10 "Discordians stick apart"

The institutional turn within contemporary Discordianism

J. Christian Greer

Introduction

The death of Robert Anton Wilson in 2007 marked a turning point in the new religious movement known as Discordianism. With Wilson's death, Discordianism not only lost its principal interpreter and the last of its original spokespersons but also its most popular evangelist. Wilson's failing health and eventual death fomented a crisis within the religion. Instead of fostering dissolution, though, this crisis catalyzed a major shift in how adherents conceptualize and practice Discordianism. As this chapter will show, the loss of Discordianism's chief theorist set into motion three projects that collectively reoriented the way in which the religion is constituted in the everyday life of its adherents.

In the six decades of its existence, Discordianism has taken on many forms, the most salient of which are surveyed below. Today, however, Discordian activity is predominately composed of participation in institutionalization projects, the central aim of which is the transformation of Discordianism into a religious tradition. These projects are the subject of this chapter. They include: 1) an online educational center based on Wilson's writings called the Maybe Logic Academy; 2) the utilization of the Discordian Archive to write the religion's official history; and 3) a global, ethnographic census of the religion entitled the 'Chasing Eris' project. This chapter argues that mass participation in these institutional structures marks a transformation of the lived experience of Discordianism. Further, it will be demonstrated that the institutionalization of Discordianism has not been a top-down process, but rather a community-wide shift in the practices that constitute Discordianism.

At the outset, it is important to clarify how the term "institutionalization" is used in this chapter, and the way in which contemporary Discordianism's turn towards it represents a novel historical trend. Religious institutionalization concerns the translation, transformation, and standardization of spiritual insights into symbolic and organizational structures (O'Dea and Yinger 1961: 31–33). As will be shown, the three institutionalization projects that define the contemporary era of Discordianism perform these functions,

to varying, yet complementary, degrees. Collectively, the three aforementioned projects have created a new interpretative framework through which Discordians understand and practice their religion.

The movement towards institutionalization is unprecedented in the history of Discordianism. The reason for this is that such a move seems to violate one of the primary tenets of the religion, namely, that it remain decentralized. Margot Adler made note of this idiosyncrasy in her groundbreaking study of the religion, "since radical decentralization is a Discordian principle, it is impossible to know how many Discordians there were and are, or what they are doing" (Adler 1986: 331). To this point, the founders of Discordianism coined the slogan "Discordians stick apart" as a means of distinguishing their "disorganized irreligion" from mainstream religions wherein members allegedly "stick together" (Adler 1986: 332; Gorightly 2003: 61). That is to say, no two Discordians were to possess the same conception of Discordianism; the theoretical *sine qua non* of the religion was that each member had to think for him or herself. So as to codify this religious tenet, Discordianism introduced a dialectical pair of religious duties. The first was dubbed project "Pan-Pontification," which was composed of handing out small documents termed "Pope cards" that proclaimed the bearer, as well as every man, woman, and child on Earth, to be "a genuine and authorized Pope" of Discordianism (Gorightly 2014: 116–117; Hill 1979: 36). By appointing everyone on Earth a Pope, Discordianism sought to contest the spurious nature of all religious authority, as well as underscore the inherent sovereignty of the individual. As a counterbalance to this duty, though, Discordians were obliged to routinely excommunicate one another (Thornley 1991: i–xxxiv). Working in tandem, Discordians are constantly being elected and ejected from positions of religious authority; the point being that one is always a Discordian hierarch, yet never hierarchically situated against anyone else. Unlike religious systems that demand behavioral compliance or mental acquiescence, Discordianism was designed to act as an intellectual point of departure for religious self-determination, individual sovereignty, and determined decentralization. Accordingly, making generalized statements on the lived experience of the religion would seem incredibly difficult. However, this is not necessarily the case if we look at the way in which these core Discordian doctrines have been embodied over the course of Discordianism's history.

So as to illustrate the ways in which the process of institutionalization has altered the way in which Discordianism is lived as a religious affiliation, this chapter will begin by providing a brief outline of the religion's historical development. This historical overview is followed by an analysis of the three projects that define the most visible form of Discordian religious activity today, namely, institutionalization. The chapter concludes by examining Discordianism's current status as a new religious movement (for both adherents and scholars) over and against its previous formulations in eras now past.

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The periodization of Discordianism

Discordianism has changed dramatically from its inception in the late 1950s. The institutional turn in Discordianism comes after five and a half decades of doctrinal development that took place across a handful of alternative subcultures. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into great depth regarding these developments, the following section will outline the five phases of Discordian history. These phases are distinguished both by the differing media through which Discordianism was transmitted, as well as the ways in which it was performed as an identity.

The first period (1958/59–1967) of Discordianism began with its founding in 1958/1959 by two Californian high school students, Greg Hill (1941–2000) and Kerry Thornley (1938–1998). At the heart of their religion was the metaphysical belief that order and disorder were mental projections on the raw fabric of existence, identified as "chaos." They agreed that every form of order, and likewise all conceptions of disorder, were superficial impositions on the ultimately generative force of chaos, which they understood as the ontological ground of being (Gorightly 2003: 57). Based on this ontology, Hill and Thornley decided that the Greek goddess of discord, Eris (Discordia to the Romans) would be the patron deity of their religious society. Since all ideas and beliefs are merely projections on ontological chaos, no singular model of reality (other than Discordianism's poly-focal approach) can be deemed superior to another. A constitutive element of Discordianism is the belief that conceptions of reality serve only as models through which consciousness manipulates ontological chaos. A later Discordian convention was to discuss reality not in the singular, but in terms of the variety of possible "reality tunnels" (Wilson 1997: ii). One of Discordianism's singular values as an intellectual system is that it does not attempt to replace one conception of reality with another, but rather leads adherents to adopt an agnostic subject position in which beliefs are considered a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. This principle was later deemed "the first law of Discordianism" and stated explicitly as "whatever you believe imprisons you" (Wilson 1997: 62).

