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POWER, POETICS AND THE POPULAR:
AMERICAN REACTIONS TO 9/11
AND THE DISCOURSE OF REDEMPTIONISM

Some are said
to be holy but
there is a bit of
confusion about
the qualifications
of the judges.

Robert Hunter, *Idiot's Delight*

On September 11, 2001, a well-organized group of terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and managed to crash three of them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and into the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Whatever this unprecedented attack will turn out to have effected in addition to the suffering of those who died in the rubble and those who were left behind, it was read first and foremost as an attack on the American way of life and on the position of the United States in an increasingly globalized world. Accordingly, the innocence and idealism or, as some would have it, the complacency of America's national identity have been severely affected by the highly symbolic destruction of two highly symbolic targets, a destruction which could be witnessed on innumerable TV screens all over the world.¹ What is more, the Islamist affiliations and motivations of the terrorists² made the prominent religious com-

¹ Cf. Sabine Sielke, "Das Ende der Ironie? Zum Verhältnis von Realem und Repräsentation zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts", *Der 11. September 2001. Fragen, Folgen, Hintergründe*, ed. Sabine Sielke (Frankfurt/M. etc.: Lang, 2002) 255–273.

² For a rather shocking first-hand source from this context see the "Final Instructions to the Hijackers of September 11, Found in the Luggage of Mohamed Atta and Two Other Copies" as printed and discussed in Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terror: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) 1–18 (discussion), 93–98 (text), 109–113 (notes).

ponent of America's national identity³ stand out in even sharper relief, a component which seems at present to enjoy an astonishing resurgence⁴ that is, however, accompanied by symptoms of crisis.⁵ In what follows I will focus on this persistent but, as recent research has emphasized, at times rather disruptive dimension of the ongoing discursive *Negotiations of America's National Identity*.⁶ Taking my cue from the sociologist Will Herberg's observation in the 1950s that "American religiosity is that of a society in an acute stage of secularization"⁷ and from recent research into the "modernism of Puritan thought and its legacy"⁸, I will analyze political, poetical and popular reactions to the events of September 11, 2001 against the backdrop of the mixture of religion and politics that has been the hallmark of the dis-

³ Cf. the organisation of Roland Hagenbüchle et al. (eds.), *Negotiations of America's National Identity*. 2 Vols (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000) into six parts, the first of which is called "The Religious Framework", followed by "The Political Edifice".

⁴ Cf. Berndt Ostendorf, "Das Religiöse in der amerikanischen Demokratie", *Merkur* 53; 9/10 (1999): 831–900 and "The U. S. Between Terror and Er-ror – Der 11. September, die politische Religion und der heilige Krieg", *Neue Bedrohung Terrorismus: Der 11. September 2001 und die Folgen*, ed. Ellen Bos (Münster: LIT, 2003) 149–167.

⁵ Cf. Gerhard Sauter, "A City upon a Hill? Die religiöse Dimension des amerikanischen Selbstverständnisses und seine gegenwärtige Krise", *Sielke* (ed.) 2002, 69–80.

⁶ Cf. William R. Hutchinison, "Religion and Social Cohesion", *Hagenbüchle et al.* (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 180–191.

⁷ Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew: An Essay in Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), quoted in Hutchinison 2000, 182.

⁸ Cf. Olaf Hansen, "Foundational Epistemology: Allegorical Interpretation and Providential Design", *Hagenbüchle et al.* (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 68–94, 76. On the importance of protestantism for modern culture in general see, for example, Richard Münch, *Die Kultur der Moderne*, Bd. 1: *Ihre Grundlagen und ihre Entwicklung in England und Amerika* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1986) 127–179 and Alan Sinfield, "Protestantism: Questions of Subjectivity and Control", *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, by Alan Sinfield (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 143–80. On the American context see Emory Elliott/Marietta Messmer, "The Puritan Heritage – Visionary Impulse of Historical Encumbrance?", *Hagenbüchle et al.* (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 39–48 and Winfried Herget, "The Centrality of the Word", *Hagenbüchle et al.* (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 49–67.

ursive construction of American national identity from the very beginning.⁹

In a typically modern combination of modernizing and re-traditionalizing impulses the unfolding of American national identity seems to be based on a paradoxical double-movement which, at its core, secularizes the religious and sacralizes the political. Both strands come together in the idea of Manifest Destiny and in the resulting American exceptionalism¹⁰ with its, from a European or otherwise non-American perspective, uncomfortable implications for American foreign policy.¹¹ Current atmospheric disturbances in transatlantic relations¹² notwithstanding, it seems to me, however, that there is a great deal of continuity between what might be called a specifically American and religiously furnished discourse of redemptionism on the one hand and a fundamental discursive pattern of Western culture at large on the other, and here I am speaking of the discourse of Romanticism, or Romantic communication,¹³ a discourse predicated on, in William Wordsworth's words, "hope that can never die,/Effort, and expectation, and desire,/And something evermore about to be."¹⁴

⁹ For a general overview cf. Knud Krakau (ed.), *The American Nation – National Identity – Nationalism* (Münster: LIT, 1997) and Roland Hagenbüchle, "From Common Ground to Common Project", *Hagenbüchle et al.* (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 1–36. On the religious dimension in particular cf. Michael J. Perry, *Love & Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) and Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (1992) (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

¹⁰ Cf. Seymour M. Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: Norton, 1996).

