

# Which, What, Witch?

**A Digital Religion Study on Swedish Instagram  
Witches, Identity and Representation.**

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## **Abstract**

This study is conducted through blogosphere studies and uses discourse, and narrative analysis to investigate how representations of contemporary Swedish Witches' identities are articulated on Instagram. The material consists of 73 posts and 99 images. The findings are that three distinct narratives (*remembrance, reclaiming, re-enchantment*) constitute a narrative plot around which the subjects construct their identities. Additionally, three discourses or identities were identified in the material, highlighting negotiations between religious, secular, and post-secular discourses in *hypermediated third spaces*. Through the theory of *hypermediation*, mediations of the witch and, significantly, the witch trials are understood as an important narrative link between a utopian past and the present. This link creates a sense of urgency, evoking strong emotions and connecting a traumatic past and the loss of ancient knowledge with current social injustices. Intersecting post-secular, secular and religious discourse, the witch trials become an important site in the *order of discourse* regarding the Witch, as they create both a discursive site for connection and contestation. Lastly, the study suggests a temporal aspect to *hypermediation theory* in relation to religious studies and "imagined communities," as *hypermediated spaces* such as Instagram allow a collapsing of not only space, but time.

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## Introduction.

The enormous stone hall was filled to the brim by people, and though doing their best to speak quietly, their voices reverberated between the tall, hard walls. I counted several scholars, celebrities, and curators amongst the interested audience at the Museum of Swedish History that night. Sweaty and a bit disheveled from running late, I quickly grabbed a champagne-colored drink served in a plastic cup, with lingonberries floating around as decoration. A small group of people suddenly climbed the modest stage at the back of the hall. The audience's chatter softened, and attention was directed towards them. The opening speeches began. Due to my poor placement in the great hall, I could only gather that this was an extended version of an exhibition previously shown at Kalmar Castle, and that it is an important piece of history to show to the public. Then they invited a couple of women cloaked in black on stage. They identified themselves as contemporary witches and spoke of witches throughout history, tying together identities through contexts of war and persecution. They read aloud a few verdicts from the Swedish witch trials and invited the audience to later join them at the big square outside, where they would tear these and other verdicts as a political act and ceremony for convicted witches of the past. As they quietly left the stage, I was struck by how time, space, and identity can be woven together in such an intricate and vivid way.

The above paragraph is a summarization and translation of a field note that I wrote after the opening night of the exhibition "HÄXOR" (witches) by artist Pompe Hedengren on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. I chose to include this note because the event served as the entry point for this thesis. Indeed, not only were the exhibition and its inauguration itself intriguing, but the aftermath sparked what could be described as something of a "controversy" regarding the complexity of (religious) identity, historicity, power of interpretation, and in extension: institutions such as the Swedish History Museum's position and responsibility as a mediator of knowledge to the

public. On the one hand, the exhibition were critiqued by some for “mixing fiction with history” by using only one actual historical artifact amongst AI-generated visuals and music by Billie Eilish (Brodej 2024; Ehlin 2024; Paulsson 2024; Ugglå 2024). Additionally, in a publicized “letter to the editor” in one of Sweden’s most-read newspapers, the writer criticizes the museum for inviting contemporary self-identifying witches, “romanticizing the distorted idea” of witches, and to a certain extent disrespecting the legacy of the witch trials (Larsson 2024). Subsequently, museum director Åsa Marnell responded to the critique, defending the exhibition as a way to make history more accessible, relatable, and relevant for the public. Indeed, the exhibition is considered to have generated a 65% increase in ticket sales compared to the year before (Marnell 2024; Gordan 2025).

With this study, however, I do not want to exaggerate this particular “controversy” case by any means. What I find interesting are the negotiations between history, identity, representation, mediation, and the contexts in which several discourses can be actualized and accepted – or not. Speaking in discourse analysis terminology, discourses seldom become visible without contestation. It is interesting, then, that contemporary self-identifying witches already *have* been visible in Swedish news media in recent years (Aqvilin 2024; Blomberg 2025; Heimersson 2024; Jebril and Lundborg 2022; Johansson 2023; Krums-Vabins 2025; Lindberg 2025; Simonsson 2024; Wallbrandt 2024). Yet, something about this exhibition sparked contestation that prompted a public discussion. It raises questions of who is considered to have the power to define and interpret things in certain contexts, especially in relation to the mediation of knowledge. These types of questions, of course, are multifarious, complex, and frankly too extensive to investigate in an MA thesis. What I found missing in the news pages regarding this “controversy,” however, was the contemporary self-identifying witches themselves: What *they* consider a witch to be. For this study, then, I have chosen to analyze representations of the witch identity as mediated by Swedish self-identifying witches on Instagram.

## Research Aim and Questions

As stated above, my aim for this thesis is to analyze representations of the Witch identity as mediated by Swedish self-identifying Witches on Instagram. For clarity, I will henceforth refer to the people and actions associated with the penal code as “witches,” and “witchcraft”, the witch trials and hunts as such, and the contemporarily proclaimed identity marker as Witch. I have conducted this research within the confines of digital religion to explore who and what a Witch is according to them, and in extension, how the Instagram post is utilized as a mediator of these representations. I have conducted this study from a point of departure in *third spaces of religion*, and through discourse and narrative analysis. My aim is also to expand on previous scholarship on the Swedish Instagram Witch and to further contribute to scholarship on digital religion and *hypermediation theory* specifically. My research questions are:

RQ1: Who or what is a contemporary Swedish Witch according to these self-identifying Witches, and how is that identity constructed, articulated, and (hyper)mediated through Instagram? In other words, what, to me, perceivable articulations and (re)negotiations regarding what a Witch is are present in the material, and how can discourse- and narrative analysis help us understand these?

RQ2: How can the material be understood through the theory of *hypermediation*?

I will conclude this section with a caveat by pointing out the disadvantages and advantages with researching contemporary phenomena. That is, observing at the precipice of the continuous unfolding of events, and the “here and now” -ness of research. At the one hand the material sources are generative and pretty accessible, and at the other it conditions an ephemeral quality to the findings that cannot be disregarded. Therefore, I view this thesis as a preliminary study in an ongoing effort to further understand these phenomena.

## Limitations, Caveats and Material

As for any study, limitations are key to success. In this case, the first is tied to the medium.<sup>1</sup> Instagram, as the site for data collection, was chosen because it has been noted as a prominent platform among the target group (Vikman 2022; Jonsson 2022). Second, as aforementioned, Instagram posts were analyzed, that is, the posts publicized on the “grid” page of the platform. Third, only posts from public accounts with a minimum of 1000 followers were included. This choice was informed in adherence with research ethics requirements and my research aim; to include only subjects who are actively and openly mediating acts of imparting representations of a Witch identity and thereby can be interpreted as figures with a broad public as the intended audience. Fourth, the subjects of this study are people located in Sweden, confirmed via hashtags and geolocations. Fifth, posts had to contain explicit written statements in the style of “as a Witch” or “we, Witches” to be considered. This limitation came to entail a delicate dance of interpretation, as one might argue that *all* posts on a self-identifying witch’s profile can be interpreted as articulations of the Witch’s identity. However, as the aim of the study is to examine how the Witch’s identity is articulated and mediated in a disseminative or representational manner, the most literal type of posts was found to be most suited for this endeavor. Sixth, only posts between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2024, were considered. The scope of the collection was shaped in the balance between collecting a broad enough sample over time to possibly reach a diverse set of posts, while managing time limitations. This sample, as previously noted, should therefore not be regarded as exhaustive by any means.

Subsequently, the material has been collected within the context of blogosphere studies, which allows the researcher to collect material unobtrusively. However, this should not imply an “objective” or neutral process. From a digital humanities perspective, the material is *created* by the researcher rather than *captured* (Masson 2017, 31-32). The sample was collected manually through multiple points of entry; from keyword-searching the word *häxa* (witch in Swedish), and through snowball sampling. These collection methods were combined because of the nature of Instagram and the fact that META does not provide means for systematic data collection for research without a nearly impossible-to-obtain API key. The reasoning behind this collection method, its benefits, and challenges will be further elaborated on in the methodology and discussion sections.

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<sup>1</sup> In choosing Instagram, however, I do not consider it an isolated island among other forms of media, but as an interconnected piece in a larger media environment (Echchaibi and Hoover 2023, 24; Scolari 2015, 1099).

The collected sample consists of 73 posts from 21 accounts. Besides the written aspect of the posts, there are 99 accompanying images (with removed duplicates, for example, when a post showcased three images on the same ceramic cup in different angles, these were combined into one image for analysis). Three images were originally videos that have been turned into stills. This choice was challenging to make, but because of time management and methodological restrictions, since this is not a thesis on video analysis, I chose to make a still of the video to at least include some visual analysis besides the text analysis.

## Introducing Instagram

Digital media scholars Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin (2020) describe Instagram as a “conduit for communication in the increasingly vast landscape of visual social media cultures.” (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020, 1). Instagram is a digital image-sharing social media application that launched in 2010. In addition to social aspects of commenting, liking, and hashtagging, defining elements upon launching were retro aesthetics (polaroid styled posts, filters, square frames, etcetera). Since launch, the platform has had several iterations and features added, such as video, music, and a “story” feature, which, since 2018, allows for augmented filters, in-post interactions through polls, and more (Ibid., 47). The context of posting has changed over time, as the authors put it, from the archival and spontaneous: “Invoking memory, creating memory through the aesthetics of nostalgia” (Ibid., 33) to planned photography or “doing it for the ‘gram”” (Ibid., 65). Ultimately, the authors argue via digital Media scholar Elisa Serafinelli, that Instagram has become a place for niche interest groups connecting through visual genres, and that

the shared visuals act as a social connector, and as an inspiration or catalyst for physical meets. Aesthetic communities also develop around particular visual styles and genres, from minimalism to brutalist architecture, around sharing art and documenting creative practice. Such communities may be extensions of pre-existing networks on Facebook, Twitter and more, but they may also involve new connections and content not shared elsewhere. (Ibid., 66)

Regarding these self-identifying witches as an aesthetic community, I would, in addition, like to argue that the relevance and value of studying Instagram is interrelated to its instantaneity and directness to this community. This is not to suggest that what is mediated on Instagram should be regarded as more “authentic” than, for example, ethnographical interviews, quantitative surveys, or representations in legacy media.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I see my approach in this study as a continuation of the unobtrusive collection method utilized in blogosphere studies, where digital media platforms can be considered as storytelling machines, with special affordances, enabling certain narratives and voices to be expressed, uninfluenced or un-interfered with and by interpretation via, for example, research or journalistic interviews. Microblogs, such as Instagram, can also provide space where groups that perceive themselves as socially marginalized may challenge mainstream discourse (Rogers 2019, 153-170; Evolvi 2019, 13-14). Blogosphere studies, in other words, entails interacting with primary texts, or biographies that deposit “explosive subjectivity”, which has been considered “perfect” material by sociologists such as Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas (Hookway and Snee 2017, 381).

## Disposition

The thesis is structured as follows: The first half includes the Literature Review section, which contains a brief review of research on the witch “through the ages,” followed by an overview of research on Witches in digital religion studies. In the following Theoretical Framework section, I situate the study within the framework of *third spaces of digital religion* and *hypermediation*. Then, in the Methodology section, I will further elaborate on the blogosphere method, ethics, and my chosen analysis methods: discursive and narrative analysis. The second half of this study is the Results, Analysis and Discussion section. The final section is Conclusions and Future Studies. The thesis ends with an Appendix (a list of the posts in the sample) and References.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Hookway and Snee (2017) or D’Ambrosio and Moeller’s (2021) concept of *proflicity*.

## Literature Review

### The Witch Through the Ages

The witch is a topic of extensive research, both of the historical persecution of “witches” and the religious identity rooted in modernity. Although this study primarily interacts with the latter, I will start the following section with a brief historical contextualization of the legal terminology and its presumed conception. Here I am following Bengt Ankarloo (1990), who argues that the ideation of the “witch” in Sweden, which roughly began in the 1300s, was intrinsically linked to Continental law, albeit with local variations (Ankarloo 1990, 285-287). It is with this motivation that the following section will include both Swedish, European, and American scholarship on the witch, from the medieval age to the early modern period.

The first Swedish national penal code on “witchcraft” was inspired by continental law and written in 1350 to be revised, further formalized, and put in force between the 1440s and the first half of the 1700s. The law in Sweden was initially targeting physically harmful magical practices (*maleficium*), but was later expanded to include non-lethal harmful practices. Only *maleficium* leading to death was formalized as a capital offence, whereas less harmful offenses were punished by fines. However, punishment for superstition, dealings with devilish arts and literature, was to be enforced through ecclesiastical law from the late 1300s (Ankarloo 1990, 287). In the 1600s, sparked by influential post-reformist and elite writings on the *maleficium*, the introduction of the *Witches’ Sabbath* overlapped with local beliefs of *Blåkulla* (Blue Hill) (Ibid., 288-230). Ankarloo assumes a skeptical stance towards previous theories of class conflict and alliance between church and state as driving conditions for the witch hunts in Sweden. Instead, Ankarloo draws on historian Christina Larner’s suggestion of why women, and old women at that, were more often accused and convicted than men for “witchery.” They argue that the disproportioned prosecution of women was due to population imbalance caused by the continental wars, which led to a greater independence for women, resulting in “a number of interlocking processes that converged to create a picture of women as disorderly and threatening to patriarchal order.” (Ibid., 316) Additionally, by law, the only instance where women could be convicted to capital punishment was for “witchery.” However, executions were rare and belief in “witches” varied, as skepticism had long been present among state officials (Ibid., 287-288, 294).