By 1963, Thornley and Hill's "non-prophet irreligious disorganization" had gained a handful of members (Gorightly 2003: 60, 2014: 11–80). The earliest form of Discordian practice that they engaged in consisted of writing and re-writing religious tracts that outlined the implications of ontological chaos, and how it was to be honored "irreligiously" within what they had dubbed "The Discordian Society." In 1964, Hill (writing under his Discordian name L&Q. vA. Kallisti, or Malaclypse the Younger) and Thornley (as Lord Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst) began laying the groundwork for the religious edifice of Discordianism through epistolary correspondence (Gorightly 2014: 23). Over the course of the next few years, their exchange grew to include numerous others. While Discordianism did not reach its fullest expression as a mail-order religion until 1968, it was

during this early period that Hill and Thornley began sending interested seekers self-published Discordian religious texts, "epistles," and ordination certificates. Slowly, a decentralized epistolary network formed, and through it a growing number of independently created Discordian "holy works" were circulated. An integral aspect of this epistolary network was the way in which it compelled those involved to independently write, and autonomously distribute, their own Discordian religious tracts. Thornley and Hill led the way, by breaking with one another so as to form rival Discordian factions. Thornley formed the Erisian Liberation Front (which promoted "Erisianism"), and Hill created the Paratheo-Anametamystikhood of Eris Esoteric, which became synonymous with the religion in the following historical phases (Gorightly 2003: 62).

This first phase drew to an end in 1965, when Hill self-published the *Principia Discordia: How the West Was Lost* in an edition of five. This 55-page compendium drew extensively from the work circulated in the epistolary network. As a capstone for the early movement, the first edition of the *Principia Discordia* laid out the complicated hierarchy of the Discordian Society, as well as a summation of the religion's beliefs (largely filtered through Hill's interpretation of Discordianism) (Gorightly 2003: 19). Taken as a whole, this edition of the *Principia Discordia* offers a vital picture of Discordianism's early period wherein the seriousness of this baroque metaphysical ludibrium is abundantly apparent.

The second period of Discordianism's history (1969–1984) is characterized by its emergence from total obscurity. Robert Anton Wilson's initiation into the religion in 1967 was the principal factor in its popularization and subsequent transformation into a spiritual mode of revolutionary consciousness. Not long after his induction into the religion, Wilson began to devote himself to evangelizing Discordianism in his voluminous literary output. His Discordian writings quickly eclipsed Hill's *Principia Discordia* as being the de facto Discordian scripture. Still, it bears mentioning that, between 1969 and 1970, Hill produced the second, third, and fourth editions of the *Principia* in limited publishing runs.[1]

Upon converting the religion, Wilson concocted a way in which Discordianism could be weaponized. Working in collaboration with Thornley, Wilson dubbed this weaponization as "Operation Mindfuck" (henceforth OM), which was envisioned as a means to destabilize a number of the assumptions that sustain consensus reality. Taking a cue from revolutionary insurrectionists like Ché Guevara, Wilson conceptualized OM as a strategic equivalent of guerilla warfare, albeit purely psychological. In his words, OM was "guerilla ontology" insofar as it was composed of "non-violent anarchist techniques [utilized] to mutate our robotic society" (Wilson 1997: 63). OM was less of an organized stratagem than an openended call for Discordians to wage autonomous campaigns of psychological warfare against agents of the status quo. For Thornley, this consisted of disseminating proposition papers concerning the P.U.R.S.E. and P.U.T.Z.

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plans; the former plan, known as the "Permanent Universal Rent Strike Exchange," was premised on creating a mass movement against landlords, whereas the latter, "Permanent Universal Tax Zap," outlined a tax resistance plan (Thornley 1985: 49; Wilson 1997: 63). Wilson, on the other hand, intended his contribution to OM to be far more disquieting (Wilson 1997: 62–63). In sum, he would attempt to revive the centuries old conspiracy of the Illuminati as a means of exacerbating the paranoid political atmosphere of the late 1960s.

Due to his former staff position at Paul Krassner's groundbreaking humor magazine *The Realist*, as well as his more recent position as editor of the *Playboy Forum*, Wilson was able to recruit a number of journalists to his Discordian plot to disseminate misinformation about the Illuminati. As contributors to underground newspapers, these new recruits played an essential role in Wilson's conspiracy: through them he would be able to augment the scale of OM considerably (Wilson 1997: 63). On staff at papers like the *East Village Other*, *The Chicago Seed*, and *rogerSPARK*, Wilson's Discordian co-conspirators (as well as Wilson himself) were able to slip cryptic allusions to the Illuminati, as well as their equally shadowy opponents identified as the Discordian Society, into their respective publications (Wilson 1997: 63; see Figure 10.1). What was more, these enigmatic references were entirely uncoordinated, so that in one publication the Illuminati were accused of being behind all international banking, whereas in another the Discordians were identified as instigating the wave of domestic social unrest that gripped the mid-to-late 1960s (Gorightly 2014: 81–113; Wilson 1997: 92–102, 104–113). Soon, exposés on the Illuminati began to appear in publications that had not been infiltrated by Discordians (Wilson 1997: 64). As far as Wilson was concerned, this proved that his conspiracy had worked: Wilson's claim that the Illuminati were locked in an ancient battle with the Discordians (which can essentially be referred to as 'the Discordian Illuminati thesis') had created a marginal niche in the media ecology of the U.S.

