, the second and third videos received 38 thousand and 24 thousand views, respectively (as of April 18, 2022).

In the first of three half-hour videos, Johnson tracks the trajectory of his prophecies from 2015 to early 2021. In July 2015, Johnson attests to being "supernaturally apprehended by the Lord" in the sanctuary bathroom of his ministry, where he recorded the first prophecy on a sheet of paper towel:

> God said: Trump shall become My trumpet to the American people, for he possesses qualities that are even hard to find in My people these days. Trump does not fear man nor will he allow deception and lies to go unnoticed. I am going to use him to expose darkness and lies in America like never before, but you must understand that he is like a bull in a China shop. Many will want to throw him away because he will

> disturb their sense of peace and tranquility, but you must listen through the bantering to discover the truth that I will speak through him.
>
> I will use the wealth that I have given him to expose and launch investigations exposing the truth. Just as I raised up Cyrus to fulfill My plans and purposes, so have I raised up Donald Trump to fulfill My purposes in the 2016 election. You must listen to the trumpet very closely for he will sound the alarm and many will be blessed because of him. Though many see the outward pride and arrogance, I have given him the heart of a father… (Johnson 2021 Part 1, 2:53-4:24).

Johnson explains that after sending his prophecy to a friend at Charisma Magazine, he was astounded to discover how "literally overnight, news agencies from around the world" wanted to interview him, "a small time, small town church planner who had no popularity or influence… who was thrust into the spotlight" (2021 Part 1, 5:17-5:52). Johnson justifies his claim about Trump as a bull in a China shop, through figurative and literal means, explaining, "[Trump] would make a mess of things, saying things he should never have said", but that he would also damage American political and economic relations with China (2021 Part 1, 6:44-7:00).

Appealing to the body of Christ, Johnson continually reinforces Trump's position as anointed by God, though he would act as a "stumbling block" in American history (2021 Part 1, 8:15-8:30). Johnson legitimizes his prophetic role by asserting his expert and celebrity status, through explaining that he had written two apocalyptic books on Trump, as well as conferred with senior ecclesiastical advisors (2021 Part 1, 10:15-10:25). By explaining a series of warning dreams of

Trump as King Nebuchadnezzar, crawling on the white house lawn, wearing a MAGA hat in a swamp of multiplying alligators, and running the Boston marathon, Johnson asserts that he was the first to have any negative prophecies about Trump's presidency (2021 Part 1). The most significant of his dreams, Johnson explains, came to him in October of 2020, where he prophesied that the Los Angeles Dodgers would win the World Series, that Amy Coney Barrett would be appointed into the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg's seat on the Supreme Court, and that Trump would win the 2020 election (2021 Part 1, 21:16-22:57). As two of the three dreams were fulfilled, Johnson began to publicly prophesy of Trump's re-election in autumn of 2020.

Coinciding with the siege of the US Capitol on 6-7 January 2021, Johnson released a formal statement of apology for his false prophecy and condemned the violence and destruction of the riot. Johnson attests to the violent backlash that he received as a result of his apology, stating that he was persecuted by Christians who "began to threaten [his] life because [he] repented" (2021 Part 1, 26:02-26:30). Johnson concludes his first video by appealing to the body of Christ - the "saints" who make up the Republican voting bloc - claiming that there is a desperate necessity for reformation in the charismatic prophetic movement (2021 Part 1, 33:11-34:05). Without acknowledgment of how "deeply sick" the movement is, Johnson claims that the American people will receive God's judgement (2021 Part 1, 34:16-34:44)

Johnson reaffirms the purpose of his video series is not to save face or make money, but that he is "under a mandate from the Lord" to explain his prophetic process and call for a reformation in the prophetic movement (2021 Part 2, 1:50-2:55). The focus of Johnson's second video is to speak on the biblical manifestations of prophets in the Old and New Testament. He clarifies that

Old Testament prophets were anointed by God and upheld by the people, whereas New Testament prophets are "placed in the body of Christ, called into community and family" (2021 Part 2, 9:30-10:04). Jesus acts as the mediator between God and man, therefore forbidding the intentional pursuit of prophetic status (2021 Part 2). Johnson states that the source of sickness in the movement is from false prophets "who use social media to prophesy without any form of accountability or community" (2021 Part 2, 10:36-11:15). Johnson asserts that New Testament prophets must act as yielded or submitted vessels rather than idolized "superhero Prophets" (2021 Part 2, 16:34-17:53). Constituting this as "prophetic idolatry," Johnson establishes that the 2020 election cycle was a divine opportunity for the charismatic movement to be graciously humbled and mercifully repent (2021 Part 2).