## The Romantization of the Witch as an Emancipatory Symbol and the Genesis of Neopaganism.

In the 2018 article “The Meaning of the Word ‘Witch,’” Historian Ronald Hutton examines and critiques the historical and academic understanding and usage of the words “witch” and “witchcraft” in the British context. Hutton suggests the ubiquitous meaning of the word “witch” is tied to medieval jurisprudence, where “witchcraft” – a term with unknown origin – went from being known as a magic amongst other magics, to become a catch-all term for a plethora of magical practices, and later a term specifically for maleficent magical practices. Hutton argues that these understandings witchcraft was cemented by elite post-reform Christian writers (academicians, lawmakers, etcetera) as a way of “attacking in particular people who offered beneficial magical services.” (Hutton 2018, 108) Hutton concludes

...the two traditional meanings are still current and have been joined in popular parlance by two more, which are distinctively modern: of a witch as an expression of individual self-realization and liberation, especially for women, and as a practitioner of a Pagan religion devoted to the forces of nature. (Ibid., 119)

In sum, according to Ronald Hutton, the concepts of witch and witchcraft, have four historically situated and distinct meanings: (1) a catch-all term for all kinds of magics, (2) maleficent magic, (3) the expression and liberation of the individual, and (4) a practitioner of pagan religion. The third and fourth meaning will be further elaborated upon below.

In the second edition of the scholarly acclaimed work on the history of contemporary witchcraft, *The Triumph of the Moon* (2019), Hutton outlines the history of British modern Pagan Witchcraft, a religious current (without an entirely traced etymology), assessed as a child of the Romantic era with roots in historic paganism (Doyle White and Feraro 2019). Per Faxneld (2017) suggests that the witch was (re)claimed as a discursive subject foremost in literature, and an emancipatory figure together with Satan, utilized by writers such as Mathilda Joslyn Gage as anti-patriarchal symbols in the 1880s and 90s (Faxneld 2017, 307-382; van Lujik 2016, 69-112). Anna Bohlin, scholar in Literature Studies, suggests that negotiations of the witch and magic in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Swedish literature served as important symbols in the development of the Swedish nation state, citizenship, ideals of progress, and Christianity. Furthermore, Bohlin argues that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary witch can, to a certain extent, be interpreted as a

“predecessor to the 1970s feminist movement’s usage of the witch in the debate regarding power and civic participation.” (Bohlin 2018, 76)<sup>3</sup>, where the “witch” became a formative representation for identity construction as a symbol against gendered oppression. Indeed, the “witch” was to be even more closely associated with feminist and environmentalist discourse(s) from the modern period, through the Neopagan current (Feraro 2015).

Neopaganism, then, is an ephemeral religious current commonly traced to the creation of Wicca by Gerald Gardner in post-war United Kingdom. Wicca originated with the publication of Gardner’s seminal book, *Witchcraft Today*, in 1954. Gardner fostered a deep interest in folklore and was inspired by the writings of Margaret Murray (whom I will return to below), as well as esoteric initiatory organizations, such as Ordo Templi Orientalis (OTO), and the Freemasons. Although the etymology is uncertain, Wicca in this context was understood by Gardner as “Wise One.” Hutton compares the conception of modern paganism with the Protestant Reformation (Hutton 2019, 213-260). Wicca has, since its conception, been accredited as a post-modern religious current as it is not organized in traditional religious structures associated with Christianity and other established religions. Instead, it is defined as eclectic and non-institutionalized, with no primary texts venerated by all practitioners (Berger and Ezzy 2009, 503). Religious Studies scholar Pavel Hórák suggests that currents beneath the Neopagan umbrella should be regarded as a sort of shadow religion to Christianity, as it has been shaped and conditioned by a Christian context (Horák 2020). Maybe a mirror metaphor could be helpful here as well; perhaps neopaganism can be seen as a reflection of Christianity, as it is often constructed as juxtaposed, yet with significant overlap in structures (Doyle White and Feraro 2019; Faxneld 2020).

### Hutton’s Key Traits of Contemporary Witches

A key belief for both Gardnerian Wiccans, modern and contemporary Witches, Hutton argues, is that “the people persecuted as witches in late medieval and early modern Europe had been practitioners of a surviving pagan religion which was feminist, life-affirming, nature-loving and rebellious.” (Hutton 2019, 428). This conviction can partially be traced to, among others, Margaret Murray and the publication of the debunked yet still highly influential book *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* in 1921. Which claimed to prove that the victims of the witch trials

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<sup>3</sup> My translation.

were members of a surviving pagan religion (Ibid., 202). The link between ancient practices and the witch trials has since been scrutinized by scholars and have, in some cases, led to a shift in narrative and phrasing by practitioners of magic. Hence, some contemporary witches refer to the victims of the witch trials as “wise men” and “wise women” or “Cunning Folk.” “Cunning folk,” then, is a ubiquitous term, much like witch, and refers to practitioners of magical crafts associated with Druidry and folk magic (Hutton 2018). Indeed, this shift towards the “wise woman” is affirmed as a narrative to create and secure an authentic narrative link between contemporary Pagans and the past by, for example, anthropologist Helen Cornish (2019). This historical link remains to be traced by scholars, however, Hutton states that there are possible links between ancient ceremonial, “learned” magic and contemporary Paganism through, for example, ritual texts. Yet the common organizational structures are most likely derived from Freemasonry rather than ancient mystery cults (for instance, in practices of initiation) (Ibid., 429-430).<sup>4</sup> Hutton concludes in *The Triumph of the Moon* (2019) that modern and contemporary Witchcraft or Paganism share distinctive traits, particularly three components. The first is the “acceptance of the inherent divinity of the natural world and the rejection of any notion of the creation of [that] world by an external power.” The second is the “rejection of any concepts of sin and salvation.” And the third is the “acceptance that divinity can be both female and male.” (Hutton 2019, 409) To summarize, Hutton suggests that what unites pagans as a religious “kit”, is the drawing on pre-Christian religious symbolism, and an imagined kinship and identification with a reclaimed and positive version of the “traditional figure of the witch” (Ibid., 410; Doyle White and Feraro 2019). Furthermore, Hutton argues that self-realization or “enchantment of powers within” is the essence of modern and contemporary Neopagan religious experience. Whether or not the participant chooses to interact with spirits and deities as literal entities during ceremonies is not essential (Hutton 2019, 411).

## The Witch and Mass Media

Depictions of witchcraft and the witch have an intrinsic relationship to fiction and mass media (Hutton 2018). In contemporary and global culture, the witch is a ubiquitous symbol produced through intellectual properties such as *American Horror Story*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *W.I.T.C.H.*, to name a few. In “Mass Media and Religious Identity: A Case Study of Young Witches” (2009), Sociologists Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy present the correlation

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<sup>4</sup> See also Henrik Bogdan, *From Darkness to Light: Western Esoteric Rituals of Initiation* (2003), 201-234.

between media depictions of the witch and the surge in young people identifying as Witches. They argue that global mass media mediations such as books, movies, internet sites, and magazines are key repositories for identity construction and maintenance of young Witches' identity in late modernity, alongside previously presented currents of feminism, individualism, and environmentalism. However, Berger and Ezzy argue that mass media are also sources or sites of ambivalence in two ways. The first concerns the double-edged nature of exposure, where it was both regarded as an affordance in identity construction and as a potential site for contestation and attack (from the religious right in this context). The second important aspect of late-modern and contemporary Witches' identity is the self-reflexive nature of the interaction with mass media depictions of witches and witchcraft.

The visual media influences young people's self-identity as witches by helping to legitimate their concepts of "moving energy," practicing magic, and using Wiccan ethics to frame their life choices. It furthermore provides an image to react against, in which they are able to define their own spiritual and magical practices as distinct from the media images. By doing this they can present themselves as serious practitioners of the religion and not as "just kids" playing at being witches. This is important for their own self-image as well as their image among their peers, with their parents, and within the larger world. (Berger and Ezzy 2009, 510)

Berger and Ezzy suggest that only a small percentage of those who interact with mass media depictions and later seek out information about witches become practitioners. Nevertheless, they argue that there is a synergetic relationship between mass media depictions and the concurrent late-modern movements of feminism, individualism, and environmentalism as motivations for adopting the identity (Ibid., 511). This argument shares similarities with Christopher Partridge's influential *Occulture* concept. Where (mass) media, since the spiritual revolution of the 1960s, has driven the occult to cultural ubiquity and thus re-enchanting "the west" instead of reaching a state of complete secularity, as have been the previous conceptions of post-enlightenment religious development (Partridge 2012, 2005). Most important for this study, however, is the conclusion posed by Berger and Ezzy that "Witchcraft does not use the visual media in a systematic or planned way to promote the religion, as there is no central

bureaucracy, leader, or money to do so.” (Berger and Ezzy 2009, 511) This suggestion will be further interacted with in the second half of this thesis.

Other researchers with a Media Studies perspective have explored the relationship between popular culture, such as science fiction and fantasy, and neopaganism, and in extension, evolving conceptions of belief, body, and technology. Religion and popular culture are, in this context, commonly argued to have a dialogical relationship, where ideas and perceptions of technology and body are re-conceptualized and negotiated through (mass) media depictions and practices (Bittarello 2008; Cusack 2010).

### “Technopagan is the Term”: Witches on the Internet

Witch is a fluid identity marker, and a Witch may inhabit more than one Neopagan-affiliated identity at once. Moreover, Neopagan and other designations such as hag, priestess, heathen, and others, are used somewhat interchangeably by the group and in the material to refer to Witch and/or other Neopagan currents simultaneously. Sometimes specifically and sometimes generally. The following section will thereby cautiously treat the terminology similarly, up to the specific section on Swedish Instagram Witches.

As early adopters of the internet, Witches’ interaction with digital media has been studied for an extensive period of time. This field comprises an array of entry points, as it is a multidisciplinary field that intersects religion and media studies. This field, I think, can with some exceptions be categorized as two distinctive ‘veins’ of investigation. Both currents are broadly investigating *lived* aspects of contemporary religion and can be considered part of the *material turn* of religious studies.

The first vein, then, concerns *mediation*. It focuses on rituals, and embodiment of Witches and Neopagans online. Key concepts here are imagination and embodiment, that is, the practice and experience of the online as a magical site. The internet is conceptualized as a space with special technological affordances enabling identity construction, communication, and practices, such as rituals and ceremonies. This kind of religious studies-oriented scholarship often investigates themes like the relationship between body, technology, and spatiality (Grieve 1995; O’Leary 1996; Cowan 2005; Fernback 2002; Evolvi 2021; Evolvi 2023). The media studies-leaning scholarship appears to primarily investigate how authority, authenticity, and identities are

mediated through digital media practices (Cowan 2005; Downing 2020; Warren 2020; Lindstedt 2023). The second vein of interest is that of *mediatization*, which centers on digital media effects on spiritual and magical practices, such as *platform logics* and how consumer culture shapes neopagan identities and practices (Fine 2019; Renser and Tiidenberg 2020; Miller 2022). In other words, the first vein centers practitioner experience of the medium, and the second is medium-oriented centering how the medium itself shapes user (inter)action, albeit with significant overlaps. Below, I will present a handful of studies that are relevant to my own investigation, which I primarily place within the mediation vein of investigation, yet I will also consider aspects of mediatization theory to an extent.

Historian of Religion Gregory Price Grieve (1995) was among the first to observe and record the online forum and live-chat Witch communities, focusing on ritual, community, and what he conceptualizes as “ritual imagination.” Sociology of Religion scholar Douglas E. Cowan (2005) examines Neopagan identity and community construction and rituals on online forums through the theory of *metatechnology*. That is, the perspective of viewing the internet as a site for what is “conceived and experienced” by the users, “in the interactive interstices” between hardware, software programming, and communication (Ibid., 5). Cowan regards the online forums as entry points and important mediators for pagan identity and community building. Furthermore, Cowan conclusively argues that, although there is an influx of pagan representation(s) online, researchers should adopt a moderate interpretation of an expansion of online pagan influence. Cowan’s argument here mostly centers on the pseudonymous and anonymous nature of the semi or closed forum environment, its opaque nature, and the discrepancy between online and offline authority and community building. Later scholarship, that by Religion and Media Studies scholar Giulia Evolvi (2021), investigates and theorizes religious mediation through Neopagan online rituals. Evolvi argues the importance of paying attention to materiality, spatiality, and embodiment when investigating online *hypermediated third spaces*. Evolvi suggests, as a part of the anthology *Third Space of Digital Religion* (2023), that the online environment functions “as if” a legitimate religious space for Neopagan communities, laden with specific affordances that easily lend themselves to contemporary Neopagan currents. Her findings were that: (1) Digital spaces are favored as platforms for legitimization by Neopagans and function as a space to challenge institutionalized religion(s). (2) Digital space fits the eclectic nature of Neopaganism with its access to a vast array of information. (3) Online third space displays a particular fit to Neopagan activity because, not unlike what was stated by Grieve and Cowan, Neopagan “ritual imagination,” which provides a flexible notion of space, physical and non-

physical, where “sacred space is conceptualized as being situated between virtual venues and materiality.” (Evolvi 2023, 88) In comparison, differences in later scholarship often lie in the hierarchical distinction and approach to authenticity and experience, where Evolvi makes no hard distinction between offline and online religious practices and regards the relationship between the two as fluid and interlinked (Evolvi 2023).