Inspired by the success of his Discordian Illuminati thesis, Wilson set about writing the biggest "mindfuck" possible. Together with Robert Shea, Wilson produced the *summa theologica* of Discordianism, a massive pulp narrative entitled *Illuminatus!* The text was written as a single volume between 1969 and 1971: however, its publication was delayed until 1975, by which point it had undergone major editorial changes. By the time it hit newsstands, not only had nearly 500 pages been cut, but the text itself was broken up into a trilogy of novels. Furthermore, its publisher, Dell, chose to market the trilogy as science fiction, despite there being little in the novels that resembled anything usually associated with the genre.

Spanning over 800 pages and including 14 appendices, *Illuminatus!* presented its readers with the most comprehensive exegesis of Discordianism to date. As an elaboration on the Discordian Illuminati thesis, the labyrinthine plot wove no fewer than five intersecting stories into an overarching narrative concerning the on-going battle between the Illuminati and a number of
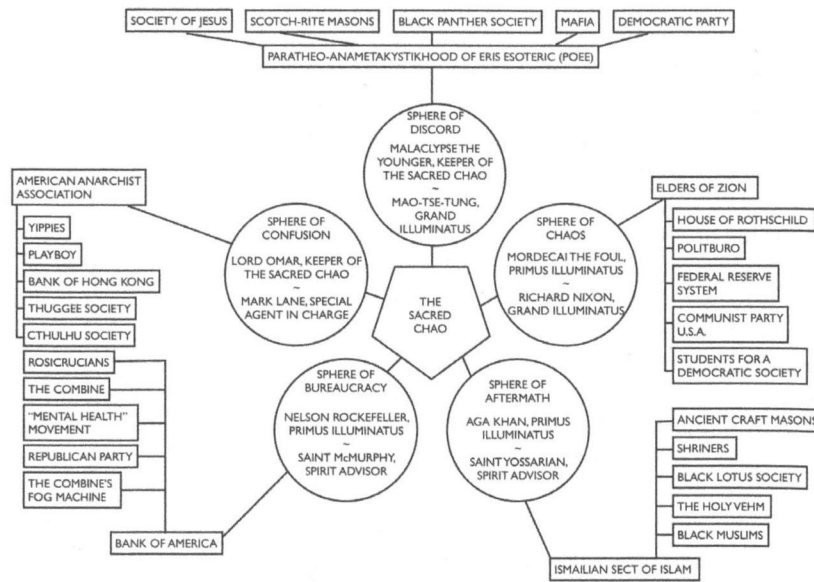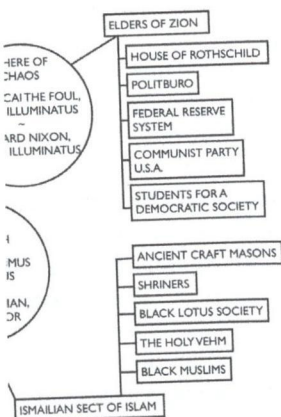
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MAO-TSE-TUNG, GRAND ILLUMINATUS

AMERICAN ANARCHIST ASSOCIATION

YIPPIES
PLAYBOY
BANK OF HONG KONG
THUGGEE SOCIETY
CTHULHU SOCIETY
ROSICRUCIANS
THE COMBINE
"MENTAL HEALTH" MOVEMENT
REPUBLICAN PARTY
THE COMBINE'S FOG MACHINE
BANK OF AMERICA

SPHERE OF CONFUSION
LORD OMAR, KEEPER OF THE SACRED CHAO
~
MARK LANE, SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE

THE SACRED CHAO

SPHERE OF CHAOS
MORDECAI THE FOUL, PRIMUS ILLUMINATUS
~
RICHARD NIXON, GRAND ILLUMINATUS

ELDERS OF ZION
HOUSE OF ROTHSCHILD
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COMMUNIST PARTY U.S.A.
STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

SPHERE OF BUREAUCRACY
NELSON ROCKEFELLER, PRIMUS ILLUMINATUS
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SAINT McMURPHY, SPIRIT ADVISOR

SPHERE OF AFTERMATH
AGA KHAN, PRIMUS ILLUMINATUS
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SAINT YOSSARIAN, SPIRIT ADVISOR

ANCIENT CRAFT MASONS
SHRINERS
BLACK LOTUS SOCIETY
THE HOLY VEHM
BLACK MUSLIMS
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Figure 10.1 Current structure of Bavarian Illuminati conspiracy and the Law of Fives.