¹¹ Cf. for a general assessment Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca/London: Cornell UP, 2002), and against the backdrop of 9/11 Christian Hacke, "Der Terrorangriff vom 11. September 2001 und seine Folgen für die amerikanische Außenpolitik", *Sielke* (ed.) 2002, 11–29.

¹² Cf. Stephan Fröhlich, "Die Auswirkungen des 11. September 2001 auf das transatlantische Verhältnis", *Sielke* (ed.) 2002, 57–68.

¹³ Cf. Christoph Reinfandt, *Romantische Kommunikation: Zur Kontinuität der Romantik in der Kultur der Moderne* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003).

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995) Book VI (1850), ll. 605–608.

In this essay, I can only offer the outline of a larger project which will combine a historically far-reaching "archaeology" of the discourse of redemptionism (in the Foucauldian sense of an analysis of the "archive" of things said or rather written in this respect¹⁵) with a historically embedded functional view based on Niklas Luhmann's systems theory of modernity,¹⁶ i.e. a view focused on the various communicative social contexts in which specific "texts" can be located and on the historical emergence of these contexts within the evolution of modern society and culture. The affinities and occasional incompatibilities of Foucault's historical discourse analysis and Luhmann's sociological systems theory have been discussed occasionally in Germany throughout the 1990s,¹⁷ and the most recent assessments are fairly enthusiastic about the potential of these approaches for a mutual illumination of their respective blind spots.¹⁸ In addition to these theoretical concerns, however, the project outlined in this paper could provide an occasion for a systematic combination of both theories in a descriptive framework based on the hypothesis that an "archive" of redemptionism cuts across various communica-

¹⁵ Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

¹⁶ Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997). For an adaptation of the Luhmannian framework which paves the way for the current approach see Reinfandt 2003.

¹⁷ See, for example, Friederike Meyer, "Diskurstheorie und Literaturschichte. Eine systemtheoretische Reformulierung des Diskursbegriffs von Foucault", *Vom Umgang mit Literatur und Literaturgeschichte. Positionen und Perspektiven nach der "Theoriedebatte"*, eds. Lutz Danneberg and Friedrich Vollhardt (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992) 389–408; Jürgen Link, *Versuch über den Normalismus. Wie Normalität produziert wird* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997) 172–184; Friedrich Balke, "Dichter, Denker und Niklas Luhmann: Über den Sinnzwang der Systemtheorie", *Widerstände der Systemtheorie. Kulturtheoretische Analysen zum Werk von Niklas Luhmann*, eds. Albrecht Koschorke and Cornelia Vismann (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999) 137–157, esp. 144 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Rolf Parr, "Punktuale Affinitäten, ungeklärte Verhältnisse: (Inter-) Diskursanalyse und Systemtheorie. Zur Einführung in die überfällige Debatte "Luhmann und/oder Foucault", *kultuRRévolution* 45/46 (2003): 55–57 and Jürgen Link, "Wieweit sind (foucaultsche) Diskurs- und (luhmannsche) Systemtheorie kompatibel? Vorläufige Skizze einiger Analogien und Differenzen", *kultuRRévolution* 45/46 (2003): 58–62.

tive spheres which provide different modes of realization. While such an "archive" of redemptionism hands down building blocks from a pre-modern tradition of Christian religious semantics and can thus be described as one of the most important re-traditionalizing impulses accompanying the emergence of cultural modernity, the communicative actualization of these semantic building blocks can only take place in the ever-evolving contexts of modern communication which are described by Niklas Luhmann as functionally differentiated social systems such as, for example, economy, science, law, art, politics, religion, and education.¹⁹ In and between these changing contexts with their various modernizing impulses, the notion of redemption combines both personal and collective dimensions of being and can thus serve as one of the most effective mediators between subjective experience and social processes. Short-circuiting the public and the private domains of modern culture as well as its re-traditionalizing and modernizing impulses in a semantic disposition that is predicated on a re-integrative vision or version of the future, the discourse of redemptionism as described from this doubled theoretical perspective could turn out to be a prime example of the workings of cultural memory²⁰ in both its material and functional dimensions.²¹ What is more, its orientation towards the future empha-

¹⁹ Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1988); *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1990); *Das Recht der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993); *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), Engl. version *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000); *Die Politik der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2000); *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2000); *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

²⁰ Cf. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1997) and *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zehn Studien* (München: Beck, 2002). For brief introductions to what might by now be called the "memory paradigm" in cultural studies see Markus Fausser, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 2003) 116–138 and Roy Sommer, *Grundkurs Cultural Studies/Kulturwissenschaft. Großbritannien* (Stuttgart: Klett, 2003) 136–142.