Throughout his third video, Johnson offers theological justifications of his two previous videos, establishing connections to scripture and charismatic rhetoric (2021 Part 3). He emphasizes that the current focus on prediction is misguided and establishes that false prophecy itself does not absolve one of prophetic status, rather the refusal to repent from false prophecy affirms deception (2021 Part 3, 10:01-13:04). Evoking passages of Deuteronomy, Johnson declares:

> I want to actually come to you tonight and tell you that false prophets are going to hell, false prophets intentionally lead the body of Christ astray. False prophets are individuals who fail a moral test, they fail a doctrine test and many of them can even fail an accuracy test.

> But I want to be very clear: just because an individual inaccurately prophesies a future event does not mean they are a false prophet. A prophet in the New Testament can inaccurately prophesy a future event, if this happens they should repent, they should humble themselves. But this does not mean that can't ever accurately prophesy a future event ever again, they just need to come back and find out where they were wrong (2021 Part 3, 15:13-16:20).

Johnson contends that the four years of the Biden administration are an opportunity to develop "prophetic maturity," to "correct rebellion sin," "direct the body to Jesus," and "live a lifestyle of repentance" (2021 Part 3, 22:02-23:42). Johnson's rhetoric throughout his third video vindicates his misstep, establishes his credibility, and legitimates his position as a genuine prophet of the charismatic movement. As of August 2022, Johnson and his team remain active on their Youtube platform.

4. *Media Reception and Contagious Conspiracism*

Scholars Tristan Sturm and Tom Albrecht claim that apocalyptic discourse is plastic or flexible enough to allegedly explain any crisis (2020, 2). The "bewildering diversity" of apocalyptic and millennialist responses to current global issues, transcend the supposed boundaries between religious and secular phenomena, which result in a global "contagious conspiracism" (2020, 2). In a 2012 publication, Sturm explains that apocalypticism is not only a religious, conspiracist or spiritual discourse, but also a societal and political one, which is founded in "teleological thinking that assumes profound change is *imminently* upon us and *immanently* behind us, ahead

of us, and within us" (2020, 3 *emphasis original*). The two authors explain that alternative media and the internet are prime carriers for millennial and conspiracist discourses, which have the power to give rise to "emotionally laden street protests, incite the destruction of telecommunication technologies and institutional infrastructure, and influence decisions made by state leaders and governments" (2020, 3). Conspiracist and millennialist narratives have the potential to act as sustainable and powerful political resources, so long as they are reequipped to reflect contemporary discourses, anxieties and crises (2020, 4). Prominent in white evangelical apocalyptic discourse, for example, is the conceptualization that COVID-19 is an attempt to institute a new world order controlled by the Antichrist, and that the crisis has been exaggerated to spread panic and ease the public into accepting authoritarian, communist regimes (2020, 5). The "narrative sustainability" and transformative potential of conspiracy theories is demonstrated; in which COVID-19 is coopted into existing rhetoric on anti-communism, science skepticism, anti-globalism, and American nationalism (2020, 6, 13).

Liberal-leaning news media published in the early months of 2021 mentioned Johnson's name along with other prophetic televangelists that make political prophecies. In a brief survey, most articles mention Johnson in a limited capacity, emphasizing his contribution to numerous false prophecies and proliferating conspiracy theories in the contemporary US. As a part of the "New Apostolic Reformation," Johnson is thrown into a mixed-bag of prophetic actors that "channel their supernatural powers" and offer spiritual insight into current world events (Graham 2021). In her New York Times exposé, journalist Ruth Graham claims that these independent evangelists are a part of a rising conspiracy demographic that is implicated in violent social and political condemnations (2021). Graham identifies connections to "cancel culture" that plague the

supposedly secular entertainment industry; denunciations of prophetic actors are portrayed as "sellouts or traitors to the holy spirit" (Graham 2021). Graham quotes sociologist Brad Christerson of Biola University, who explains that the growing distrust of institutions is a "symptom of our time… [people] are searching for real sources of truth" (2021). As reported by Lifeway Research at the Southern Baptist Convention in 2021, almost half of Protestant pastors hear conspiracy theories from their congregation (Graham 2021).

Mentions of the concern of the New Global Order and the Global Cabal are sprinkled throughout these reports, especially in discussion of the January siege (Roose 2021, Boorstein 2021). The demographic of the capitol occupants has been associated with the Proud Boys, "Stop The Steal" and Jericho March participants, whose demonstrations for "election integrity" have repeatedly turned violent (Dias and Graham 2021). In their article on how white evangelical Christianity has fused with Trump extremism, journalists Elizabeth Dias and Graham comment on the increased blending of symbols and grievances. The Capitol riot, for example, featured the presence of "Jesus 2020" banners, Armor of God insignias, white crosses labelled "Trump Won," allusions to QAnon conspiracies, anti-5G signs, anti-vax signs, COVID-19 conspiracy signs, Confederate flags, and anti-Semitic t-shirts (Dias and Graham 2021). What connects these people, Dias and Graham claim, is their participation in a "holy war" (2021). Not only does prophecy serve a predictive purpose, it also acts as an analytical lens for making sense of the past and present (2021). I suspect that the blending of symbols in these demonstrations speaks to the blending of widespread cultural anxieties, and the polarizing forces that characterize our current late-modern age. In other words, due to the hyper-individualized media landscape, everyone has an individual

cause. Social and political demonstrations create an affective niche, uniting seemingly incompatible causes by their expressions of anxiety and calls for change.