This chart was featured in the 4 June 1969 edition of the seminal East coast underground newspaper, the *East Village Other*. Printed without any editorial explanation, this image illustrates the Byzantine logic of the Discordian Illuminati thesis as perpetuated under the auspices of OM. This same image was to appear six years later in Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus!* trilogy.

independent Discordian cabals. Its sheer size not withstanding, *Illuminatus!* was unlike any Discordian text that preceded it. The first major difference was that, unlike the didactic focus of the *Principia Discordia*, *Illuminatus!* depicted Discordianism as the esoteric counterpart of revolutionary groups like the Weather Underground, the Yippies, and the Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers. This refashioning of the religion entailed fashioning the religion's decentralized, mutualistic structure as an implementation of anarchist philosophy, its promotion of LSD as an expression of Leary's psychedelic philosophy, and ontological chaos in terms of the Dao (Wilson and Shea 1988: 382–384, 406–407, 767–768). Second, the trilogy created a clear picture of how Discordianism could be practiced (as a revolutionary religious orientation) within everyday life. By chronicling the adventures of the novels' Discordia heroes, the authors presented readers with unobstructed views into the thoughts, feelings, and deeds of idealized Discordians. While the four editions of the *Principia Discorida* as well as the "holy works" all outlined the belief system for Discordianism, they never described how to put the beliefs into action. *Illuminatus!* did so adeptly, and in so doing offered sympathetic readers a frame of reference for integrating Discordianism into

MAFIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY
(POEE)

ELDERS OF ZION
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their own lives. Essential to this frame of reference were the practices that Shea and Wilson described as integral to the Discordian way of life. While the theories and practices associated with Aleister Crowley's magick in addition to free love (conceptualized according to the theories of Wilhelm Reich) were both portrayed as central aspects of being a Discordian, the use of psychedelics (e.g., LSD, hashish, and cannabis) stood out as by far the most salient.[2] Following Leary's conceptualization of psychoactive chemicals as spiritual tools, Wilson and Shea portrayed LSD as the "sacrament" of Discordianism (Wilson and Shea 1988: 626). The sacralization of psychedelics within the trilogy integrated Reichean sexual-liberation and Crowley's magick into the religious gestalt of Discordianism, thereby transforming the religion into a vehicle for their determined exploration.

Marketed as science fiction, the *Illuminatus!* trilogy was ignored by the literary establishment of the day. Moreover, it remained marginal in the hermetic subculture that was science fiction fandom at that time. However, as *Illuminatus!* was closer to a Discordian recruitment text than "scienfictional" entertainment, the following it did garner was less a fan-base than a dedicated network of Discordian co-conspirators. The idiosyncrasies of science fiction fandom in the mid- to late 1970s formed an essential part of Discordianism's development, and in order to fully understand its underground popularization, the religion must be contextualized within that heady microcosm. In addition to giving rise to a host of other eccentric religious movements (Adler 1986: 283–318; Cusack 2010: 144–146), science fiction fandom contained an expansive culture of self-publishing in the form of fan magazines, known as "fanzines" or simply "zines" (Bainbridge 1986: 10–11). While *Illuminatus!* was not mentioned in the majority of these publications, the trilogy's admirers steadily produced a small mountain of Discordian periodicals. Indeed, it was the legion of Discordians within science fiction fandom that produced the longest running and most voluminous Discordian publication to date: the *Golden APA*. Running for 24 years (1979–2003) under the editorial direction of Arthur Hlavaty, *The Golden APA* provided a private medium in which the most dedicated Discordians (Wilson and Shea were *ex officio* members and frequent contributors) could extrapolate, contest, and reformulate every aspect of the religion.

In addition to creating *The Golden APA*, Arthur Hlavaty also founded a correspondence club called the Illuminatus! Nut Cult. According to Hlavaty, this was an epistolary, notional organization that consisted of a few dozen Discordians within science fiction fandom "interested in anarchy, magick, self- and drug-abuse, and other unsavory practices" (Hlavaty 2015). Distinct from *The Golden APA*, which was an amateur press association complete with an organizational structure, the Illuminatus Nut Cult was a loose correspondence network dedicated to the exploration of the taboo subjects which Wilson and Shea portrayed as integral to Discordianism (Hlavaty 2015). As the formation of this group makes clear, the trilogy acted as a gateway through which science fiction readers were led to conceptualize

Discordianism as an intellectual platform for attaining higher states of consciousness through anarchism, magick, and psychedelics. Situated on the margins of science fiction fandom, Discordianism became an intellectual framework for the personal exploration of these taboos.

Towards the end of the 1970s, Discordian fanzines began to attract contributors and readers outside of science fiction fandom, so that by the dawn of the 1980s, Discordianism had distinguished itself as the preeminent psychedelic religion. The trilogy's unapologetic endorsement of the spiritual benefits of psychedelics found a welcome audience within a revitalized psychedelic movement. Few public intellectuals were as vocal in their condemnation of the U.S. government's "War on Drugs" as Wilson, and his criticisms of it effectively cast Discordianism as its ideological foil.[3] While not distinct from the popular conflation of Discordianism and psychedelics, this period also saw the formulation of an explicitly Buddhist interpretation of Discordianism. Initiated by Thornley, this form of Discordianism drew extensively from Zen, psychedelics, and anarchism and was taken up by two notable Discordian authors: Camden Benares (né John Overton), and, years later, Tundra Wind (né Jim Wilson). The literature pertaining to this lesser-known iteration of Discordian thought includes Thornley's *Zenarchy* newsletters (first published in 1968), the subsequent book *Zenarchy* (1991), as well as Benares' *Zen without Zen Masters* (1977) and *A Handful of Zen* (1996). While no less ingenious, Thornley's concept of Discordian Zen, much like Hill's work at this time, was overshadowed by Wilson and Shea's popular formulation of Discordianism.