Another important aspect of digital religion studies is authority. In 2020, Study of Religions scholar Áine Warren theorized the authority formations of a Neopagan community on YouTube, challenging the perceptions of online Neopagan networks as horizontal authority structures. Instead, Warren suggests a horizontal-to-vertical axis to understand neopagan authority. Warren’s investigation centers on the *formative* and *nonformative* aesthetic influence and vis-à-vis authority of one prominent agent on Neopagan altar videos. Ross Downing’s article “Hashtag Heathens: Contemporary Germanic Pagan Feminine Visuals on Instagram” (2019) is a netnographic study of heathen influencers on Instagram. Investigating the relationship between commerce through *Religious Market Theory* and religious expression on Instagram by women who identify as followers of Norse or Germanic heathenry. Downing argues that the platform functions as a mediator of not only commercial interests, but of theological and identity expressions through multimedia means.

Sociologist Marta R. Jabłońska (2024) investigates Slavic Witches’ use of social media and its impact on contemporary neopagan practices and identity construction, through a comparative analysis of Catholicism in Poland. Although primarily concerned with contemporary practices, Jabłońska concludes her study by noting the perceptions of the (Polish) Witch as multifarious and ambiguous; both demonic and divine, powerful and an innocent victim, sexually enlightened and a skilled herbalist, wise and rebellious in defying Christianity. This, Jabłońska argues, provides an extensive backdrop of highly individualized imagery, choices and pulls to interact with Witchcraft today (Jabłońska 2024, 135).

Carolina Lindstedt (2023) investigates in her MA thesis, nature-oriented Neopagans’ “experiences and approaches to religious practices.” (Lindstedt 2023) It is a netnographic study of self-identifying Pagans on the Reddit board “SASSWitches” (i.e., skeptical, agnostic/atheist, and/or science-seeking Witches). Lindstedt utilizes the lived religion perspective, focusing on the analytical concepts: spiritual dimensions, embodiment, emotions, and materiality. Her findings were that the participants’ “concept of religion should be viewed in light of their

feelings of reverence and wonder towards nature and science.” (Lindstedt 2023, ii), and emphasis on imagination-as-religious experience in a secular context, bearing similarities to previous research on esoteric currents’ relationship to religious experience and science (Faxneld 2020, 18-24).

On the mediatization leaning side of recent scholarship, we have Sociologists and Media scholars such as Berit Renser and Karin Tiidenberg (2020) who investigated Estonian Witches’ usage of Facebook groups and Messenger. Through mediatization theory, the concept of *technological affordances*, and the *communicative figurations model*, they found that it is

(1) characterized by networked eclecticism; (2) enacted by witches who amass authority by successfully using social media affordances; and (3) consists of practices and rituals that are preferred by seekers, easily transferable to social media settings and validated by Facebook algorithms. (Renser and Tiidenberg 2020, 1)

Other scholars, such as Chris Miller (2022), have investigated the relationship between consumer capitalism and technological affordances and how these affect Witches’ posting actions on TikTok. Miller identifies and suggests further research regarding the tension between commercial success and religious authority and authenticity in social media spaces. Similar to Coco and Woodward’s research on a Witches’ community’s messaging boards, ideas of authority and authenticity are contested and heavily negotiated processes within the communities they researched (Coco and Woodward 2007).

## The Swedish Instagram Witch

As of writing, peer-reviewed publications specifically about Swedish Witches’ online presence are hard to find, but I have found two very helpful MA theses that have been used as springboards for discussion and comparison in my study.

Religious Studies MA Emil Vikman (2021) sets out to analyze Swedish Instagram Witches and how their worldview is mediated and negotiated within a secular Swedish context. It is a netnographic study where Vikman categorizes 200 Instagram posts collected within a 30-day period and analyzes their contents through Paul Heelas’ *Transgressive Thesis Theory* (TTT).

Vikman concludes that the religious content is prominent in the material, with distinct repeating aspects of a living nature, mental manifestation, and both psychological and physical healing. The representations or worldviews were disparate in practice, but shared commonality in their goal of self-realization and development. Vikman notes a small percentage of secular-coded content set within the codes of everyday life, physical activity, beauty, and inspiration. Vikman suggests a difference from previous research in a notable absence of feminist and environmentalist coded material and instead found significant representation of mental health discourse. Vikman also notes an absence of commercial content and Wicca in the material compared to previous research.

Filippa Jonsson's Media and Communication Studies thesis "The Instagram Witch" (2022) is primarily an interview study, with aspects of online and offline ethnography. Jonsson investigates contemporary Swedish Witchcraft and the negotiations and effects between practices and digital media affordances, with the primary point of departure in mediatization theory. Findings indicate a digital transformation of the participants' Witchcraft practices when applied in digital space. That is; to successfully drive online *ritual transfer*, digital and aesthetic creativity are considered as core components. Furthermore, Jonsson notes that digital "witchcraft creates innuendo for a marketization of witchcraft and in extension a neo-esotericism of witchcraft in the form of paywalls." (Jonsson 2022, 1). Jonsson also argues for a "mundane" (what I interpret as mundane from a perceived secular perspective) understanding of magic in the participants' everyday life, centering contestation tied to feminist and environmentalist positionings against globalization and alienating conditions of modern society.

## Research Gap

As we can see, the two MA theses in the section above reached quite different conclusions regarding the presence of discourses of feminism and environmentalism in the Contemporary Swedish Witch community on Instagram. I find Vikman's findings especially interesting in comparison to previous research and my own material, which, as we will see, features a prominent presence of both feminist and environmentalist discourses. Of course, differences in findings can be a matter of chosen methodology and research questions, and probably again the ephemeral quality of contemporary research. Whatever may have caused the disparities in results between Jonsson's, Vikman's, and my research, I think, demonstrates that the amount of

research conducted on Instagram and this topic is not exhaustive, further motivating more research engaging with varied disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological points of entry.

## Theoretical Framework: Digital Religion and Third Spaces of Religion.

Below I will shortly review and present my chosen theoretical framework of digital religion and third spaces of digital religion. Lastly, I will present my chosen theory for this project, which is Guilia Evoli's hypermediation theory. The theories and analysis methods utilized in this study was, as I will elaborate further in the methodology section, chosen through an abductive process.

In short, digital religion as a field of study has its origins in the 1990s and has had four "waves" of scholarship. Media and Religion scholars Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria summarize these waves as "descriptive, categorical, theoretical, and convergent" (Campbell and Tsuria 2021, 10). The first and second waves of scholarship went from documenting digital religious activity online to researching negotiations of identity, authority, and legitimacy in digital spaces. The third wave scholarship investigates rituals and the tension and relationship between the "online" and "offline," while expanding on methodology. The fourth wave is characterized by further development of mediation and mediatization theories, theories of embodiment, and is regarded as a convergence of the previous waves. In *Digital Religion* (2021), Campbell and Tsuria argue for an emerging fifth wave, characterized by new technology and methodology, interdisciplinary studies, and practitioner-led scholarship. Focus for this wave is digital theology, and "the current strengthening of traditional and even fundamental religious positions." (Campbell and Tsuria 2021, 10)

### Third Spaces of Digital Religion

As this study investigates articulations of the Witch identity mediated in digital spaces (Instagram), I have chosen to follow Media and Religion scholars Stewart Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi's aforementioned *Third Spaces of Digital Religion* (2023) approach. Placed in the intersection between religion and media studies, this perspective takes particular interest in how "space, language, and aesthetics of religion are repositioned and reassembled to fashion alternative social and knowledge formations." (Ibid., 28) Drawing on Homi Bhabha's *third space theory* which centers post-colonial conditions of hybridity, imitations and negotiations of identity, Hoover and Echchaibi regard the "in-between-ness" or "third-ness" of digital space as defining characteristics of digital religion, its workings and articulations as somewhere between

and beyond public and private spaces such as work, news media, places of worship or at home. (Ibid., 4-7; Berg 2018, 277)

So, what defines religion within the confines of this theoretical framing? First and foremost, Hoover and Echchaibi draw on the definition and inclusion of religious expressions as *family resemblance*. That is, rather than applying a rigid definition of religion, they regard religion as a fluid aspect of a broad cultural spectrum. This approach enables researchers to approach looser networks and non-institutionalized practices as objects of study. In extension, although it is connected to the physical world, the digital realm is perceived as interconnected spaces with unique sets of affordances that do not necessarily correspond with the physical world. Researching digital religion in this way asks the question “what might we learn by assuming that in digital religion we were looking at something on its own terms and its own locations?” (Hoover and Echchaibi 2023, 3) They continue:

The significance of this to the “received religious” or “received spiritual” is obvious along a number of dimensions, but one in particular stands out: if there is some way that digital religion might be uniquely sited or located to be able to help re-imagine religion, then rather profound implications for religious authority present themselves.” (Ibid., 3)

The above framing is reflected in the present study, as I have collected material from self-identifying Witches and posts clearly intended to mediate their Witch identity, and in certain ways claim voice or authority over it.

### Hypermediated Third Spaces of Religion

Apart from Bhabha’s theory, Hoover and Echchaibi draw on several media theories and set up three major conditions for their third spaces of religion approach. First, they reference media theorist Nick Couldry’s *media super-saturation* concept, which is an extension of mediatization theory, that conditions (digital) media as a ubiquitous and social presence in everyday life. Thereby attention is directed towards the “received religious” in these spaces, rather than regarding digital and mass media as “new” influences that affect institutions, as has been the case in previous scholarship. Hoover and Echchaibi argue for a mediatization theory approach that “focuses on continuities in the ways in which religions have always been mediated, and

sees more modern means of mediation, such as in the digital realm, as evolutions, rather than disruptions.” (Echchaibi and Hoover 2023, 18)<sup>5</sup> This perspective is helpful because (Swedish) Witchcraft, as previously mentioned, is not an institutionalized religious current and, beyond that, has a long going relationship with digital media. I define digital media, following Evolvi, as both communicative tools and experiential objects (Evolvi 2019, 26). The second condition for Hoover and Echchaibi’s third space approach is the resignation from secularization theory – that is, the idea of the disappearance of religion in contemporary society. Conversely, religious life is changing and expanding beyond previous scholarly imagination. This will be elaborated on below as *post-secularity*. The third condition is the Giddean structuralist view “that social action plays in the constitution of social structure, and on the self.” (Echchaibi and Hoover 2023, 7) Digital third spaces, then, become venues for negotiation of religious identity across multiple platforms and publics, which allows for types of interaction not always afforded in physical space. It can also create tension as it is situated between

private and public, between institution and individual, between authority and individual autonomy, between large media framings and individual “pro-sumption,” between local and translocal, etc. Digital third spaces of religion are fluidly bounded. Boundaries are important, but they are subject to a constant process of negotiation. (Hoover and Echchaibi 2023, 26)

Third spaces are, as previously mentioned, considered spaces capable of sustaining authentic (religious) experiences. This is theorized through regarding digital third spaces as an aesthetic action. That is, “They act “as-if” the various expressions they craft in these spaces represent grounded, received truth claims for known communities of shared experience and value.” (Hoover and Echchaibi 2023, 10-11)

Drawing on Hoover and Echchaibi’s theory, *hypermediated spaces* are approached from a spatial perspective. In *Blogging My Religion* (2019), Evolvi characterizes hypermediation as a process of social formations and communications across several spaces, and yet they are conditioned by digital spaces. That is, digital spaces are regarded as generative and independent yet interconnected with others. Hypermediated spaces are investigated through negotiations and tension between three dialectical pairs: mainstream-alternative, public-private, and real-

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<sup>5</sup> See also Lundby 2012, 228–229; Evolvi and Lundby 2022.

imagined. Blogs, Evolvi argues, are examples of hypermediated third spaces because of the oral quality of offline interaction, thus “mirroring conversations that normally happen in physical spaces” (Evolvi 2019, 13).

Microblogs such as Instagram, Evolvi writes, provide venues for communities who perceive themselves as disenfranchised elsewhere and, as such, digital space becomes a venue for counter-hegemonic discourse to take place, and for groups with different values to negotiate. From the dialectical pairing of mainstream-alternative spaces, alternative is understood by Evolvi as both alternative elements that are not incorporated in mainstream culture and mainstream oppositional elements, creating counter-hegemonic discourse. (Evolvi 2019, 39-40). The pairing of public-private spaces refers to the fluidity and tension in communication between small communities as well as a broader public(s) (Evolvi 2019, 42-43). The pairing of real-imagined spaces is defined as the tension between using digital space to both discuss religion, its place in society, as well as practices and beliefs, “but also to imagine realities that are different from the one in which they live, both at the aesthetic and conceptual level.” (Evolvi 2019, 46) Hypermediated spaces become mediators of shared and contested aesthetics and sentiments, interacting as imagined communities through shared visual and narrative production. Hypermediated spaces also become sites for secular, religious, and post-secular negotiations. Post-secularity, is understood by Evolvi as: “the phenomenon of 'believing without belonging': people are not necessarily less religious but rather navigate a society where religious and non-religious domains continuously evolve and intersect with each other.” (Ibid., 25)

Furthermore, hypermediated spaces are understood as sites that mediate emotion, exemplified by Evolvi through nationalism. National identity as an imagined community may elicit strong feelings, even resulting in violence from acting in favor of the (imagined) community. Imagined communities occupy several spaces, and online spaces are “understood as potentially generative of social imaginations and authentic in virtue of the meanings and feelings they elicit, and offline spaces, which are tangible locations impacted by the creative activity of digital spaces.” (Evolvi 2019, 49)

This theoretical framework connects with and highlights certain recurring themes found in the material, as it theorizes emotional elements in (media) life, bridging offline and online environments (Evolvi 2021; Lundby and Evolvi 2022; Evolvi 2023). Hypermediation as a

theoretical frame lends itself well to this study, as it asks amongst other things: “Why do certain religious groups choose the internet to articulate their narratives? Would they be able to express themselves in the same way without the internet?” (Evolvi 2019, 14) Combined with third spaces of digital religion, digital media practices are regarded as venues for both expression and influence, consensus and resistance affecting social spaces and formations (Hoover and Echchaibi, 9).