²¹ Cf. Aleida Assmann's distinction between *Speichergedächtnis* and *Funktionsgedächtnis* in her monograph *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisse* (München: Beck, 1999).

sizes the forward-directed orientation that cultural memory assumes when it is described from a functional systems-theoretical perspective in which historical semantics are drawn upon to facilitate the continuity of communication, and this re-orientation of the concept of memory towards the present or even the future chimes in with recent findings in memory research which insist that

[f]rom a strictly biological point of view, the term memory is a misnomer. Brains are evolved not for retrospection and contemplation but for intention and anticipation – for looking forwards rather than backwards, outwards rather than inwards, for being selective rather than merely retentive.²²

If this is the case, then the following preliminary case studies of examples from the spheres of politics, poetry and popular culture might serve to illustrate how, aesthetic and political differences notwithstanding, the discourse of redemptionism marks a fundamental communicative pattern in modern or even “postmodern” culture, a pattern which is particularly attractive and effective in times of crisis. Before I turn to these examples, however, a few words on the historical genealogy of redemptionism and on its basic semantic ingredients should be added.

The term redemptionism figures prominently in a recent piece in the *Times Literary Supplement* which states unequivocally that for the emergence of American national identity and policy “no theme was more important than redemptionism” and that in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks “[t]he United States is back in the redemption business.”²³ In its broad sense the term covers both the religious and the political dimensions of America’s “civil religion.”²⁴ In a narrower religious sense it covers the indi-

²² John MacCrone, “Reasons to Forget: Scientists Count the Ways We Get It Wrong”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30th Jan 1994: 3–4, 3. For similar notions with regard to cultural memory cf. Mieke Bal’s introduction to Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover/London: UP of New England, 1999) vii–xvii.

²³ Christopher Croker, “Great Redeemers”, *Times Literary Supplement* May 23 (2003): 6–7, 6.

²⁴ The term was introduced by Robert N. Bellah. Cf. Robert N. Bellah, William G. McLoughlin (eds.), *Religion in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Re-*

vidualistic and private dimensions of religious experience under modern conditions²⁵ as well as longstanding theological traditions such as the providential theme,²⁶ eschatology and apocalyptic thought,²⁷ and millennialism and millenarianism.²⁸ The discourse of redemptionism is the common ground on which these various strands of thought and experience meet and mingle, or rather where they are brought into being in communication and where they can unfold their relevance and impact in the public sphere. Its most important ingredients are

1. a deterministic view of the course of history conceived as a unitary process; 2. the assumption of a cosmic conflict between good and evil; 3. a deep-seated pessimism about the present and a belief in a final cataclysmic battle between the forces of good and evil; 4. a sense of the imminent end of time; 5. the hope for a millennial kingdom on earth, often in combination with the notion of a Second Coming of a Messiah; and 6. the expectation of life after death, including the belief in the Last Judgement.²⁹

Bernd Engler, Joerg O. Fichte and Oliver Scheiding distinguish the more radical millenarianism which “took root in medieval and post-Reformation Europe” and is based on “the ardent expectation of a thousand year reign of peace after the apocalyptic cataclysm”³⁰ from its more moderate, gradualist and preparationist counterpart

ligion in a Time of Trial (New York: Seabury, 1975), and Robert N. Bellah, Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

²⁵ See, for example, Murray Joseph Haas, “Self-Serving Redemptionism: A Jewish-Christian Lament”, *Theology Today* 52,1 (1995): 108–112. <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1995/v-1-criticscorner2.htm> (September 29, 2003).

²⁶ Cf. Elliott/Messmer 2000 and Croker 2003.

²⁷ Cf. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) and Paul Boyer, “Bible Prophecy Belief and the Shaping of America’s National Identity”, Hagenbüchle et al. (eds.) 2000, Vol I, 192–213.

²⁸ Cf. E. L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968) and more recently Bernd Engler, Joerg O. Fichte, and Oliver Scheiding (eds.), *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630–1860* (Trier: WVT, 2002).

²⁹ Bernd Engler, Joerg O. Fichte, and Oliver Scheiding, “Transformations of Millennial Thought in America, 1630–1860”, Engler et al. (eds.) 2002, 9–37, 10 (FN 1).

³⁰ Engler/Fichte/Scheiding 2002, 13 (FN 8, my emphasis).

millennialism which "developed in the non-militant groups of religious non-conformists in seventeenth-century Europe and gained firm ground in colonial America"³¹ and which is based on a belief in the "collective, enduring transformation of the human condition *within* history."³² It is against the background of these "ubiquitous Western concepts"³³ that the following remarks will very preliminarily trace the presence of a discourse of redemptionism in American reactions to 9/11 and analyze its function in various communicative contexts. The first of these will be politics.

POWER

From the founding of the United States onwards the presidential rhetoric has been strongly influenced by that mixture of reciprocally secularizing and sacralizing impulses so characteristic of the American civil religion.³⁴ George W. Bush's rhetorical crisis ma-

³¹ Engler/Fichte/Scheiding 2002, 13 (FN 8). For the enlightenment influence on the concepts of gradualism and preparationism cf. 21–26.

³² Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill/London, 1988) 199, quoted in Engler/Fichte/Scheiding 2002, 13 (FN 8, my emphasis).

³³ Engler/Fichte/Scheiding 2002, 13 (FN 8).