The third period of Discordianism lasted from 1984 to 1990; it is marked by the ascent of Discordianism within the underground publishing culture known as the "zine scene." By 1984 the custom of making and distributing self-published zines had spread from science fiction fandom to a number political, sexual, and spiritual subcultures, and with it went Discordianism. Unlike science fiction fandom, however, these subcultures actively utilized zines as a means of cross-pollinating with one another (Greer 2013: 170–171). Many of the leading lights of this scene were either Discordian, members of a Discordian off-shoot religion called The Church of the SubGenius, or affiliated with "post-political" programs based on ontological chaos (Black 1994: 3–12, 32, 182–184). One of the most noteworthy figures within the zine scene was Mike Gunderloy, whose participation in science fiction fandom led to his conversion to Discordianism. Gunderloy had been an active contributor to Hlavaty's *The Golden APA* since its inception, and after years of writing for it, he decided to publish his own zine, which he named *Factsheet Five* (Hlavaty 2015). As the first zine dedicated totally to reviewing other zines, *Factsheet Five* quickly became the central clearinghouse for this decentralized milieu. Gunderloy's investment in Discordianism led him to showcase Discordian publications in his zine. Their continued exposure in *Factsheet Five* established the religion as an intellectual and spiritual reference point in the zine scene. The Discordian

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axiom to "stick apart" conformed perfectly to the epistolary network structure of the zine network, as both the religion and the underground literary milieu were based on decentralized, autonomous communication. Acting as either publishers, writers, or merely interested readers, Discordians of this period lived their religion within this self-published literary underground.

The fourth period of Discordian history (1991–2004) began at the dawn of personal computing, which, incidentally, drove the zine scene into terminal decline. From the early 1990s onwards, former zinesters migrated to BBS (Bulletin Board System) boards and Listservs, carrying their eccentric religious affiliation with them. Relocated to the virtual world of computers, the activities and preoccupations of the zine underground came to be known as "cyberculture." Led by underground publisher and psychedelic aficionado, R.U. Sirius (né Ken Goffman), cyberculture was crafted out of the confluence of a subgenre of science fiction known as cyberpunk, a reemergence of a psychedelic subculture, and computer hacking enthusiasts. Sirius' magazine *Mondo 2000* was the flagship cyberculture publication, and while it was aimed at the general public, it did not attempt to conceal its roots in the zine scene. To this end, *Mondo 2000*, as well as lesser-known cyberculture zines like *bOING bOING* singled out Robert Anton Wilson as being the principle "cyberculture" philosopher (Sirius 2012). From 1990 to 2000, Wilson, along with Terence McKenna and Hakim Bey (né Peter Lamborn Wilson), distinguished themselves as the leading voices of the 1990s underground, which encompassed the rave scene and the "cyberdelic" subculture.

The migration online triggered one of the most significant shifts in Discordian practice to date. In the realm of cyberspace, Operation Mindfuck morphed into hacking. In addition to being an intellectual framework for exploring the intersection of psychedelics, sex, and magick, Discordianism's emphasis on the virtue of creative disorder was a perfect match for the growing number of hackers. In keeping with the original intention of OM, hacking offered Discordian computer enthusiasts an entirely new playing field for creatively disrupting the status quo. Among all of the early Discordian computer hackers, though, one name stands above the rest: Karl Koch (1965–1989). For Koch, the *Illuminatus!* trilogy was revelatory; in homage, he not only adopted the name of the trilogy's protagonist ("Hagbard") as his own, but also named his computer after the artificial intelligence ("FUCKUP") within the novels (Hafner and Markoff 1991: 139–250). In the late 1980s, the names Hagbard and FUCKUP would appear in newspapers worldwide as a result of a Cold War cyber-espionage incident in which Koch played the central part. Over the course of three years (1986–1989), Koch, a German citizen, worked in collaboration with fringe members of the Berlin-based Chaos Computer Club to sell source code hacked from U.S. military computers to the KGB (Stoll 1989). While the international media said little of Koch's religious affiliation, the connection between it and his exploits was clear to the growing international hacking subculture.

The fifth period of Discordian history (2004–the present) is character-ized by the institutionalization of Discordianism. As a consequence of its prominent position in 1990s cyberculture, Discordianism was one of the first religions to establish itself on the Internet, and since its migration to cyber-space, it has enjoyed steady growth (Chidester 2005: 198). Throughout the early 2000s, new Discordian texts were steadily circulated over the Internet; however, their influence all but evaporated with the news that Robert Anton Wilson had become terminally ill. Wilson's declining health, and eventual death, set into motion the latest transformation of Discordianism; after his death, Discordian activity would primarily be oriented in preserving his leg-acy. The fact that the process of institutionalization is indistinguishable from the creation of Wilson's legacy betrays his status as first among Discordian equals, in addition to the suspicion that he will not be easily replaced. Considering the impossibility of distinguishing between Wilson's work and Discordianism itself, it seems reasonable to suggest that Wilson's death was the primary factor in the shift towards institutionalization.