## Methodology

As aforementioned, I have chosen an abductive approach for this study, that is, the theory was chosen in dialogue with the material through several rounds of coding. A close reading of the material and initial coding was conducted in the first round, breaking down the text components as granularly as possible. Theoretical perspectives were continuously tested on the material in a repetitive process until reaching a point of abstraction. Brianna L. Kennedy describes abduction as

an iterative interplay between (a) data collection and analysis, in which the ongoing analysis of data suggests plausible hypotheses to investigate further; and (b) data and theory, in which researchers have to draw implicitly or explicitly on previous theoretical knowledge but also re-think, revise, or challenge established theoretical assumptions to resolve surprising or puzzling data. (Kennedy 2018, 6)

Below I present the chosen collection and analytical methods for this endeavor.

## Blogosphere Studies

As I previously have argued for *why* blogosphere studies are suited for this project, I have dedicated the following section to motivating *how* I have employed it. I consider the Instagram posts as “contemporary documents of life.” (Hookway and Snee 2017, 394) and thereby place this study within the qualitative and ethnographical current of blogosphere studies (henceforth blog studies and analysis). As presented by Nicholas Hookway and Helene Snee in *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods* (2017), blog analysis is a form of digital text analysis that comprises four steps: (1) *Selection criteria*, which was discussed in the Limitations section

above. (2) *Data collection*, where I utilized variants of both *searching* and *trawling* in this study; that is, I used the platform-based search engine to do a keyword search for “häxa,” (“witch,”) which led me to posts. If the account was suitable according to the research criteria, it was reviewed in depth, post-to-post, within the set time limitation. Accounts that were tagged or mentioned by accounts previously deemed suitable were then also reviewed, and so on. Eligible posts were screen-captured, tagged, and saved manually. (3) *Establishing an online presence*. This step is optional, and as no interaction was solicited in this study, it was passed over. (4) *Preparing the data for analysis*. This step entails organizing and coding the material; in this case, all posts were given a numeric identification number before being placed in a Word document to be manually coded before analysis. As a “pre-coding,” of sorts, I used Voyant Tools, which is an online open-source digital text analysis tool (Sinclair and Rockwell 2025). Using a digital text-analysis tool is a way to get a rudimentary overview of collected material and get initial insights into, for example, (1) the most frequent words appearing in the material, and (2) their *collocates*, which are their neighboring words in the text (Sinclair and Rockwell 2025; Tsuria et al. 2017, 80-83). I uploaded the text-based sample data as a Word document and refined the results through auto-generated stop words in Swedish and English. I found that utilizing digitally aided textual analysis tools alongside manual coding helped me conceptualize coding categories and locate literal connections between concepts and constructions in the text that I might have overlooked. However, manual coding was imperative to distinguish context-dependent codes and non-literal connections or simply, for example, when the text contained negations. Using this combination of methods was a delicate dance between literal and contextual interpretation, both of which are necessary when constructing categories for analysis. Important to note, though, is that each method is laden with its specific conditions and should not be considered as “neutral” data, but created (Masson 2017, 30-32).

## Discourse and Narrative Analysis

Drawing on Religious Studies scholar Kristel Torgrimsson ’s dissertation on Mormon feminist identity construction through the podcast medium (2025), I have predominantly chosen to follow Discourse theorists Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Philips and their presentation of the Political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse analysis originally presented in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) (Jørgensen and Philips 2002; Torgrimsson 2025, 86). I have also utilized aspects of Torgrimsson's narrative analysis toolkit, which I will return to below. I find that this mixture of discursive and narrative analysis lends itself well to the

study. Because, as Hookway and Snee argue, narrative inquiry in blog studies centers on “how participants use stories to interpret their biographical experience, create meaning and construct identity” (Hookway and Snee 2017, 387) it also melds well with the theoretical framework of third spaces of religion. Indeed, Hoover and Echchaibi draw on several concepts from structuralist and post-structuralist theory, such as articulations and representations. They also operate from the point of departure of culture and knowledge as processes, constructed and contingent (Hoover and Echchaibi, 1-22). These are epistemological conditions for doing discourse analysis, as argued by Jørgensen and Philips. However, they also argue that methodological eclecticism or adaptive methodology, where the researcher combines analytical tools and sometimes methodologies can be favorable when conducting discourse analysis, as they can unlock perspectives and paths for further analysis (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 4-7).

Discourse theory provides not only analytical tools, but a framework of inquiry (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 4), conceptualized as

What discourses are articulated in the text? What meanings are established and what meanings are excluded? What are the nodal points of the discourses (that is, the central signs, around which the other signs are organised and derive their meaning and which exclude other possible meanings)? Do different discourses define the nodal points in different ways, so that there is a struggle to fix meanings in terms of one discourse rather than another? And which meanings are taken for granted across different discourses? What identities and groups are discursively constructed? (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 165-166)

To reiterate: to investigate the representations of the Witch identity as found in the material, I will ask questions concerning what consensus is, what is contested, and in what contexts these articulations are actualized.

Discourse analysis, as theorized by Laclau and Mouffe, is a theory of analyzing how (political) social processes create and organize meaning and, essential to this study, identity through the *practice of articulation*. Summarized, discourse is theorized to encompass text, practice, as well as material objects and phenomena, which are referred to as *signs*. Objects and practices do not themselves inhabit meaning, but are considered *meaning-carriers*, i.e., they are ascribed

meaning through social processes. Meaning, then, is contextual, relational, contingent, and therefore inherently unstable. Discourse itself is constituted through articulatory practices, which Laclau and Mouffe describe as follows:

In the context of this discussion, we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated. (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105)

Discourse is by Jørgensen and Philips, helpfully illustrated through a fishing-net metaphor, where the knots of the fishing-net represent signs in a discourse. The knots constitute the net through their different positions in relation to each other. The signs become *moments*, where temporary fixed meanings are constructed through the act of exclusion of other possible interpretations of the signs in the effort to “create a unified meaning,” or *hegemony*. Hegemony, therefore, is a core concept in discourse theory that can be understood as the social process and struggle to determine and control the naturalized, *objective* meaning or “consensus” of certain signs (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 47-51; Torgrimsson 2025, 91). Moments, as mentioned above, are signs that inhabit temporarily fixed meanings. They are related through *chains of equivalence*, which is the compounding of signs in relation to each other, such as “woman,” “mother,” and “wise.” Although related, their meanings are constructed through *difference* from each other and thus constitute a discourse (Torgrimsson 2025, 91; Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 43-51). Some signs are ubiquitous and challenging to control, such as “woman.” Thus, articulations can be understood as an act that influences in what discourse a sign is to be understood. For example, putting “wonder” and “woman” together affects our understanding of the initial sign, now placed within a popular culture context. This can be understood through Jørgensen and Philips as the *order of discourse*, inspired by Critical Discourse theorist Norman Fairclough, and thereby deviating from Laclau and Mouffe’s *field of discursivity*, which they argue is too ambiguous for analytical success. The order of discourse, then, is the process of contestation of a sign, or nodal point, between an approximated set of actors and discourses for control over the meaning of said sign or nodal point (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, 27).

Similarly, identity cannot be entirely fixed, Laclau and Mouffe argue. Identity is (re)produced through *representation* and *identification*. Jørgensen and Philips write that identities are constructed through representations made of “clusters of signifiers with a nodal point at their centre” (Ibid., 43). A nodal point, to reiterate, is a salient analytical tool for this thesis, and is understood as a “privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered.” (Ibid., 27)

Furthermore, Jørgensen and Philips write, “Identities are accepted, refused, and negotiated in discursive processes.” (Ibid., 43) In doing so, the individual assumes a *subject position*, that is, what “role” we play in a certain context, such as a customer at a supermarket. Thus, individuals can inhabit several identities. Jørgensen and Philips write that because identity is contingent, never fixed, and multifarious, identities may become *antagonistic* when they “make contrasting demands in relation to the same actions within a common terrain, and inevitably one blocks the other. The individual discourses, which constitute each of the identities, are part of each other's field of discursivity.” (Ibid., 47), or again, order of discursivity.

As Instagram is a visual medium, incorporating visual analysis was necessary. Overall, visual discourse analysis encompasses similar concepts to those presented above, that is, signs, nodal points, difference, hegemony, etcetera. Additionally, visual discourse analysis examines discursive practices and considers whether there is consensus in how the visual subject is constructed. If not, what differs? The aim is to unveil how moral values and ideals are constructed in an image. Moreover, when working with discursive visual analysis as a method, the image is analyzed in two stages: denotative and connotative. The denotative stage examines what literal visual signs are present in the image; in this case, I have interpreted them as elements. The connotative stage is where I analyze what possible moments, nodal points, chains of equivalences, and articulations are present within the image and what discourses are created (Eriksson and Göthlund 2012, 47-50).

Lastly, I follow Torgrimsson’s use of the scholars of Literature Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s concept of *life writing*. *Life writing* pays special consideration to chronology when doing narrative analysis. Torgrimsson defines *narrative* as moments and nodal points “interlinked either (a) through *narrative plots* with certain structural dispositions or (b) through broader narrative tropes as part of the discursive repertoire of a religious group or community...” and *narrative plot* as “the identification of story and/or story arcs and how they temporally arrange

past, present, and future in a meaningful whole.” (Torgrimsson 2025. 89). I found Torgrimsson’s formulation on temporal arrangements and identity construction especially useful and has informed the disposition of the analysis section.

## Ethical Considerations

Although the topic of research ethics has been and will continuously be addressed throughout this thesis, I would like to dedicate this section to further reflect on my positionality as a researcher in relation to the material and, in extension, the subjects.

As this study is conducted within the framework of structuralist and post-structuralist epistemology, I regard knowledge as a social process and as something constructed and contingent. I also consider the research I produce as laden with my own perspectives and biases. This undoubtedly affects material collection, questions asked, the results, and subsequently the discourse(s) that are potentially reified through my writings (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 21-22). This practice of reflexivity draws on traditions such as ethnographic, gender, and post-colonial studies.<sup>6</sup> However, as broadly argued in these academic currents, this does not suggest regarding reality as something purely abstract or knowledge as entirely relative. To motivate my findings, I construct my arguments in dialogue with the empirical material, the analytical tools presented above, and previous research (Gilliat-Ray et al. 2021; Engler and Stausberg 2021).

Within digital humanities, there is a methodological discussion on “fair use” of public material in online environments. Opinions differ within the research community on what is to be assessed as public in relation to informed consent. Moreover, research concerning religious identity is considered inherently sensitive by the Swedish Research Council (Swedish Research Council 2017; Franzke et al. 2019). These realities warranted extensive consideration, which resulted in the decision to refrain from collecting sample data from, for example, semi-private forums or comment sections. Instead, I decided to collect material from accounts with over

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<sup>6</sup> It might seem strange then, to draw on these currents as inspirations for methodological reflexivity, but not engage with, for instance, intersectional theory. This is a choice made for the sake of space, based on my conviction that to engage those types of theories properly would require an extensive addition to the theory portion of the thesis, and furthermore, did not harmonize well with the research questions as written. However, delving deeper into an intersectional analysis of similar material would be a possible venture for a dissertation. For now, I acknowledge these aspects as formative. Lastly, there is an array of salient scholarship with related framings. See, for instance, Hedenborg White 2020b and Jabłońska 2024, among many others.

1000 followers who exhibit a practice of imparting knowledge, and the account holder clearly exudes a public persona. Lastly, informed by other studies such as Downing's, Hookway and Snee, and through conversations with my supervisor, I decided not to gather informed consent as it was not deemed warranted (Cowan 2011; Hookway and Snee 2017; Johns 2021; Fielding et al. 2017; Markham and Buchanan 2017; Downing 2019).