³⁴ Cf., for example, Robert S. Alley, *So Help Me God: Religion and the Presidency, Wilson to Nixon* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972), Ronald E. Isetti, "The Charter Myth of America: A Study of Biblical Symbolism in the Inaugural Addresses of Presidents", *Cithara* 16.1 (1976): 3–17, Roderick P. Hart, *The Political Pulpit* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1977), James David Fairbanks, "The Priestly Functions of the Presidency: A Discussion of the Literature on Civil Religion and Its Implications for the Study of Presidential Leadership", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11 (1981): 214–232, Robert Underhill, *The Bully Pulpit: From Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan* (New York: Vantage Press, 1988), Paul Goetsch, *Presidential Rhetoric and Communication since E.D. Roosevelt: An Annotated Bibliography* (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), Paul Goetsch and Gerd Hurm (eds.), *Die Rhetorik amerikanischer Präsidenten seit F.D. Roosevelt* (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), Stephen A. Smith (ed.), *Bill Clinton on Stump, State and Stage: The Rhetorical Road to the White House* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1994), Paul Goetsch, "In the Bully Pulpit: Presidential Rhetoric Between Sermonizing and Agenda Setting", Hagenbüchle et al. (eds.) 2000, Vol. I, 330–346, Kathleen H. Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000).

agement after the September 11 attacks can be placed in this tradition, as Klaus P. Schneider has shown in his detailed analysis of presidential speeches and statements from Bush's immediate reaction at Emma Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida at 9.30 Eastern Daylight Time on September 11 to his second Address to the Nation on October 7, 2001.³⁵ In pragmatic political terms, the available documents³⁶ suggest the emergence of three verbal and conceptual strategies, which Schneider identifies as 1) the redefinition of the terrorist attacks as acts of war,³⁷ 2) the personalization and location of the enemy in Osama bin Laden, hiding in the Taliban's Afghanistan,³⁸ and 3), somewhat surprisingly, an increasingly cautious and balanced handling of the religious dimension.³⁹

It is this third level which is of interest in our present context: Closer scrutiny of the religious content of Bush's statements reveals a striking parallel to the paradoxical doubling of secularizing and sacralizing tendencies which I claimed earlier for the unfolding of American national identity at large. On the one hand, and this is what Schneider emphasizes, Bush moves from conventionalized and implicit references to Christian religion as a kind of "default case" of religiosity (including serious blunders such as

³⁵ Klaus P. Schneider, "Sprachliches Krisenmanagement: Zur verbalen und konzeptuellen Bearbeitung der Terroranschläge in den Reden von George W. Bush", *Sielke* (ed.) 2002, 110–130.

³⁶ The texts are available under <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/>, including audio and video files.

³⁷ The first instance can be found in the "Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team" on September 12, 2001: "The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war" <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html> (27.6.2003). See also the commentary by Slavoj Žižek, "Are we in a war? Do we have an enemy?", *London Review of Books* May 23 (2002): http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n10/print/zizek01_.html (15.7.2003).

³⁸ First explicitly identified in response to a journalist's question on September 16, 2001 ("Remarks by the President Upon Arrival"). Cf. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html> (27.6.2003). For a journalistic account of the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan cf. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (2002) (London: Simon & Schuster Pocket Books, updated edition 2003).

³⁹ Schneider 2002, 127–128.

the reference to the imminent "crusade" on September 16) to a careful acknowledgement of religious diversity and an insistence that "We don't see this as a war of religion, in any way, shape or form."⁴⁰ Calling on the faithful of all backgrounds for their support in the fight against terrorism becomes a staple of Bush's rhetoric from September 15 onwards, and he visits the Islamic Center of Washington DC with the widely televised "soundbite" message that "Islam is peace" on September 17 and extends greetings to the Jewish community on the occasion of Rosh Hashanah on that same day.⁴¹ On the other hand, however, this development, which, with its frequent invocations of freedom and democracy, would seem to indicate an alignment with tolerant, secularizing tendencies, is counterbalanced by the identification of terrorism and evil that is introduced by Bush in the same speech on September 12 in which he introduced the redefinition of the terrorist attacks as acts of war: "America is united. The freedom-loving nations of the world stand by our side," he states at the end of his "Remarks [...] in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team", and adds notoriously: "This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail."⁴²

From this point onwards references to the evil of the world, which has to be routed and extinguished, punctuate the president's messages. It is this rhetorical construction of "a cosmic conflict between good and evil" which aligns his rhetoric with basic elements of the discourse of redemptionism and thus sacralizes the political in a typically American way. It also reveals "a deterministic view of the course of history conceived as a unitary process" which is the basis of American exceptionalism.⁴³ This is most explicit in the president's "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People" on September 20, which includes the following flourishes of America's universal claim for worldwide power:

⁴⁰ "Remarks by the President At Photo Opportunity with House and Senate Leadership", September 19, 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010919-8.html> (27.6.2003).

⁴¹ Cf. Schneider 2002, 122–124.

⁴² Cf. note 37.

⁴³ Cf. the list of basic features of redemptionism quoted above.