Maybe logic

Wilson's death in 2007 came at the end of a protracted and painful battle with *post-polio sequelae*. Over the last years of his life, Wilson's infirmed condition galvanized emotional, economic, and spiritual support from the Discordian community he had spent his life fostering. This support reached an apex in the months before his death, when word got out that Wilson was no longer able to afford his medical expenses. Thanks to an internet campaign launched by media theorist Douglas Rushkoff and broadcast by zine-turned-blog *bOING bOING*, Wilson received over $60,000 in dona-tions in just over three days (Davis 2015: 335). The event's success was both a reflection of Wilson's historical influence on Discordianism, as well as a portent for things to come.

An audio retrospective of Wilson's life and work, entitled *Robert Anton Wilson Explains Everything* (2001), signaled the transition into the fifth period of Discordian history. Totaling over six hours of interview material, this project offered listeners an autobiographical account of Wilson's intel-lectual, spiritual, and political preoccupations. While the audio retrospective marked the first attempt to preserve Wilson's legacy, it certainly would not be the last. The most significant follow-up was a documentary directed by Lance Bauscher entitled *Maybe Logic: The Lives and Ideas of Robert Anton Wilson* (2003). Whereas the audio retrospective presented Wilson's wide-ranging intellect in his own words, Bauscher's documentary put forth a thesis regarding Wilson's stature within Discordianism. Crafting together over 20 years of footage, *Maybe Logic* made the case that Wilson had achieved an uncommon level of spiritual understanding, and that it was his formida-ble intellect that guided the development of Discordianism. The release of Bauscher's documentary represents a key moment in the formation of the

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knowledge culture of contemporary Discordianism. Unlike the editions of the *Principia Discordia*, *Zenarchy*, or *Illuminatus!*, which explicated various aspects of Discordian thought, *Maybe Logic* was an emic meta-text on the Discordian movement *as such*. More specifically, the documentary was not an exposition of Discordian thought, but an attempt to portray Robert Anton Wilson's personal philosophy as the embodiment of Discordianism. The transformation of Wilson into a symbol opened up a new vector of Discordian identity and practice; in a word, it began the process of institutionalization in which a standardized Discordian knowledge culture is established in symbolic and organizational structures.

In the process of collecting interviews for the *Maybe Logic* film, it became evident that Wilson's community of supporters included a number of influential esotericists and cultural critics. Sensing an opportunity for collaboration, Bauscher and Wilson spent the year following the documentary's debut organizing an online community and education center dubbed the Maybe Logic Academy (Anon. The Maybe Logic Academy, n.d.). The Maybe Logic Academy opened its (virtual) doors on 23 April 2004, a day that the mayor of Santa Cruz had christened "Robert Anton Wilson Day" a year earlier. Space limitations prevent going into any depth with regard to the academy's varied curriculum, publications, and international events; nevertheless, it is important to stress the continuity between Bauscher's documentary, the creation of Robert Anton Wilson Day, and the formation of the Maybe Logic Academy. Collectively, they indicate a movement within Discordianism towards building an institutional narrative with Wilson as the primary protagonist.

Over 9 years, the Maybe Logic Academy enrolled over 2,000 students in more than 50 courses, thereby becoming the most visible online center for the study of esotericism (Moore 2008). The faculty roster stands as a "who's who" of modern esotericism: R.U. Sirius; the founder of The Church of the SubGenius Ivan Stang; the co-founder of Chaos Magick, Peter Carroll; and the United States Deputy Grand Master of the Ordo Templi Orientis, Lon DuQuette, feature among others. Though the course offerings ran the gamut from Starhawk's courses on ecological feminist Neopaganism to Mark Pesce's class on the open-source digital landscape, each ostensibly honored Wilson's work as foundational; indeed, nearly half the courses offered were either taught by him or based on his work.

The chance to virtually interact with the spiritual patriarch of Discordianism made the academy the first epicenter for international Discordian activity. And as Discordians from around the world began to interact within the academy, the nature of what was considered conventional Discordian practice changed: Discordian activity became centralized in online classrooms devoted to Wilson's writings. The education-based Discordian community that formed around the Maybe Logic Academy quickly became the most visible representative of the religion, and through its efforts, the groundwork of Discordianism's institutionalization was laid.

Historia Discordia

In 2009, the self-proclaimed "crackpot historian," Adam Gorightly, established the Discordian Archive. The archive was founded after Gorightly acquired Hill's personal papers from Dr Robert Newport, a childhood friend of Thornley and Hill, and an original Discordian (Gorightly 2013). Hill was largely inactive in the Discordian milieu after the production of the fourth edition of *Principia Discordia* in 1970, so while his papers represent the most comprehensive record of the first two periods of Discordianism's history, they do not provide much insight into its later expression. Here, it is instructive to keep in mind that before Gorightly inherited the archive, Discordianism lacked a central repository for its foundational documents. That said, Gorightly's organization, publicization, and publication of Hill's papers serves an important function with regards to the institutionalization efforts initiated by the Maybe Logic Academy. Whereas Wilson's death in 2007 led to the institutionalization of a Discordian knowledge culture within the academy, Gorightly's archival efforts have supplied it with an origin narrative.