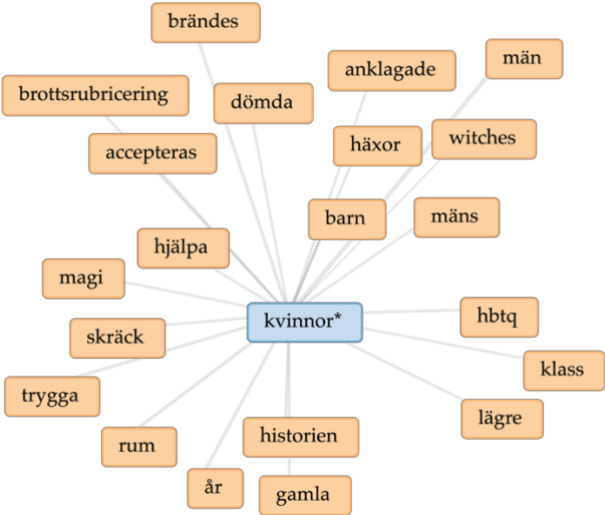
## Summary

In sum, the following chapter will interact with what has been presented above as follows: at the first round of coding, I used basic computer-aided text analysis and a first layer of discourse analysis, where I searched for moments and nodal points, and their location in the text. In the second round of coding, I searched for connectors between these, both discursive, and narrative. From the analysis and discussion section, I have focused on the articulatory practices and how these constitute different discourses and narratives, negotiations and tensions to answer my research questions: Who or what is a contemporary Swedish Witch according to these self-identifying Witches, and how is that identity constructed, articulated, and (hyper)mediated through Instagram? And: How can the material be understood through the theory of hypermediation?



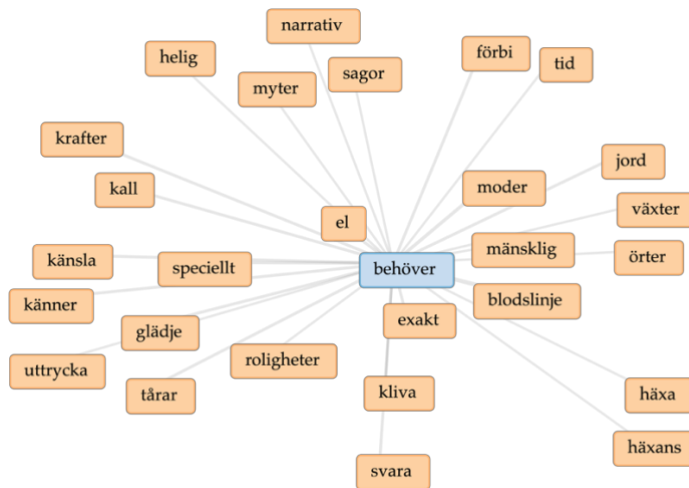
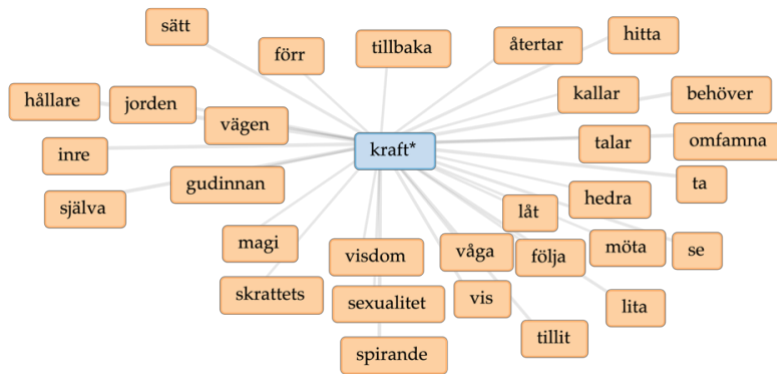
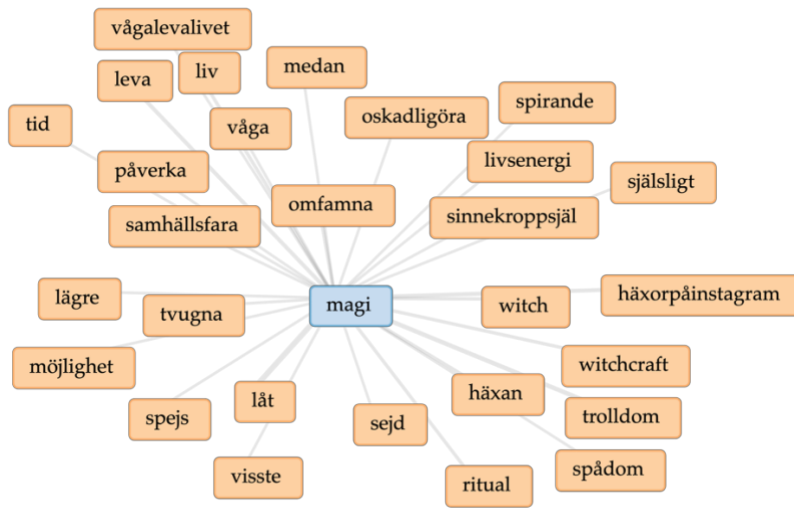
Upon further manual sorting of these results, iterations of “häxa” and “witch” are clearly dominating the corpus and appeared a total of 228 times when combined. Also, iterations of “kvinna,” “kvinnor,” and “women” are clearly prominent in the material and appears a total of 74 times. The following most frequent words found were “magic” (44), “power”/“powerful” (40), “need” (38), “feel”/“feeling” (37), “the word” (26), “life” (25), “the world” (23), “alone”/“ourselves”/“in fact” (23)<sup>8</sup>, “see” (20), “letting”(20), “back to” (19), “knowledge” (19), “year(s)” (19), “word(s)” (18)<sup>9</sup>, “nature” (18), and “ceremony” (18).

A sample of the collocates of four of the top terms “kvinnor,” “magi,” “kraft,” and “behöver” yielded the following results (the asterisks indicate a search for all possible iterations of the word):



<sup>8</sup> Translating this word from Swedish to English without additional context is difficult as it can hold numerous meanings.

<sup>9</sup> I refrained from sorting “word(s)” and “the word” together as they yielded such different collocates upon further inspection.



[fig. 4, fig. 5, fig. 6, fig. 7]

These results were created through Voyant Tool's link tree visualization tool for collocates. The decision for including collocates of only four top terms was made because of space management and significant overlap between the subsequent terms. In the same vein, the term "witch" was excluded because it in this context was regarded as too generic to spur any meaningful analysis.

The search for the term "Kvinnor\*" (a combination search for the terms "women" and "woman") yielded the results: "offense," "burned," "convicted," "accused," "witches," "children," "man/men" "LGBT," "class," "lower," "history," "old," "year(s)," "spaces/rooms," "safe," "fear," "magic," "help," "accepted."

The search for the term "Magi" gave these results: "Life," "live," "dare to live life," "dare," "meanwhile," "embrace," "neutralize," "burgeoning/in bloom," "life force," "mindbodysoul," "soulful," "witch," "witchesoninstagram," "witchcraft," "divination," "ritual," "sejd," "let" or "song," "space," "knew," "possibility," "made to"/"forced," "lower," "threat to society," "influence," "time."

The search show that "Kraft\*" (a combination of power, powers and powerful) is related to the words: "a/the way," "before," "going back," "reclaim," "find," "need," "embrace," "to call," "to meet or encounter," "speaking," "honoring," "trust/trusting," "follow/following," "to have courage," "to let (something)," "wise/wisdom," "sexuality," "burgeoning/in bloom," "magic," "laughter," "within," "alone" (can also be understood as a thing "as a matter a fact"), "vessel," "the goddess," "the earth."

Lastly, the search for the term "Behöver" (need or needing in Swedish) yielded the following results: "holy/sacred," "myths," "narrative(s)," "fairy tales/stories," "past," "time," "mother," "earth," "human," "plants," "bloodline," "herbs," "witch," "exactly," "step (into)," "answer," "jovial times," "tears," "happiness," "express," "feel," "especially," "feel/feeling," "calling," "power."

## Manual Coding – Contextualizing the Posts

Without analyzing too much too early, some interesting moments and chains of equivalences are seemingly taking shape in the basic digital text analysis above. The results were similar to the smallest elements that I managed "manually" to unearth from the text without doing an

analysis. However, the digital text analysis tool does not account for the time and context in which the posts were published. Therefore, at the second round of coding, I opted to code the posts falling into these four categories: (1) “The General” or the lifestyle/inspirational category. These posts are (seemingly) not determined by an external occurrence or occasion; rather, they comprise everything from musings on magic and Witchcraft, interior design tips, political content, and advertisements for courses and activities. 40 posts belong in this category. (2) “The Special Occasion” or the holiday/celebration category, is characterized by knowledge dissemination of holidays and rituals (Samhain, Ostara, Litha etcetera, the equinoxes, full moon rituals, International Women’s Day, Pride, etcetera). This category contains 15 posts. (3) “The Retort” or the reaction/responsive category comprises posts specifically written as reactions to writings or happenings in another medium or context (here, the HÄXOR controversy is central). The number of posts in this category is seven. The final category, "The Mission", is a somewhat difficult category to tease out in this section. It shares several similarities with the previous categories yet is distinct in several ways. This will be further discussed later in this chapter. This category contains five posts.

### Visual Coding on the Denotative Level.

The image material consists of 99 images. On a denotative level, 59 of the images were representations of humans, where 35 are pictures of a single person, and consist of 32 portraits and three selfies (that is, self-photography taken with the front-facing camera of a smartphone). 22 images were of two people or more. Lastly, in this category, there is a hard-to-categorize close-up of an eye.

39 images were without humans as the main feature, 15 I interpret as what Leaver et al. describe as “flatlay still lifes”, that is, “personal items painstakingly arranged for best visual appeal.” (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020, 72) There were 17 text-overlay images. There were also two screenshots of museum director Åsa Marnell’s debate response in DN regarding the “HÄXOR” exhibit at the Swedish Museum of History. Four images were pure landscape pictures, and one image was a pride flag. The most common denominator of all the image material was representations of nature or being outdoors, with 58 such images, in contrast to images clearly taken indoors (19), and images such as illustrations with text overlay, and screenshots of articles (22).

I interpret the image material as predominantly featuring white middle-aged women, with a few exceptions of people of color and men or masculine-presenting people. No children are featured in the material, but people who are assumed to be in their 20s, as well as older women, are featured. Yet overall, the vast majority are Scandinavian-looking women; fair-skinned, straight hair in blonds, browns, grays, and reds in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. As for human gestures, a frequent specific gesture was hands out, palms up and face towards the sky, or praying hands (8). There are also group photos of people in a circle, such as around a cauldron or an altar (4). There are also recurring imagery of naked women or feminine presenting people, both by themselves and in group settings (7).

As for items shown in the pictures, the most prominent ones I have sorted and categorized as: herbs, fruits and vegetables (16), smoke and fog (14), cloak (10), artisanal crafts (10), candles (8), staff (6), ritual makeup (6), crystals (5), cauldron (5), drum (5), pointy witches' hat (4), fire (3), books (3), screenshot of Åsa Marnell's response in DN (2), broom (1), tarot cards (1).

It is from this backdrop the following analysis is drawn, where I compare and discuss the sample alongside previous scholarship on Witches on the internet and my chosen theories on digital religion.

## Analysis and Discussion

The sample, as will be shown below, shares major similarities and differences compared to Jonsson's and Vikman's theses, and will be discussed throughout. Starting with the first research question in mind, I will demonstrate my analysis of how identity is constructed and how discourses are articulated in the material. I have included examples of the material throughout, where I have translated the posts written in Swedish and attached the original quote in a footnote.

### Which, What, Witch? A narrative and discursive analysis

When viewing the material and comparing it to previous research, three central themes or *narratives* emerge, constructing the time axis and narrative plot of the Witch identity. These are the *Narrative of Re-enchantment*, the *Narrative of Reclaiming*, and the *Narrative of Remembrance*. As we will see, it is common for the posts to comprise of several, if not all, of these narratives. The following section is an exploration of these three narratives, concluding with a discussion of found discourses and their interaction within the overall narrative plot.

#### *The Narrative of Remembrance*

What rests within forests of an ancient past? Starting from a narrative of peace and harmony, the narrative of remembrance presents a utopian ideal and serves as a temporal and emotional anchor point in the material. Roughly, the narrative is organized through nodal links between a time when the liberated [woman] lived harmoniously with nature and her full emotional spectrum at her disposal, and where ancient knowledge and magic was free and accessible. It implies a moment of social justice and equality, and a more “natural” state of living. For example, when contemplating the word witch, one writes:

(...) To me it is about reclaiming the power of the word and being a woman who does not fear my womanly heritage. My heritage is the strong connection to the land that I walk, the connection with the trees, the earth, the plants, the mountains and the animals. But also, the invisible worlds that we are living beside. As well as the infinite depth of our feelings. To have the courage

to approach, hold and allow for feeling to take place. (...)  
(180001.2022-10-09)<sup>10</sup>

The narrative is mediated similarly in pictures, often depicting nature both through illustrations and photography. This narrative, I interpret, is articulated in terms of *longing* and a *need* to break or contrast with contemporary society, by constructing a sort of "golden past," utopian narrative. Significantly, there is an articulation of longing expressed for this *action* of remembrance, through a pronounced need for stories, myths and fairy tales (210014.2023-12-31;\_70010.2023-02-26). The mediation of the remembrance narrative through this perspective, I would argue, also become a (discursive) practice, that is, the Swedish Instagram Witch is someone who *remembers*. This narrative affirms what Hutton conceptualizes as a key aspect of contemporary Witchcraft by reiterating articulations of an ancient magical past conceptually unbound by the shackles of "modern" rationalist thought (Hutton 2019). What ties the narrative of remembrance to the contemporary narrative of re-enchantment is the second and contrasting narrative, which is a dystopian one.