Of course, the news media are deeply implicated in promulgating affective trends in mainstream culture. Graham's reports, published mainly through the *New York Times*, further proliferate polarizing discourse. Distinctly explaining these actions and demonstrations as dangerous, pathological, and contagious, reifies social divides. As noted in chapter two, framing affective circulation through the terminology of "contagion" removes members of a group from their social and political contexts and obfuscates their social practices, rendering affective expression into pathological behaviour (Wetherell 2012, 147). Put simply, the concept of contagion in our current age automatically sparks an alarmist reaction. The explicit choice to utilize certain language to frame these practices strengthens their affective power (Feldman Barrett 2018, 146).

Author William H. Sewell explains that historical events tend to transform social relations in ways that could not be fully predicted from the gradual changes that made them possible (2005, 227). A historical event can be conceptualized as, 1) a ramified sequence of occurrences, 2) recognizable by notable contemporaries, that 3) result in a durable transformation of structures (Sewell 2005, 228). The Trump presidency and the resulting political and cultural turmoil can be recognized as containing various historical events with specific spatial and temporal processes. It can be understood, then, that Johnson's adaptation, reappraisal and reconfirmation of his prophetic role indicates a moment of accelerated change brought about by a historical event (Zygmunt 1972, as cited in Tumminia 1998, 159; Sewell 2005, 226). Sewell explains:

> …because structures are articulated to other structures, initially localized ruptures always have the potential of bringing about a cascading series of further ruptures that will result in structural transformations - that is, changes in cultural schemas, shifts of resources, and the emergence of new modes of power (2005, 228).

The reaffirmation of his brand of evangelical theology after disconfirmation, as Johnson demonstrates, emphasizes the renewing of group affiliation as a result of emotional distress. This turning inward, as social psychologist Diana Tumminia explains, is exemplary of the "range of unfalsifiable beliefs [that members] can draw upon in the maintenance of group reality" (1998, 159). Tumminia discusses the strengthening aspects of failed prophecy, clarifying that if prophecy was the only guiding principle, its disconfirmation would prove injurious to group identity. However, she explains that since prediction often springs from a broad context of belief, non-confirmation provides a test which usually strengthens a group (1998, 159). Utilizing socially constructed logic, as Johnson does in his critique of Old and New Testament prophetic actors and calls for reformation, allows him to solve the interpretative mystery of disconfirmation and reestablish his personal and group identity.

5. *Conclusion*

Johnson's online ministry, and specifically the videos in this assessment, can be considered commodities in the cultural and religious economies (Bekkering 2018, 5). His online ministry operationally functions as an information system to broadcast his prophecy to his manifold following (DiTommaso 2020, 318). The social functions of Johnson's ministry are to maintain,

validate, and reinforce his own identity and legitimacy in the prophetic movement through a reactionary redress to political events (DiTommaso 2020, 318). The capitol siege itself is an exemplary "overdetermined symptom of the times" (Wetherell 2012, 4), especially in comparison to other social and political demonstrations of the same year (i.e., the forceful militarized responses to Black Lives Matter and various decolonial actions and demonstrations). Wetherell's notion of affect in terms of emotional and social capital is clearly demonstrated here, insofar that "embodied expressions are deeply embedded in a nexus of relations" (2021, 4).

Johnson mediates calls to fakery by reasserting the authenticity of his gospel and position within the contemporary prophetic movement (Bekkering 2018, 9). Implicitly addressed in these videos, and explicitly addressed in others on his YouTube platform, Johnson communicates his disparagement with online ministries, critiquing the democratization of new media (Turner 2015, 61). Recalling Rodríguez-Plate's statement that the apocalyptic focuses on the end of *a* world, as opposed to the end of *the* world: Johnson's video series attests to the end of the prophetic movement as it stands (2021, 230).