This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom. [...] [This country will define our times, not be defined by them [...]] In our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom [...] now depends on us. [...] We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. [...] The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.⁴⁴

The more radical religious implications of this stance as indicated by points 3) to 6) in the list of basic features of redemptionism quoted above, i.e. the truly apocalyptic expectations, are not explicitly spelled out in Bush's rhetoric, but Bruce Lincoln has shown in a recent book to what extent George W. Bush caters to the needs of the fundamentalist Christian segment of his electorate, many of whom actually believe in variations of points 3) to 6) on the list, by means of double coding. Lincoln even goes so far as to treat Bush's "Address to the Nation" on October 7, 2001 and Osama bin Laden's pre-recorded "response" as a case of "symmetric dualisms."⁴⁵

All in all, however, Bush's and bin Laden's respective dualisms operate on completely different premises, and Lincoln acknowledges this by stressing the differences as much as the similarities. Bush's dualism is after all firmly embedded in the American tradition of secularizing the religious and sacralizing the political, a

⁴⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (27.6.2003).

⁴⁵ Both texts can be found in the Appendix to Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) 99–103. The chapter comparing both documents is called "Symmetric Dualisms: Bush and bin Laden on October 7", Lincoln 2003, 19–32 + 113–116 (notes). As might be expected, Lincoln came in for some severe criticism. See, for example, David Martin, "Blinded by the Enlightenment", *Times Literary Supplement* June 20 (2003): 11–12. All in all, however, his analysis offers useful insights and a welcome attempt at minute analysis in a climate of patriotism and propaganda (and has been greeted as such). On media response to 9/11 in general cf. April Eisman, "The Media of Manipulation: Patriotism and Propaganda – Mainstream News in the United States in the Weeks Following September 11", *Critical Quarterly* 45, 1–2 (2003): 55–72.

tradition that is based on the first principle of freedom and a strict separation of church and state. These core ingredients of the firm link between modernization and secularization, however, induced a complementary process of de-secularization in turn, and this sacralizing impulse soon began to encroach upon public discourse from its firm location in the private sphere.⁴⁶ Whether the recent resurgence of fundamentalist Christian doctrine indicates a breakthrough for these de-secularizing tendencies or marks just a phase in an ongoing negotiation remains to be seen, but it is clear that it strengthens the discourse of redemptionism as a resource for rhetoric in the public and secular sphere of wielding political power by means of communication, with all the reassuring and uncomfortable implications this entails for Americans on the one hand and non-Americans on the other. Politically, the functional focus is on consolidating present power with the promise of a better world in the future, and while there are always those who are opposed to present power structures there will not be many who are opposed to a better world. It is this common ground of hope which makes the discourse of redemptionism so effective and attractive, and the next string of examples will show how even those who are rejecting George W. Bush's politics on principle succumb to this lure.

POETICS

"Poets," a current saying goes, "Poets are like harmonica players. Terrific, but not much use in them."⁴⁷ This assessment acknowledges the traditional exalted status of the poet and his or her artistic achievements, but at the same time it manages to tone down these aspirations by suggesting that poetry is what might be called a "generic" activity of limited reach, somewhat like playing the blues, but even less commercially viable. It seems that poetry has become a producer's art with not much of an audience

⁴⁶ Cf. Ostendorf 2003.

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As these words indicate, poetry is, when it comes to the crunch and in spite of all modernist innovations, still viewed in basically Romantic terms these days, i. e. as a medium for recording and constructing personal experience on the one hand and for expressing and sharing it on the other. So it does not come as a surprise that the various prefatory texts in the most comprehensive anthology of poems on 9/11, entitled *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind*, reenforces these assumptions.⁵² The "Intro-

⁴⁸ Creeley 2003, 28.

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⁵⁰ Billy Collins, "What's American About American Poetry?", *Writers on America: 15 Reflections*, ed. George Clack. (Washington, DC: Office of International Information Programs/U. S. Department of State, 2003) 22–25, 23.

⁵¹ Cf. Creeley 2003, 27: "If the sad events of September 11, 2001, provoked a remarkable use of poems as a means wherewith to find a common and heartfelt ground for sorrow, it passed quickly as the country regained its equilibrium, turned to the conduct of an aggressive war, and one has to recognize, went back to making money"

⁵² Allen Cohen, Clive Matson (eds.), *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind: Poets on 9/11* (Oakland, CA: Regent Press, 2002). Other literary reactions (with some overlaps) have been collected in William Heyen (ed.), *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond* (Easton, MD: Etruscan Press, 2002).

tradition that is based on the first principle of freedom and a strict separation of church and state. These core ingredients of the firm link between modernization and secularization, however, induced a complementary process of de-secularization in turn, and this sacralizing impulse soon began to encroach upon public discourse from its firm location in the private sphere.⁴⁶ Whether the recent resurgence of fundamentalist Christian doctrine indicates a breakthrough for these de-secularizing tendencies or marks just a phase in an ongoing negotiation remains to be seen, but it is clear that it strengthens the discourse of redemptionism as a resource for rhetoric in the public and secular sphere of wielding political power by means of communication, with all the reassuring and uncomfortable implications this entails for Americans on the one hand and non-Americans on the other. Politically, the functional focus is on consolidating present power with the promise of a better world in the future, and while there are always those who are opposed to present power structures there will not be many who are opposed to a better world. It is this common ground of hope which makes the discourse of redemptionism so effective and attractive, and the next string of examples will show how even those who are rejecting George W. Bush's politics on principle succumb to this lure.