### ***The Narrative of Reclaiming***

What grows in the dust of a shattered promise? The legacy of the witch trials and the idea of the "death of magic" serve as a clear nodal point in the material, becoming the second narrative of this analysis. The narrative of reclaiming anchors the narrative plot and Witch identity in both a utopian and a dystopian past represented as a source of collective and individual trauma. That is, the death and destruction of magical practices is tied to patriarchal violence; the narrative of remembrance is here articulated within the context of loss. This will be further explored throughout this section. For example, one writes: "So much knowledge and folklore have been erased and forgotten. Leaving us to feel out, experiment, make circles and draw pentagrams so that the forest can regain its power." (70008.2023-04-19)<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in esotericism studies, it is commonly conceptualized as a legitimating strategy for groups to claim an unbroken chain to an ancient past to create authenticity (Faxneld 2020, 18). This narrative,

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<sup>10</sup> "För mig handlar det om att ta tillbaka kraften i ordet och i att vara kvinna och inte rädas mitt kvinnliga arv. Mitt arv i den starka kopplingen till marken jag vandrar på, kontakten med träden, marken, växterna, bergen och djuren. Men också de osynliga världarna som vi lever sida vid sida med. Även våra känslors bottenlösa djup. Att våga möta, hålla och tillåta att känslorna får ta plats."

<sup>11</sup> "Så mycket förståelse och folketro som har suddats ut och glömts bort. Som gör att vi är utelämnade till att känna in, testa oss fram, slå cirklar och rita pentagram så att skogen ska återfå sin kraft."

then, contrasts and partially breaks that pattern, and in exchange provides a clear emotional and reflexive link to the overall narrative plot and identity construction. The reclaiming narrative is articulated as a resistance or critique of modern, post-enlightenment society, and is more or less explicitly articulated through discursive difference vis-à-vis the patriarchy, violence, war, famine, individualism, and social injustice. It is through this narrative of reclaiming that these discourses are articulated as extensions or shared aspects of the historical traumatic event of the witch trials. Moreover, I find, that by creating this narrative link to contemporary society, much like Jonsson suggests in her research, the Witches are somewhat contesting contemporary ideals of individualism (Jonsson 2022). I would then suggest that the Witch identity is characterized by *both* individualistic and collectivistic ideals. Several posts highlight the importance of the community, which is something I will return to below. Within the narrative of reclaiming, individualism, on the other hand, is articulated through ideas of the woman who was punished for her independence and knowledge, thus activating the discourse of authenticity and self-realization. It is through this abstract loss of ancient wisdom and very personal identification with the historical victims of “witchcraft” as a continuation of patriarchal violence (Hutton 2019, 410) that I regard this narrative as an imperative nodal point and link between the narrative of remembrance and the narrative of re-enchantment.

Below I have included a few examples of the narrative of remembrance. They contain both text and image. The first example is an illustration of a woman, presumably of color, who is being burned at the stake for being a witch. The woman is tied up, dressed in a simple dress, with an illustration above her of a cartoon witch. She has long, straight dark hair and a peaceful expression as she lights a cigarette, hanging from her mouth, upon the flames.



(...) I meet a lot of people who still suffer trauma and fear from the witch persecutions. Imagine that the church comes barging into a small village and kidnaps half the women living there. Someone's mother, wife, sister, and daughter and they never return. A village of sorrow carries wounds that are passed down through generations. I try to remind them where we are presently, 2022, in Sweden, where nobody gets convicted of witchcraft and executed or tortured. Still, there is suspicion, isolation and betrayal...in a perverse society with a juridical system who lets rapists walk free, where women must hide with their children from violent men, domestic violence and death, social services who lets children stay with their flesh and blood even though they are incompetent parents, profound ignorance in regards to climate change, depletion of mother earth's resources. An over-reliance on science that makes machines and hospitals necessary for childbirth. Plastic surgery, Botox to fit beauty standards in a system made to take your money. (210004.2022-01-21)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Jag träffar många som lider av dessa häxprocesser fortfarande, i form av trauma och rädsla. Tänk er själva, kyrkan stormar in i en liten by och tar med sig hälften av ortens kvinnor, någons mamma, fru, syster och dotter

The text, as we can see, activates elements of fear and historical trauma and connects this with a list of perceived contemporary issues in society.

The following example post consists of a photograph and text, where a white woman with brownish, long hair is caressing the muzzle of a little black pony. The backdrop is a lush summer green foliage. A quote (not the full post) from text attached to the image connects the poster to the witch trials.



A quote from the post above reads: “A few hundred years ago they burned people like me. Those who thought beyond the world. Us [clear-eyed].” (20001.2023-08-26) Animals, nature, and marginalized peoples are all moments in this narrative, as illustrated in the picture above,

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och de kommer aldrig tillbaka. En sorgens by bär sina sår, generationer efter bär dem. Jag brukar försöka påminna om att vart vi är nu, 2022, Sverige, ingen straffas för häxeri genom döden, tortyr el våld. Dock finns misstanke, utfrysning och svikande kvar. Men alltså svikande från vad? Ett perverst samhälle som har ett rättssystem som gör att våldtäktsmän går fria, där mammor måste gömma sig med sina barn pga våldsamma män, misshandel och död i nära relationer, socialen som rör om att barn minsann mår bra av att bo med sitt blod och kött trots deras inkompetens som förälder, total ignorans inför klimathotet, utarmning av resurser hos moder jord. Övertro på vetenskap till den grad att de flesta som ska föda barn tror att de inte längre kan om de inte är uppkopplade till maskiner på ett sjukhus. Plastikkirurgi, Botox för att passa in i mallar skapta av ett system som vill tjäna pengar på dig.”

where a woman is posing in greenery with a horse. Organized around other moments such as the disproportionate number of women executed for “witchery,” the patriarchal and, in extension, state and religious institutional violence and control are positioned as difference. Interestingly, women who are regarded as anti-feminists and thereby patriarchal accomplices are sometimes present within this narrative (210002.2022.10.05; 40007.2024.12.11). Central identities here are the “witch” *and* the Witch, structured so that representations may inhabit both the position of a victim, and a person possibly in possession of ancient (and dangerous) knowledge, thus affirming previous research (Jabłońska 2024; Feraro 2015, Bohlin 2018, Doyle White and Feraro 2019, 4, Berger and Ezzy 2009). I also think this sort of post exemplifies the narrative overlap present in most posts, where the imagery may connect to the narrative remembrance through a connectedness with nature, and the text may display elements and nodes connected to the historical trauma of the witch trials.

Moreover, it is within this narrative “bracket” that I have found the most posts categorized as “response to critique.” The reasoning behind this categorization lies in the discursive struggle over the witch trials that is, seemingly, through this material, immense, as it seems a contested issue both within and outside of (what I presume) the general Neopagan community. Significantly, I find negotiations of three identities, which I understand as (1) The Witch as the stewardess of the ancient magic that survived witch trials (2) The Witch as the “wise woman”, related to a medicinal and folk magic discourse yet ambiguous and flexible in meaning, and (3) The Witch is “ordinary”, that is, the Witch is not a witch but a political symbol and reminder of historic “witches”. Reflexive negotiations of these identities are sometimes made by directly addressing the shift in terminology (Hutton 2018; Cornish 2019). Drawing on Jørgensen and Philips, these shifts, sometimes within the same posts, illustrate how antagonistic identities are negotiated (Jørgensen and Philips 2002, 43), and as will be discussed later, make visible how the negotiations between secular, religious, and post-secular discourses are enabled by hypermediated spaces.

Below we will see an example of these “response to critique” posts, which was posted in conjunction with the “HÄXOR” exhibition discourse.



Some people have reacted to the fact that we, as a contemporary spiritual community, where some of us choose to call ourselves witches, have become such a prominent part in the efforts for reparations for the convicted who did not identify as witches.

This is not about being a witch. For me, it is about the fact that I am passionate about fighting injustice, discrimination, and structural violence, and that I see strong connections between what happened then and what is happening in our world right now. They are the same processes in different formats.

I think we, as contemporary witches, clearly see and recognize the injustices these people were experiencing. That is why we are dedicated to this cause. (100003.2024-12-06)<sup>13</sup>

The above image is a still frame of a video from the ceremony outside the Swedish Museum of History on the 4th of December 2024. It depicts two people dressed in long white robes with led-light wreaths in their hair, speaking into microphones and holding big clipboards with mittened hands. The text overlay says: “We honored those who were murdered in the Swedish witch trials. We read their names. We symbolically tore the sentences with the intention that the real ones shall be overturned.”

Analyzing the text, I think it illustrates negotiation between identities and narratives. The author represents and identifies depending on what narrative is currently articulated in the text. Here, I would interpret the narrative of re-enchantment and the narrative of reclaiming as the articulated narratives. This post is categorized as “response to critique.”

Below I will present another example in the same category, although with another type of illustration attached.

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<sup>13</sup> “En del reagerar på att vi som nutida andligt community, där en del väljer att kalla sig häxa, har blivit en så stor del av att kämpa för denna återupprättelse. De som dömdes såg ju inte sig själva som häxor. För mig handlar det inte om att vara häxa. För mig handlar det om att jag brinner starkt för att kämpa mot orättvisa, mot förtryck och mot systematiskt våld och jag ser starka paralleller från det som hände då och det som händer i vår värld nu. Processerna fortfarande i andra former. Jag tror att vi som nutida häxor ser tydligt, och kan känna igen den orättvisa som dessa människor utsattes för. Därför är vi engagerade.”



When we reclaim the word witch, we think it is historically empowering in reparations for the women who were convicted for witchcraft.

We are completely aware of the accused being accused of relations with the devil and practicing maleficent magic.

To deem the usage of the word as deeply offensive in regard to the descendants of the witch trials, and to liken this to the N or I word, and to argue for their inherited right to the word?

Well, 😞 Witches are not an ethnical group. No one was persecuted in several generations because their grandmother was a wise woman. Witches have no country that has been depleted in resources and have no specific witch-religion or witch-language that is prohibited by the nation state. The group that was accused and still is accused of witchcraft is diverse. There are no minority or native peoples.

We are all more or less descendants of the witch trials, the silent ones, those at the sidelines, and those who participated. [sic]

To know the history of the word is extremely important because, yes, it becomes problematic if you do not know about the witch

persecutions, exclusion, murder without trial, fear, bullshitting,  
and intense fear of what is different. (210006.2022-10-26)<sup>14</sup>

The image above is a monochrome illustration of a woman with straight, long, and dark hair, dressed in a leather jacket, with a cigarette in her mouth. Also present in the picture is the text “My place is all over the place,” differentiates and positions the character in the illustration with a, what I presume, the notion of a “woman’s place being in the kitchen”-type critique. The text, which I have also categorized as a “retort,” was posted in response to a critique of an unnamed receiver of “people who want to shame witches for claiming that identity.”

I think this post illustrates reflexivity of the identity in relation to other minority groups, negotiating the tensions of secular morality in attaching identity to the historic “witch.” Sometimes, by disassociating the identities altogether (“it is not about being a witch,” “those who were executed were not witches”) or actualizing a more politically charged symbol. Also present in the material is the shift toward “wise woman,” which, as I have argued, serves as a legitimating and emotional anchor point surrounding the loss of knowledge, yet maintaining a sense of historicity (Hutton 2019; Cornish 2019). I would argue that these two posts above exemplify the discursive struggle over the word, which becomes especially prominent and visible within the narrative of the witch trials, as it is tied to a commonly known historical event.

Interestingly, this narrative is what differs the most from previous MA theses, where the Witch trials are almost nonexistent. Although certain themes, as demonstrated, overlap with Jonsson’s thesis, such as environmentalist and feminist discourse, and the “contestation of alienation in

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<sup>14</sup> “Vi tycker det ger kraft till historien om upprättelse för de kvinnor som dömdes med brottsrubricering häxa när vi reclaimar ordet. Vi är fullt medvetna om historien att kvinnor och män blev anklagade för att ha samröre med satan samt utöva skademagi och därför blev anklagade för att vara häxa. Att det är djupt kränkande för de som är ättlingar till häxprocess och kan liknas med N el I ordet och att ättlingar till till de som anklagats för häxeri har mer rätt till ordet? Nja 😞 Häxa är inte en etnisk grupp, ingen förföljdes i flera generationer pga mormor var en klok gumma, häxor har inget land som tömd på resurser, har ingen specifik häxreligion el häxspråk som inte får användas av staten. Gruppen som anklagades och fortfarande anklagas för häxkonst är heterogen. De är ingen minoritet eller ursprungsfolk. Vi är ju alla ättlingar till häxprocesser mer el mindre, de tysta som stod bredvid & de som utförde. Att känna till historien kring ordet häxa är extremt viktigt för ja, visst blir det problematiskt om en inte känner till häxprocesser, utanförskap, mordet utan rättegång, rädsla, skitsnack, intensiv rädsla för det som är annorlunda.”

modern society.” These themes, however, were not present in Vikman’s findings. There could be a number of reasons for this, of course. For instance, may Vikman's results have been influenced by a global pandemic and a shift in focus from feminist, environmentalist discourse and practices of self-advertisement towards concerns about mental and physical health? This is pure speculation of course, however, whatever caused this discrepancy, feminist and environmentalist discourses are prominent in the collected material in this study. Thereby representing an important aspect of the mediated Witch identity as to be a person who *reclaims*.