It is possible that Johnson has undergone a realization of the responsibilities of "net citizenship" (Rantapelkonen 2014, 2), though his ongoing involvement in "philanthrocapitalism" is yet to be determined (Wilkins 2015, 134). What is clear is that Johnson possesses a confident spiritual, social and cultural dexterity: he is clearly aware of how the ingenuity of his prophetic gospel effects political discourse and mobilization (Boyer 1992, 295). Johnson's apocalyptic discourse taps into the shifting and flexible waves of embodied affect, through his ability to adapt to a shifting environment of belief (Wetherell 2012, 4, 42). The salvific demand in Johnson's

apocalyptic rhetoric is maintained despite his prophetic disconfirmation, through his identification of the "sickness" in the charismatic-Pentecostal movement, and the discursive practices of encouraging the "seeding of his ministry" through financial contribution (Johnson 2021 Part 3, 28:07-29:56). Johnson's rhetoric clearly demonstrates Hummel's "perpetual imminency" paradigm, in that his discourse is able to withstand failed prophecy and his following is maintained (2020, 305). As an "artifact of religious production" fortified by historical events, (Reed 2020, 472; Sewell 2005, 228) Johnson's video series attests to a reorientation of online ministries and offers potential insight into future manifestations of American popular culture. This thesis maintains that the potential cultivation of personal and intragroup affect is stronger through new media, due to its demotic and polarizing structure. In other words, greater engagement through highly specified and curated media fortifies affective niches.

Apocalyptic discourse, established as an emotional norm situated within the environment of belief of the late-modern era, is an affective expression of embodied anxiety. Embodied anxiety is reinforced by antagonistic social conditions that distinguish the current world order. Predictive misattributions, or errors in judgement, are an attempt toward maintaining ideological and moral-emotional security, exemplified through the case study of Johnson's "I Was Wrong" video series.

In recent years, the material conditions and patterns of everyday life have changed. The global pandemic has suddenly and substantially informed the spatial aspects of daily living. Social changes at rapid temporal pace underwrite cultural anxiety, which increases the tendency to

gravitate to all-encompassing explanatory models. Our affect lives most strongly in the aftershock, in personal and collective narratives which live through outbursts of affect separate from chronological time; an extended present moment. The “new normal” of the contemporary age is to exist in a prolonged state of grievance, actively processing the realities of climate change, global health crises, and ongoing war and genocide. As consuming technocratic subjects, we collectively depend on imagined futures to exist in the present.

Appendix: Applications and Future Directions

Alternative directions for a similar interdisciplinary analysis abound. If apocalyptic discourse is established as an emotional norm, it can be operationalized to track the dissemination and circulation of anxiety-based affect. This form of study has the potential to reveal data on the population wide prevalence of emotional and material insecurities, providing valuable information for psychological and social group interventions.

For example, Social Network Analysis (SNA) and Actor Network Theory (ANT) could be applied to case studies of NRMs to create an "apocalyptic map" of late-modern popular culture. This map could identify large-scale elements that interact to mobilize affect. Mainly applied within sociological analyses, SNA and ANT may be fruitful in studying apocalyptic NRMs as they identify chains of association and affiliation. As most recent conspiratorial and apocalyptic data exists online, SNA and ANT are well suited for assessing the movement and dissemination of virtual spiritualisms. Methodologically, SNA is similar to structural mapping utilized in neurological, linguistic, and computational analytics, and I believe it could yield a novel analysis.

SNA identifies kinship patterns, community structure, and associative directionality. Through assessments of relational data, SNA allows the researcher to represent degrees of connectivity in a network, the rate of ideological propagation and/or diffusion, or the influence of a given actant. It could be informative to survey scholarship on contemporary apocalyptic NRMs that draw lines

of affective connection between various nodes (cultural/social/psychological phenomena, group rhetoric, political events, health and climate crises, etc.).

Following the socio-technical approach of theorist Bruno Latour (2005), an analysis of apocalyptic discourse through ANT could capitalize on its interdisciplinary approach, refuting essentialist assumptions and focusing on relational ties. With particular emphasis on non-human actants that engage in participatory networks and the equal attributions of importance between human and non-human actants, ANT claims that everything in the natural world exists in constantly shifting networks. This material-semiotic methodology is influenced by theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway whose work greatly influences the theorists in the present thesis. The ability to view non-human actants (i.e., divinities, Governmental Organizations, 5G, COVID-19, etc.) as vertices of affective transmission can describe the dissemination and subsequent circulation of apocalyptic emotional norms.

By explicating affective psychosocial processes through the typology of affective practice, this thesis establishes apocalypticism as an explanatory model with a focus of obtaining moral-emotional security. This research and its goals are fundamentally interdisciplinary. The findings of this investigation could be applied in counselling and therapeutic models that identify existential affective threads and concerns of finitude that manifest as dysregulated embodied states. This thesis contributes to the growing interdisciplinary field that prioritizes harm-reduction and de-radicalization based approaches of violent or destructive action, through contextualizing this behaviour as a response to insecurity. Future studies could suggest

adaptations to psychoanalytic and cognitive behavioural therapeutic approaches to accommodate and prioritize experientially-focused and embodied therapies.

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