POETICS

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duction" by the editor Allen Cohen, for example, states programmatically that the anthology represents a "different historical record of these monumental events [...] [a] record based on the perceptions and feelings that can be uniquely mirrored in the poem," and he goes on to state that "ninety percent [of the poems sent in] were good poems [because] [t]hey expressed deep emotions and profound thoughts with the severe attention to details that makes poems revelatory."⁵³ The "Preface" by co-editor Clive Matson hits the same groove when he views the anthology as "a forum for those voices [within us]" which are most effectively expressed by poets and goes on to state that in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks people attended poetry readings in droves because they felt the need "to be in the presence of poets, who were expected to approach the event in a real fashion, even if this meant expressing doubt and confusion," because after all "contradictions and [...] dissent are not unpatriotic, they're real."⁵⁴ And the "Foreword" by Michael Parenti finally pits "the people in the White House" against "us", the people, claiming in good Marxist fashion that

[w]hen our leaders continue to serve the special interests of those who control the land, labor, capital, natural resources, and markers of this and almost all other nations, when they continue to violate the humanity of everyone else at home and abroad, then it is time to raise our voices against the subterfuge, the hidden agendas, and the heartless imperatives of empire. And then it is time to turn to the poets.⁵⁵

Poetry, it appears, is an intensely private medium that is expected to work as a kind of "true" and "authentic" corrective in an alienated and corrupt public sphere, and on a more theoretical note this understanding of poetry chimes in with the first two functions that Hubert Zapf identifies in his "Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts", i. e. the function of a *cultural-critical metadiscourse* on the one hand and the function of an *imaginative counter-discourse* on the other.⁵⁶

⁵³ Allen Cohen, "Introduction", Cohen/Matson (eds.) 2002, i-iv, i/ii.

⁵⁴ Clive Matson, "Preface", Cohen/Matson (eds.) 2002, v-viii, v/viii/viii.

⁵⁵ Michael Parenti, "Foreword", Cohen/Matson (eds.) 2002, ix-xii, ix/xi.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hubert Zapf, "Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts with Examples from American Literature", *REAL – Yearbook of Research in English and American Litera-*

It is striking, however, that in spite of its oppositional stance this kind of wishful thinking shows a great affinity with what I earlier called the discourse of redemptionism, albeit on a, except for slightly old-fashioned Marxist aspirations like Michael Parenti's, more moderate and private scale. Accordingly, the "[i]ndependent and dissenting views" of the poets, who, incidentally, come from all walks of American literary life, from the mere amateur to the established professional, these views are to foster "a deepening of perception, of renewed seriousness about the human predicament and about the necessity to evolve into our full humanity," as Allen Cohen puts it in his introduction, adding with explicit reference to Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the world" that "the poets are singing and they are seeing a new world."⁵⁷ And in the spirit of this invocation of the prophetic and visionary tradition of Western poetry the anthology at large "is dedicated to all those who have given their lives in the ways that have held humanity hostage to the recurring nightmare of history and to those dreamers who can see and manifest a new world of peace and justice for all beings."⁵⁸ Again on a more theoretical note it is possible to relate these effusions to Hubert Zapf's more sober third function of imaginative texts, i. e. the function of a *reintegrative inter-discourse* which complements the predominantly reflexive dimensions of the first two functions with a potentially constructive dimension, and it is clear that the "archive" of redemptionism figures prominently with regard to this "inter-discursive reintegration" of (post-)modern culture.⁵⁹

ture 17 (2001): 85–100, 93. See also Hubert Zapf, *Literatur als kulturelle Ökologie. Zur kulturellen Funktion imaginativer Texte an Beispielen des amerikanischen Romans* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002).

⁵⁷ Cohen 2003, i/iii.

⁵⁸ Italics in original dedication.

⁵⁹ Cf. Zapf 2001, 93. For a parallel conceptualization of modern literature from a systems-theoretical point of view cf. Christoph Reinfandt, *Der Sinn der fiktionalen Wirklichkeiten. Ein systemtheoretischer Entwurf zur Ausdifferenzierung des englischen Romans vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1997) 16–122. For a historical re-conceptualization of these functions in terms of Romanticism cf. Reinfandt 2003.

In these final lines the poem suggests in an outright redemptionist fashion that new “loves and voices” will emerge from the apocalyptic rubble, and it is quite striking that for the time being redemption is presented as exactly the kind of poetry featured in the anthology, i. e. a poetry of lost, buried and repressed voices that is, for once, even formally enabled by the anachronistic feature of rhyme (“despair – air – everywhere”).

A similar reflexive turn can be observed in Robert Pinsky’s “not quite blank verse” meditation “Newspaper”, which reflects upon the relationship between the media and reality. The poem opens with the following short-circuiting of mediality and reality:⁶⁶

They manufacture newsprint with a grain,
So you can tear straight down a vertical column.
But if you try to tear it crosswise, it rips
Out of control, in jagged scallops and slashes,
Serrated chaos like the blocks of smoking ruins. (ll. 1–5)

At its end the poem recapitulates its title in the metaphor “the skin of days” (l. 45) after it has linked its theme to the discourse of redemptionism in an oblique way about half way through:

The craving for some redemption is like a thirst.
It’s in us as we open the morning paper:
Fresh, fallible, plausible. (ll.18–20)

As this indicates, the discourse of redemptionism lurks everywhere in everyday life, but from the poet’s point of view writing is the best way of catering for these needs because, as Pinsky’s poem puts it, “Words broadcast on the air don’t seem as solid” (l.34). This, incidentally, is the point where poetry turns upon itself in order to claim its redeeming capacities in a strange mixture of modesty and megalomania. And this brings me to my third and final example.