Both these above presented narratives are part of a larger narrative plot that I interpret as the Witches’ identity. And whereas a thesis is limited to a linear structure, I would like to highlight my understanding of these narratives as continuously in movement, oscillating and meshing among each other. Nevertheless, I do view the two previously presented narratives as discursively and chronologically fundamental for the contemporary narrative, which I will present below.

### ***The Narrative of Re-enchantment***

Will the Witch who heals herself also heal the world? The third and concluding narrative of what the contemporary Witch is and what they do centers on the narrative of re-enchantment. This final narrative combines the narratives of utopia and dystopia. Here we find discursive moments of self-development and magically charged political activism as ways to heal both yourself and the world. Healing the world, then, is to “go back” and connect with the ancient, magical knowledge and ways of viewing the world through, and doing remembrance. “Going back” is to connect with a dormant ancient power within to unlock and restore what has been stolen and destroyed by patriarchal powers. This narrative establishes a cyclical way of perceiving time (in accordance with nature's own cycles), and discursively constructs the eternity of the Witch's soul and knowledge, which may be reborn. Again, creating an interesting tension and potential antagonism between discourses, constructing the Witch as both a victim and a hero. The knowledge is both lost and accessible. Linking the contemporary Witch narratively and emotionally this way to both an ancient past and the witch trials, also creates an interesting relationship with time and urgency, which will be further discussed in the next section.

These findings correspond closely with previous scholarship on Witches, Neopagan and Esoteric tradition, through themes such as the living nature, nature as woman, the micro-macro relationship between the female body, the earth, and, in extension, the goddess (Vikman 2021; Johnsson 2022; Hutton 2019). Also, the political moments are stable and correspond with previous research (except for Vikman's intriguing findings). I think, following Hutton, it is through understanding the relationship of woman as nature that we can understand the feminist and environmentalist discourse, as a post-enlightenment and romantic critique of industrialization and rationality. This constitutes an antagonistic discursive relationship, or negotiation between affordances granted by modern and contemporary society, such as democratic values and technologies. These narrative and discursive moments construct the Witch as both progressive and traditional. She lives with “a foot in both worlds,” and she “stirs the pot.” Still, as mentioned above, she clearly rejects “modern” society and rationalist thought and associated moments, such as capitalism, certain aspects of individualism, patriarchy, institutional and religious abuse, environmental destruction, loss of feeling or intuition, war, famine, and social injustice.

Visually, the contemporary Witch is articulated through depictions of forests and with religious gestures and items such as white robes, praying hand motions, posing around an altar, depicting rituals, and corresponds with, among others, Hutton's argument of the draw on Christian symbolism (Hutton 2019, 411). Also occurring is the Witch in black robes, the cauldron, the pointy hat, drawing on visual resources from fiction (Jablonska 2024; Berger and Ezzy).

Interestingly, a component that I haven't found very prominent in the previous research and that stood out in this material is the clear advocating and recruitment aspect of some of the posts, categorized by me as “missions.” These posts I interpret as texts styled with the intent to convince and recruit. For example:

Can you hear the calling?

Listen

Answer

Come

This earth needs you and your powers, your unique perspective on the world, your way of navigating through the human world. Your anger, your joy, their [sic] tears, and it needs exactly your feeling of not fitting in.

You are anyone. You do not need a bloodline, you do not need to know anything special, you can work with anything, you are retired, you are young, you are old, you are a man, you are a woman, you are non-binary, you are born in Sweden, you are born somewhere else, you are rich, you are poor.

What I want to say is...If you feel a certain longing, if you think you are crazy because you have a feeling about things that you see flickering past, then that is your calling. You do not have to be a witch or even call yourself a witch. (210011.2023-11-14)<sup>15</sup>

Prominent moments in this post are the calling, the earth, powers, creating a discourse of chosen-ness or differentiation from (other) humans. The otherness is connected to feeling (in contrast to others lack thereof). Yet it also contains discourse of openness, that is, “you are anyone.” There is a streak of the narrative of remembrance through articulations of longing, connecting this otherness to an ancient legacy.

Lastly, below I will show two more examples of articulations of the Witch identity from the “special occasion” category of posts. I have included these because of their inclusion of all three narratives, thus illustrating the overall narrative plot.

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<sup>15</sup> “Hör du kallet? Lyssna Svava Kom. Den här jorden behöver dig och dina krafter, ditt sätt att se på världen, ditt sätt att navigera dig genom människors värld. Din ilska, din glädje, sina tårar och den behöver exakt din känsla av att inte ha passat in. Du, är vem som helst. Du behöver ingen blodslinje, du behöver inte kunna något speciellt, du jobbar inom vilken sektor som helst, du är sjukpensionär, du är ung, du är gammal, du är man, du är kvinna, du är icke binär, du är född i Sverige, du är född någonannastans, du är rik, du är fattig. Vad jag vill säga är...om du känner en annan längtan, om du tror att du är galen för att du känner på dig saker, att du ser något flimra förbi så är det kall. Du behöver inte vara en häxa el ens kalla dig för häxa.”



### WITCH - HÄXA - WISE ONE

Today is the day when in folklore, the witches were said to be riding to their sabbath on Blåkulla (swedish folklore).

Many people claimed that witches had kidnapped them and brought them to their rituals on Blåkulla often to strengthen their accusations made against people in the witch trials.

That was a very clever invention of patriarchal power. To create a culture where everything you said could be used against you. Creating a culture where free thinking and stepping outside of the norm is immediately punished by everyone around you. Resulting in a group who controls themselves to obey and not rebel.

Many people were just normal people falsely accused of being witches but many people actually held very important knowledge and wisdom. Ancient traditions of herbal medicines and folk

magic. Knowledge about the earth and how to live in deep contact with the earth.

These people didn't call themselves witches or häxor (witch in Swedish) but they were wise women and men who were in service to their communities, helping to heal, find lost things and guide people in their lives.

This role in the community is an ancient one whatever word you use to describe them and this role was lost.

Today we reclaim the role of the one in service to the community, carrying wisdom [sic] about healing, spirit and the earth. We reclaim the words Witch, Häxa, Wise one as beautiful words describing a very important archetype and role in an earth connected community.

We heal the words and we heal the wounds from those horrible times. We heal to become free to live fully. We heal to be fully embodied and to make sure we won't accept it to happen again.

(100004.2023-04-06)

The post above was made close to easter and exemplifies all three narratives analyzed in this thesis. From a visual perspective, the person is using contemporary technology to envision and enact the narrative of remembrance. That is, located in nature, with a runic text overlay, makeup and tattoos, hands towards the sky, dressed in plain clothing, crystal jewelry, and carrying ritual instruments. Furthermore, I suggest that the post further exemplifies the discursive negotiations between the Witch, "wise one," or "ordinary people" in how it actualizes different articulations within the narratives remembrance and reclaiming. The post concludes with the contemporary Witch prerogative: the narrative of re-enchantment, which entails a micro-macro perspective on healing (Hutton 2019; Faxneld 2020).

Finally, the Witch and the woods are two significant visual moments in photos, illustrations, and more abstractly through depictions of landscapes, as this final post of this section exemplifies.



## ✨ THE WITCH ✨

The witch is a historical symbol for the woman who goes her own way and frees herself from what is considered traditional.

She practices magic and believes that wishes can come true 🪄

The persecution of witches started in the 1400s and meant that women who were considered to practice magic were executed.

The reason for this was that they were perceived as having relations with the devil when they, as a matter of fact, were learned and well-established women.

Some of them were midwives supplied with medicine from nature's magical pantry.

This knowledge was feared as it threatened the position of men 🌿

The last witch who was convicted of witchcraft was an 80-year-old woman from Eskilstuna who was beheaded in 1704.

50,000 women in Europe had been accused and executed for witchcraft at that time ✨

These rumors started with children's testaments of journeys to Blue Hill and obsessions [or could be possessions, my remark] of the devil.

Later it became clear that all these were imagined stories.

Samhain falls on the 31st of October and is celebrated through rituals and ceremony as the witches' New Year's Eve ✨🔮

To identify as a witch in modern times means, amongst other things, reclaiming your own power and having the courage to live as yourself ✨

♥️ What is a witch to you? (110002.2024-10-29)<sup>16</sup>

This example was posted within the context of Samhain. The image is an illustration of a presumed Witch, dressed in all black with a pointy hat. Walking alone in a fall-colored forest, the observer can only perceive the Witch's back. She is positioned as if she walks her own way, independently, which becomes apparent when analyzing both image and text together. This second example of how the Witch is mediated also centers the witch trials. Articulations of ancient knowledge are less prominent (though present through moments such as “nature’s magical pantry” and positioning the “witches” as women with possession of subversive knowledge). Arguably, the moments in the text are organized around the Witch as a secular coded emancipatory figure. Moments such as “reclaiming your own power” and “being

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<sup>16</sup> “ ✨ HÄXAN ✨

Häxan är en historisk symbol för den visa kvinnan som går sin egen väg och slår sig fri från det som anses traditionellt.

Hon utövar magi och tror på att önskningsar kan infrias 🔮

Under 1400-talet började häxjakten som innebar att man avrättade kvinnor som ansågs ägna sig åt häxkonst.

Grunden till detta var att man ansåg att de var i samröre med djävulen när de i själva verket var lärda och väletablerade kvinnor.

En del var verksamma som sjuksköterskor med hjälp av läkemedel från naturens magiska skafferi.

Det fanns en rädsla för denna kunskap då den också hotade männens position 🌿

Den sista häxa att dömas till döden i Sverige var en 80-årig kvinna från Eskilstuna som halshöggs 1704.

Då hade 50 000 kvinnor i Europa anklagats och avrättats för trolldom och häxeri ✨

Dessa rykten började med ett barns berättelse om resor till Blåkulla och besatthet av djävulen.

Senare framkom det att allt varit påhittat.

Samhain som inträffar den 31 oktober anses vara häxornas nyår och kan firas genom olika ceremonier och ritualer ✨🔮

Att i modern tid identifiera sig som häxa handlar bland annat om att ta tillbaka sin egen kraft och våga vara den man är ✨

♥️ Vad är en häxa för dig?"

yourself” connect the contemporary narrative of re-enchantment with the narrative of reclaiming with the witch trials. Lastly, the author invites the reader to discuss what the witch means to them. This adds an interesting dimension to the text, which will be further discussed in the next section.

### Summary

In sum, what a witch is in this material has been analyzed through narrative and discursive analysis and is constituted by (1) A narrative plot containing three distinctive narratives: the narrative of remembrance, the narrative of reclaiming, and the narrative of re-enchantment. (2) Three distinctive discursive representations and negotiations between the Witch, “wise one,” and the “ordinary people.” As noted by previous scholarship, there are often no hard distinctions between denominators, that is, Neopagan, Witch, Heathen, etcetera. That holds true in this material as well to a certain extent. What is really interesting, then, are the relationships and *sometimes* articulated distinctions between different denominators, such as the Witch, the “wise one” (and or Priestess). To be a priestess is articulated as to follow a calling, particularly the call “of the earth,” which involves vows and education (often provided by the poster themselves). It is tied to ideas of self-realization through shadow-work to access a dormant well of power and wisdom within (210018.2024-02-22). Their mission is to "re-enchant" and "reconnect" the world to nature through ceremony, community, rituals, and magical practices. The Witch, on the other hand, is in some places articulated as “more of a political savage, trickster, with a subversive purpose, to flip concepts and turn them upside-down (...) the witch and witchcraft is self-proclaimed.” (210018.2024-02-22)<sup>17</sup> This might suggest an in-group negotiation between secular and post-secular discourses of the Witch identity, where the “wise one” might function as an overlap between the more religiously imbued Priestess-identity, continuing the romantic legacy of the Witch as a secular symbol. Following Laclau and Mouffe’s theory, this could be an example of antagonism within the in-group discourse, where several identities are inhabiting overlapping positions within the discourse, and/or also the process of separating these discourses into more manageable categories, especially when interacting in a public discourse. There is also a negotiational relation to the discourse of "ordinary people", a deeply secular discourse that I interpret as mostly a response to the critique

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<sup>17</sup> Häxan är mer att likna vid en politisk vilde, en trickster, en normbrytande funktion som hela tiden vänder upp och ned, ut och in på begrepp (...) häxan och häxkraften är självvalt, ingen ger det till en.

of the conflation between the religiously coded Witch identity and the historical victims of the witch trials. Also, here the witch is constructed a woman who is “being herself.”

## Weaving the Web: Hypermediating the Witch

Elaborating on the section above, in this following section I analyze the material through Guilia Evolvi's theory of hypermediation, to discuss the relationship and negotiations between public and private, mainstream and alternative, religious, post-secular and secular in the hypermediated space of Instagram. Tying back to the introduction and very point-of-entry of this thesis, I will present below an example of the "HÄXOR" discourse found in the sample.

1:55 mån 9 dec. TISDAG 10 DECEMBER 2024

**INSÄNDARE** Redaktör: Mats J. Larsson

### 1600-talets häxprocesser.

## Märkligt att Historiska museet ger plats åt nutida "häxor"

● I onsdags invigdes utställningen "Häxor" på Historiska museet i Stockholm. I samband med öppningen hölls en ceremoni där självutnämnda häxor rev sönder kopior av domar från häxprocesserna samtidigt som namnen på de dömda lästes upp.