As with the Maybe Logic Academy, the organization of the Discordian Archive grew out of a documentary project. Gorightly first became aware of Hill's papers in 2001 while researching a biography on Kerry Thornley, published as *The Prankster and the Conspiracy* (2003). This publication coincided with the opening of the Maybe Logic Academy, as well as the release of another book that treated Discordianism as a religious tradition, namely, Eric Wagner's *An Insider's Guide to Robert Anton Wilson* (2004). As the first analysis of Wilson's work written from an emic Discordian perspective, Wagner's text exemplified the institutionalization trend initiated by the Maybe Logic documentary. At the core of this trend was the conviction that Wilson was not just an exceptional Discordian co-conspirator, but a spiritual authority worthy of veneration. Like Bauscher and Wagner, Gorightly eventually adopted Discordianism as his own spiritual orientation (and in so doing, adopted the Discordian name "The Wrong Reverend Houdini Kundalini"). However, unlike their treatment of Wilson, his biography of Thornley did not constitute a hagiography. That said, it nonetheless was subsumed in the process of institutionalization that dominated the lived experience of Discordianism in the 2000s. The collective effect of these projects signaled a movement in which Discordians themselves began to construct their own intellectual tradition.

Through his blog, *Historia Discordia*, Gorightly continues to transform Discordianism's material culture into a historical narrative of its past. Thanks to the participatory nature of the Internet, Gorightly's narrative concerning Discordianism's historical development has attracted a number of online collaborators. While the intermingling of older Discordians with new converts is not, ostensibly, the primary purpose of the blog, it is inseparable from the archive's aim of creating a serialized history of

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Discordianism. This is because the transformation of Discordianism's material culture into its history allows different generations of Discordians to co-create Discordian identity, in both the past and the present. This co-creation is an essential aspect of the lived experience of contemporary Discordianism insofar as constructing the narrative of Discordianism's past entails negotiating the identity of Discordianism today. As the locus of institutional history, the archive mediates between Discordianism's past and its present so that the process by which ephemera is converted into Discordianism's history simultaneously produces contemporary Discordian identity. Accordingly, the archive's power as a mediator should be read in terms of being diachronically generative: it organizes disparate accounts of Discordianism's past into a coherent tradition, which then exerts a consider-able influence upon the present. This influence emanates from the creation of a linear historical trajectory (in the form of a narrative) that aligns an invented past with a prefabricated future, thereby inherently implying the continuity of the tradition through the present (Hobsbawn 2000: 1). That is to say, the past and the future are brought into being within the lived experience of the present.

In the contemporary period, the *Principia Discordia* is recognized as Discordianism's primary text. The process by which this came about illus-trates how the invention of the Discordian tradition binds archival research to the on-going construction of contemporary Discordian identity. As a result of the highly limited publishing runs, the various editions of the *Principia Discordia* played almost no role in the popularization of Discordianism from the mid-1970s onwards; yet, the institutional projects of the current period have retroactively invested the text (specifically the fourth edi-tion) with a newfound significance. The value contemporary Discordians assign to the text reflects the priorities of institutionalization; its valoriza-tion in the present period stems from the fact that the *Principia Discordia* is understood to be the "original revelation" upon which the narrative of Discordianism's history is based.[4] As this example demonstrates, the nar-rative of Discordianism's past functions as a permanent interlocutor with contemporary Discordians: it is in the mirror of tradition that Discordians today see the reflection of their own religious identities.

Contemporary Discordianism is a discursive field in which the creation of Discordianism's past interfaces with its conceptualization as a lived tradi-tion that is unfolding in the present. The dominant factor in this interface, though, is the religion's orientation in spiritual autonomy. The tension between tradition and autonomy is nowhere more acute than within the question of discursive self-representation. Faced with the imposition of tra-dition, contemporary Discordians have been led to ask what it meant to be a Discordian. This line of questioning has led to wider, corporate consid-erations, such as how (or whether) Discordianism constitutes a religious movement. Brenton Clutterbuck's Chasing Eris Project emerged as a direct response to these questions.

Chasing Eris

Brenton Clutterbuck, also known by his Discordian name "Placid Dingo," began the Chasing Eris project in 2012. As an attempt to answer the questions raised by Gorightly's archival research, Clutterbuck's project addressed the issue of Discordian identity, both on an individual and movement-wide level. Clutterbuck's international ethnographic census, which he dubbed the "Chasing Eris project," led him through his native Australia and nine other countries spread across three continents. Through the use of the "snowball sampling" survey method (in which contacts are recruited along lines of acquaintanceship), Clutterbuck was able to document a cross-section of international Discordianism, in much the same way Margot Adler surveyed modern paganism in *Drawing Down the Moon* (Sulak *et al*. 2014: 62). Clutterbuck's informants included prominent U.S. Discordians, like 'Professor Cramulus' and Adam Gorightly, Brazilian and Polish chaos magicians, the Finnish scholar of Discordianism Essi Mäkelä (Mäkelä and Petsche 2013), as well as the present author. Clutterbuck has yet to publish his findings; however, the execution of the project is just as important as the data it will yield, on account of the fact that it clearly represents an iteration of the institutional turn within the religion. Essentially, the Chasing Eris project represents an attempt within Discordianism to outline its own collective identity in much the same way as Gorightly's archival project aspired to produce Discordianism's own official history.