THE POPULAR

Who could be better suited as an example of “The Popular” than “The Boss” himself, Bruce Springsteen, the man who used to be rock ‘n’ roll’s future and who, according to the most recent le-

⁶⁶ Cohen/Matson (eds) 2002, 94–95.

gend, was redeemed from years of writer’s block by an ordinary guy drawing up in his car right next to him in the aftermath of 9/11 uttering the three words “We need you!”⁶⁷ To this injunction everyman’s hero responded by writing and recording the album *The Rising*, which has, on the whole, been received warmly as a moving and appropriate engagement with the September 11 attacks.⁶⁸

So what is *The Rising*?⁶⁹ It is perhaps best characterized as a slightly old-fashioned mainstream rock album that profits from Springsteen’s reputation as an authentic and honest performer and character. Some of the songs were actually written before 9/11, and among these is, astonishingly, the album’s closing track, a gospel-tinted ballad prophetically entitled “My City of Ruins”, a song that laments the absence of any kind of faith in inner city landscapes and exhorts the listeners to “Come on, rise up!” in a kind of rebuilding project of everyday activity “with these hands.” Of the remaining fourteen songs, six make no direct reference to 9/11 and may well have been written before the event, but it is striking that all are predicated on future innerworldly experiences of redemption or imminent doom, as even the titles indicate: “Waitin’ on a Sunny Day”, “Countin’ on a Miracle”, “Let’s Be Friends”,

⁶⁷ The quip about rock ‘n’ roll’s future goes back to the critic John Landau who “discovered” Springsteen in 1974 and kick-started his career with the much-quoted sentence “I saw rock ‘n’ roll’s future, and its name is Bruce Springsteen”. The “We need you!”-legend can be found, for example, in the *Rolling Stone*-Special “It’s Boss Time”, *Rolling Stone* (German ed.) 5 (2003): 51–66, 64.

⁶⁸ See, for example, the five-star review by Kurt Loder in *Rolling Stone* 903 – August 22, 2002 (<http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/cd/review.asp?aid=2044473>) (14.6.2003), Dave Marsh’s review in *Counterpunch: Journalism that Rediscovered America*, ed. Alexander Cockburn, Jeffrey St. Clair (<http://www.counterpunch.org/marsh0831.html>) (14.6.2003) and David Pyndus’s review in *Pop Matters* (<http://www.popmatters.com/music/reviews/s/springsteenbruce-rising.shtml>) (26.8.2003). For a less enthusiastic but balanced assessment cf. Alexis Petridis’s review in *The Guardian* (http://www.guardian.co.uk/friday_review/story/0,3605,762904,00.html) (28.8.2003), for a hostile reaction from Springsteen’s fan base (“A big, streaming, exploitative pile of PC nothing”) cf. <http://www.morethings.com/music/springsteen/rising.html> (26.8.2003).

⁶⁹ All lyrics are quoted from the CD-booklet of Bruce Springsteen, *The Rising* (Columbia Records, 2002).

“Further On (Up the Road)”, “The Fuse”, and “(Meet Me at Mary’s Place”. Musically, on the other hand, the songs are rather backward looking, evoking earlier genres such as 1950s rock ‘n’ roll (“Waitin’”), 1980s stadium rock (“Countin’”, “The Fuse”), Motown (“Let’s”), blues/r’n’b/hard rock (“Further”), Sam Cooke (“Mary’s Place”). The 9/11–theme is, however, sounded right from the beginning of the record. The opener “Lonesome Day” moves obliquely from the comparative triviality of love lost in verse 1 to the impact of the September 11 attacks in verse 2:

Hell’s brewin’, dark sun’s on the rise
This storm will blow through by and by
House is on fire, viper’s in the grass
A little revenge and this too shall pass

The lyrics end, however, with a plea for restraint and a statement of confidence based on a direct reference to the discourse of redemptionism:

Better ask questions before you shoot
Deceit and betrayal’s bitter fruit
It’s hard to swallow, come time to pay
That taste on your tongue don’t easily slip away
Let kingdom come, I’m gonna find my way
Through this lonesome day

And the song’s signature, introduced as a bridge in the middle and then picked up again as a potentially open-ended coda, is the gospel-like repetition of the phrase “It’s alright” which sets the scene for the overall consolatory tone of the album and foreshadows the closing “Come on, rise up!”.

Within this framework many of the 9/11–songs interspersed with the “neutral” songs mentioned earlier sound a smoother, introspective note on acoustic instruments, assuming either the perspective of those confronted with the loss of a loved one as in “Into the Fire”, “Empty Sky” and “You’re Missing”, or projecting themselves into the minds of those who were directly confronted with the horror such as the returning firefighter in “Nothing Man.” A stand-out track, which, however, smacks a little too strongly of an obvious PC-gesture, is “Worlds Apart”, the story of two lovers faced with seemingly unbridgable cultural frontiers presented in a typical “world music”-setting drawing on

qawwali, “the intense, God-conjuring, life-affirming vocal music of the mystical Sufi sect of Islam”⁷⁰ as performed on the recording by Asif Ali Khan & Group.

All in all, then, tracks 1 to 12 on the album intermingle reflections on 9/11 with the consolations of classic rock music, and at least one critic points obliquely to the apparent datedness of Springsteen’s mode of communication by closing his review with the observation that “he’s still trying to cross that bridge – the one connecting people in commonality and shared experience – and at this point no one does it better.”⁷¹ It is clear that this combination introduces a sense of community and expectation that can easily draw on some stock elements of the discourse of redemptionism in its specifically American variety. Accordingly, *The Rising* seems at times to be in danger of suffering the same fate as Springsteen’s widely misunderstood 1984 song “Born in the USA”, “a troubled examination of Vietnam’s after effects [that] was misconstrued by fans, detractors and even Ronald Reagan as gung-ho chest-beating” because of its heroic musical setting which was presumably intended to be read as irony.⁷² On the album *The Rising* this tendency comes to a head in the anthemic title track which gathers Springsteen’s audience in a huge sing-a-long chorus just like “Born in the USA” did 19 years ago. The song “The Rising”, however, in a reflexive turn similar to the poetic examples quoted earlier, self-consciously limits its promise of redemption to the typical Springsteen concert situation: “Come on up for the rising *tonight*”. It is tempting to view this reflexive turn as a characteristic marker of the aesthetic under modern conditions, and the remaining tracks of the album illustrate this delimited reach of redemptionist prom-

⁷⁰ Loder 2002.

⁷¹ Pyndus 2002.

⁷² Petridis 2002. Springsteen was horrified by this and has played a sparse acoustic arrangement ever since. Cf. his comments in Bruce Springsteen, *Songs* (London: Virgin, 1998) 163–169 and Petridis’s biting retrospective comment: “If you set your troubled examination of Vietnam’s after-effects to the sort of fanfare last heard when an all-conquering Caesar returned to Rome, bellow it in a voice that suggests you are about to leap offstage and punch a communist, then package it in a sleeve featuring the Stars and Stripes and a pair of Levi’s, it’s no good getting huffy when people seize the wrong end of the stick”.

ises in the aesthetic sphere. The penultimate song on the album is the pensive "Paradise", which in a risky move pits the mind of a suicide bomber contemplating his own arrival in paradise in verse 1 against the mind of an American mourning a loved one and envisioning a reunion in verse 2. Verse 1 runs as follows:

Where the river runs to black
 I take the schoolbooks from your pack
 Plastics, wire and your kiss
 The breath of eternity on your lips
 In the crowded marketplace
 I drift from face to face
 I hold my breath and close my eyes
 I hold my breath and close my eyes
 And I wait for paradise
 And I wait for paradise

Verse 2, on the other hand, introduces an American perspective which may well be linked to the loss of a loved one in the 9/11-attacks:

The Virginia hills have gone to brown
 Another day, another sun goin' down
 I visit you in another dream
 I visit you in another dream
 I reach and feel your hair
 Your smell lingers in the air
 I brush your cheek with my fingertips
 I taste the void upon your lips
 And I wait for paradise
 And I wait for paradise

In an extension of the voice of verse 2 the third verse then follows these redemptionist fantasies through with the singer imagining arrival in paradise as a submergence in water while crossing a river on his way to the other side:

I search for you on the other side
 Where the river runs clean and wide
 Up to my heart the waters rise
 Up to my heart the waters rise
 I sink 'neath the water cool and clear
 Drifting down I disappear
 I see you on the other side
 I search for the peace in your eyes
 But they're as empty as paradise
 They're as empty as paradise

Paradise, the song suggests at this point, is completely empty, a void, and it is certainly not mere chance that its melody is strongly reminiscent of Paul Simon's "The Sound of Silence". What remains is the here and now, and the song ends with the words

I break above the waves
 I feel the sun upon my face

After this return to this world, the final song, "My City of Ruins", entreats the audience to join what I called earlier a rebuilding project of everyday activity "with these hands", and it is in the context of this ongoing struggle for *immanent* redemption (which includes the "aesthetic" activities of writing and performing) that the singer prays to the Lord for the strength and the faith and the love.

This kind of double-coding, which secularizes the sacred and sacralizes the secular, is, as I hope to have shown with the range of my topical examples, a typically American phenomenon which makes the discourse of redemptionism a pervasive rhetorical and thematic resource in American culture.⁷³ While many of its historical manifestations have been thoroughly studied, an integrative functional view which pays particular attention to the various communicative contexts in which this resource is drawn upon is still pending, and the approach outlined in this essay could be a first step in this direction.⁷⁴

TÜBINGEN

CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

⁷³ It could also be another contributing factor to the global success of American popular culture. Cf. Berndt Ostendorf, "Why Is American Popular Culture so Popular? A View from Europe", *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46,3 (2001): 339–366.

⁷⁴ An earlier version of this essay was presented as a lecture at the University of Giessen on September 11, 2003. Thanks are due to Ansgar Nünning for humming a couple of Springsteen tunes on the road to Hamburg and to the members of a DFG-Forschergruppe-to-be at Kiel University on "popularity/popularization" which has since shifted its focus towards "art/religion".