Unlike the periods in which Discordianism was a mode of mail-order spirituality, or, later, a platform for psychedelic culture jamming, Clutterbuck's project makes it clear that contemporary Discordianism is preoccupied with coming to terms with itself as a new religious movement, complete with all the trappings associated with the category of religion. For Clutterbuck, the material culture of Discordianism, as well its history, offers only a partial view of the religion. On the website that introduced his project, Clutterbuck stated that the text that is commonly identified as the *locus classicus* of Discordianism does not disclose the essence of the religion, at least not openly: "The original work of Discordianism, the *Principia Discordia* has an almost scrapbook-like set up, and refuses to explicitly reveal the 'main idea' of Discordianism" (Clutterbuck 2012). Here, Clutterbuck insinuates that his project will do precisely what research into the material culture cannot, to wit, uncover the essence of Discordianism. However, Clutterbuck's work is not positioned in opposition to the archive; in fact, the opposite is true. While Clutterbuck's global census makes clear the value he places on understanding Discordianism as it is lived today, his reference to the *Principia Discordia* as "original work" of the religion evidences how his project supplements Gorightly's institutional narrative. Whereas Gorightly's historical narrative moves forward in time from the religion's origin, Clutterbuck's account moves backwards from the present to meet it. The two work in concert insofar as the identities Clutterbuck mapped are contextualized

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within the tradition of Discordianism derived from the archive. The posi-
tive reception of Clutterbuck's project within on- and off-line Discordian
communities makes clear that many Discordians are no longer content to
remain in decentralized, anonymous networks. The lived experience of
Discordianism today is defined by the impulse to come together in the form
of pedagogical, intellectual, and social communities.

Conclusion

It is not a coincidence that the scholars began their inquiry into Discordianism
in the early 2000s. The first academic study of the religion, David
Chidester's *Authentic Fakes* (2005), was published just at the point in which
Discordianism had transformed itself into the new religious movement it is
today. Before this period, Discordianism was not constituted in ways that
are readily visible to scholars of religion. Discordianism became visible as an
object of inquiry only after it took a dramatic turn towards institutionaliza-
tion. And its transformation into a new religious movement is not without
its repercussions. The academic discourse that authenticated the religion in
the 2000s also served to further reify Discordianism along the same lines as
its emic, institutional narrative. The result was that the religion's adherents,
as well as the scholars who study them, came to exist in a collaborative feed-
back loop involving the on-going construction of Discordianism, both in the
past and the present.

Today, academics and adherents appear to agree that the essence of
Discordianism resides in the 4th/5th edition of the *Principia Discordia*.
Presumably, this is because the text seems to offer all of the requisite data
for a normative appraisal of a new religious movement. It contains an origin
story, a list of commandments, a liturgical calendar, a list of saints, and an
account of Discordianism's principle deity, Eris. In sum, the 4th/5th edition
Principia Discordia seems to be a perfect index of everything a "real" reli-
gion needs. Herein lies the problem: all of the trappings that scholars used
to analyze Discordianism were secondary aspects of the religion until the
contemporary period. Said differently, the religious minutia contained in the
4th/5th edition of the *Principia Discordia* is an illustration of one aspect of
the Discordian *ludibrium*, not its basis. In order to appreciate the status of
the *Principia Discordia* within Discordian belief, and more importantly its
central place in contemporary Discordiansim, one must examine the ways
in which the religion has been recast over the last six decades. Surveying the
historical phases in which Discordianism's idiosyncratic beliefs developed, it
becomes clear that its current status as a new religious movement obscures
its previous iterations within science fiction fandom, the psychedelic under-
ground, the zine scene, and cyberculture.

Until the current period, Discordian belief occupied a liminal position
between philosophy, religion, and politics; it was neither merely a joke nor

simply a religion. Discordianism's assiduously playful investment in religious forms was premised on the belief that its use of them was neither entirely genuine nor solely satirical. Far from being an indistinct system of thought, Discordianism offered its adherents a means of entering into a state of intellectual liminality that paralleled the indeterminate status of the religion itself. Through the process of institutionalization, this liminality has been replaced with the certainty that Discordianism is a new religious movement, and not only that, but one that is worthy of study. While Discordianism as a religion is evidently worthy of study, what remains to be seen is whether scholars of religion will be equipped to account for the periods in which it was not.

Notes

1 Each subsequent edition of the *Principia Discordia* contained notably different content. The Loompanics 4th/5th edition, published in 1979, is now regarded as definitive (Greer 2014: 110–111).
2 Over the course of his long career, Wilson would gain prominence within esoteric milieus as one of the foremost interpreters (and proponents) of Aleister Crowley's spiritual writings. Appropriating a line of thought initiated by Israel Regardie, Wilson contextualized Crowley's value in terms of the spiritual practices he lucidly enumerated in his work. In his spiritual autobiography, Wilson attributes his own mystical experiences to the combination of Crowley's magick and LSD (Wilson 1997: 66–71).
3 Promotion of the psychedelic experience was a hallmark of Wilson's literary career from its inception (Wilson 1973). His definitive refutation of the logic behind the "war on drugs" appears in Wilson (2000: 12–16).
4 Scholars and practitioners alike pay little attention to the fact that the edition of the text that is commonly referenced as authoritative is in fact the 4th/5th edition of the text, which differs significantly from the 1st edition (Greer 2014: 110–111).

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