"Vi ställer oss bakom ceremonin för att vara med att ge upprättelse åt de oskyldigt dömda. Att uppmärksamma häxprocessen är också att lyfta fram en viktig del i kvinnohistorien", säger museichefen Åsa Marnell i ett pressmeddelande.

Minnet av häxprocesserna som skördade många dödsoffer i Sverige under slutet av 1600-talet förtjänar att uppmärksammas. Men ska vi verkligen göra det genom att normalisera själva övergreppet?

Att de två kvinnor som höll i ceremonin utanför Historiska museet kallar sig själva för häxor är minne avsett som ett uttryck för solidaritet. Men de kvinnor som avrättades med avskyrda

metoder gjorde inget anspråk på att vara häxor. Det var förövarna som använde detta epitet för att misstänkliggöra och alienera.

Genom att använda det begreppet på detta sätt blåser vi liv i en gammal nidsbild. Det kan inte vara vägen framåt.

I en intervju i TV4 för museichefen Åsa Marnell frågan om något som liknar masshysterin under häxprocesserna skulle kunna hända i dag. Det är en högst relevant fråga.

Det är därför viktigare nu än någonsin att vi står upp för demokratiska värderingar och principen om ett fungerande rätts-samhälle. Att uppmärksamma offren för avrättningarna av påstådda häxor är en del av det. Men att romantisera den förvrängda världsbild som skapades för att kuva och skrämra 1600-talets kvinnor genom att lyfta in häxan i vår tid är inte det.

**Filip Larsson, Umeå**

**Svar direkt. Samtida häxor driver upprättelsen**

● Som museum kan vi inte sätta oss över historisk rätt. Däremot har vi en lång tradition av att diskutera hur historia hänger ihop med samtiden och framtiden. Genom utställningen "Häxor" och ceremonin när domarna från de svenska häxprocesserna 1668–1676 rivs, vill vi att våra besökare ska förstå människor som levde innan oss och gärna reflektera över likheter med dagens samhälle. Häxprocesserna i Sverige är en viktig del av kvinnohistorien och vår gemensamma historia som vi vill uppmärksamma.

Insändarskrivbenten menar att vi normaliserar själva övergreppet som skedde under det vi kallar häxprocesserna samt att vi ägnar oss åt att romantisera en förvrängd bild av dåtidens kvinnor genom att använda begreppet häxor och bjuda in personer som i dag kallar sig häxor. Historiska museet valde att upplåta utrymme för flera samtida häxor under vår invigningskväll. Anledningen är att det

är en grupp som driver frågan om att ge upprättelse till de oskyldiga som avrättades i häxprocesserna. Viktigt att betona är att samtida häxor inte heller anser att de som dömdes på 1600-talet var häxor.

Människor har under alla tider utfört olika ritualer och ceremonier. Detta har varit en del av människors liv och därmed av människors historia. Vi på Historiska museet anser att det är viktigt att lyfta olika röster och syner på historien och lägger ingen värdering i hur personerna identifierar sig.

Ingenstans i utställningen påstås det att de kvinnor, män och barn som då drabbades skulle vara häxor. Tvärtom görs det tydligt att de var vanliga människor och att denna typ av "förföljelse" kan drabba vem som helst.

Däremot jagades, anklagades, dömdes de för trolldom, avrättades och brändes på bål för att de ansågs vara häxor. Och det är just detta som utställningen handlar om och utställningens syfte är att hedra de närmare 300 oskyldigt dömda personerna.

Åsa Marnell, museichef, Historiska museet

A few have complained about us calling ourselves witches (See the best response from @historiska's director Åsa Marnell in the picture). An argument is that those executed during the witch trials were not witches or did not call themselves witches. We are well aware of that fact, and that most of those executed were not wise women or men, even though they were overrepresented in the witch trials. (...)

One of the witch's missions is to interfere and to stir the pot, on an individual and societal level. We are living in an age of privilege, and in a part of the world where we safely may reclaim the word by using it in its original and positive sense: hagazussan,

tunriderskan, she with one foot in the familiar and the other in the wild and unknown. Our mission is to heal and to re-enchant the world, and to provide people with knowledge in magical creation. While we still have time, we are weaving a growing community to withstand the progressively blustering winds in our world. (40007.2024-12-11)<sup>18</sup>

The above image is a screenshot of the letter to the editor, mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, expressing criticism regarding the “HÄXOR” exhibition, alongside museum director Åsa Marnell’s response. The headline, published with the original letter, reads “It is strange that the Swedish History Museum offers a platform for contemporary ‘witches.’” The highlighted quote from Marnell reads: “Contemporary Witches are the driving force behind the reparations.” Reflecting on that December night at the Swedish Museum of History, I regard it as a formidable example of Evolvi’s hypermediation theory. Because of the event itself, the venue, the topic matter, the presence of varying publics and discourses, as well as the preparations and the aftermaths across several media spaces. Although, as presented above, several discourses were already present in the material well before the event in question, it functioned as a perfect entry point and a framework for these tensions to crystallize. That is, tensions between the historic persecution of “witches” and Contemporary Witches intersected in the middle of public religious, secular, and post-secular discourse. The venue and context facilitated numerous discourses to interpose conceptions of what a witch is, presumably also provoked by the fact that this institution represents historical and cultural hegemony. It was interesting and telling, then, that the self-identifying Witches participated in an event at this venue. As previously noted, broad representations in public and mass media constitute not only a site for identification but a venue for contestation (Berger and Ezzy 2009). It is also interesting that this community, who in the material consistently identify with the alternative side of Evolvi’s dialectical pairings, chose to participate in public discourse at this very mainstream space (Evolvi 2021, 20). From a discourse analysis perspective, I would suggest that this could

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<sup>18</sup>“Några få personer har klagat på att vi kallar oss häxor. (Se bästa svaret från [@historiska](#) s chef Åsa Marnell på bilden) Ett kritiskt argument är att dom som avrättades i häxprocesserna inte var häxor eller kallade sig själva häxor. Vi är högst medvetna om det, och att dom flesta som avrättades inte var kloka gummor eller gubbar, även om dessa var överrepresenterade i häxprocesserna. (...) En av häxans uppgifter är att störa och röra om, på individnivå och i samhället. Vi lever i en privilegierad tid och i en del av världen där vi utan fara för livet kan reclaima häxordet och använda det i dess ursprungliga positiva bemärkelse: hagazussan, tunriderskan, hon med ena foten i det hemtama och andra foten i det vilda, okända. Vårt mål är att läka och återförtrolla världen, och ge människor kunskap att själva skapa magi. Medan tid är väver vi en allt större gemenskap så att den står stark om omvärldens vindar fortsätter att blåsa kallare.”

be interpreted as an action motivated by the order of discourse, and the struggle to control the nodal point or sign, the witch, in an action to further conjoin the historic “witch” and the contemporary Witch identity. Another reason, if following Evolvi, would be an *emotional* one, through the negotiation between real-imagined spaces. Within this analytical pairing, community, space, and time become particularly entangled. As imagined communities drive strong feelings in hypermediated spaces, I would suggest that a *temporal aspect* could also be utilized to understand imagined communities. I think this is illustrated through the identification with these convicted “witches” of the past through the collapsing of time (the “what was then is now” aspect), creating a type of urgency and directness through these spaces, also motivating offline action, which I regard as formative aspects of hypermediation. The event at the museum became an important site for not only contestation (through the process of organizing this ceremony and participating in the exhibition), but it also became, I think, an important site for publicity and recruitment. I base this argument on the pervasiveness of the narrative of the witch trials in the material, and Evolvi’s theory, that not only does the witch trials serve as an important, emotionally charged event *within* the community, but it also catches the emotions of a broader (maybe secular) public through a feminist discourse. Therefore, the narrative of reclaiming becomes an important site for recruitment or convincing a broad, secular, or post-secular public to join the community or at least support their identity. Thereby, the double-edged nature of exposure could be deemed a risk worth taking in this context. This also makes me interpret the material as examples of systematic representations of the Witch. However, I will not suggest that this is representative of *all* the Swedish Instagram Witches and their posting habits (keeping in mind that the sample amounted to 73 posts out of approximately 2000 reviewed). What I suggest, rather, is that when posts that are formulated in this specific way, that is, “As a Witch, I...” and “We, Witches...,” are seemingly also constructing the Witch identity in a certain way that elicits feelings of community, urgency, and identification across time and space(s).

Are the digital third spaces necessary affordances for this kind of expression? This is where I find Evolvi’s theory of hypermediated third spaces somewhat challenging to navigate. As a theory, it is construed as an action-based process beholden to a specific type of environment. In other words, is Instagram imperative for the representations of the Witch that I found in the material? I do not think so, as they very much align with previous research conducted outside the confines of digital religion. Nevertheless, the generative aspects of these posts might be understood in the range, dimensions, embeddedness and directness of communication that these

spaces enable, differentiating the Instagram post from a book or a phone call. Maybe it also enables the subjects to move more freely between the different narratives than, for instance, in an interview. This query, however, cannot be answered in this study but could serve as a subject for future research – indeed, Evolvi argues that hypermediation *should be investigated across spaces*. On the other hand, if I were to rephrase by borrowing Berger and Ezzy’s conclusion in their study of mass media: Do hypermediated spaces enable practices and articulations that promote religion in a systematic and planned way, that, for instance, mass media did not? (Berger and Ezzy 2009, 510) I would in contrast argue yes, and as described above, that digital spaces might lend themselves useful for this type of endeavor. This might be, following Evolvi, the affordance granted to publics who perceive themselves as marginalized to do self-representation and counter-hegemonic discourse (Evolvi 2019, 42-43).

Furthermore, similarly to Vikman’s findings and to some extent also Jonsson’s, Wicca is not prominent in the material at all. Instead, Witch in this context has seemingly become inclusive, so that anyone has the right to claim the identity, as long as they adhere to certain discursive understandings of the world. Indeed, you do not even have to call yourself a Witch to be included in “the community.” I find this type of outreach very interesting, and it has the potential of becoming a topic for future studies. This brings questions to mind, such as, what “imagined community” is being constructed? What are the goals and processes facilitating this communicated inclusivity? And, from a mediatization perspective, could it be, as Jonsson suggests, an effect of the marketization of witchcraft? Maybe, yet, although nowadays broadly conceived as a platform for marketing, Leaver et al. argue that Instagram was not conceived for commercial ends. Rather, it was a user-driven change where sponsored content drove the platform towards commercialization (Leaver et. al. 2020, 4). Here, Heidi Campbell’s Religious Social Shaping of Technology theory might be a useful framework for inquiry (Campbell and Tsuria 2021). Moreover, as Downing suggests the platform becomes a place for both commercial interests and theological mediation, I would like to argue that it also becomes an important space for religious recruitment, and I wonder how that might affect the medium (Downing 2019). Lastly, this actualizes an interesting shift from what was argued by Cowan in regard to anonymity and the discrepancy between offline and online authority, where the Witch in this material has, to borrow Cowan’s words, seemingly “come out of the broom closet” of the semi-private online forum, and become visible both at times with name and face (Cowan 2005). I join Warren and Miller in the call for creating new models for understanding authority online in these communities – not conditioned by institutionalized religion or consumer

capitalism. Instead, possibly through, as Warren suggests, formative or non-formative aesthetic authority (Warren 2020; Miller 2022).

## Conclusions and Future Studies

“It is the story that makes the difference” author Ursula K. Le Guin writes in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Le Guin 2024; org.pub 1988, 31), first published in *Women of Vision*. Although the quote relates to her approach of writing science fiction in the 1980s, I think her perspective corresponds in many ways with the results of this thesis, most prominent in the importance and gravitas narratives and storytelling play in the process of representation, although here through social media, of course. The subjects in this study distinctly articulate a *need for different* stories than a perceived mainstream society, that is, somewhat crudely put: a patriarchal and post-enlightenment society. A Le Guinian parable for this study, then, would be to step away from the tale and ideals of the arrow to, in the case of this thesis, embrace the circle and cyclical, although the circle somewhat breaks with Le Guin’s concept, which illustrates storytelling as a bag (Le Guin 2024; org.pub 1988).

To summarize, with this study, I have made an effort to analyze Swedish Instagram Witches' self-representation on Instagram. My research questions were: Who or what is a contemporary Swedish Witch according to these self-identifying Witches, and how is that identity represented and articulated through Instagram? As for what and who the Contemporary Swedish Witch is, the findings were quite ambiguous; they could be almost anyone as long as they adhered to some discourses, differentiating against modernity, patriarchy, social injustice, environmental destruction, and in the identification with historic “witches.” Important nodal points such as living nature, the liberated woman, ancient knowledge, nature as woman, and self-realization were understood and organized through narrative analysis and the use of narrative plot in constituting the contemporary Swedish Witch identity. These were conceptualized as three core narratives: The narrative of remembrance, the narrative of reclaiming, and the narrative of re-enchantment. Within these narratives, three identities were found: the Witch, the “wise one,” and “the ordinary person,” understood as antagonistic identities conditioned by post-secular negotiations of identity within the community. At times, however, as a response to critique, the link between the ancient utopian past and the witch trials was actively diminished.

The second research question was: How can the material be understood through the theory of hypermediation? Here, I predominantly examined representations and mediations surrounding the witch trials, as that discourse and narrative were found to be an area of contestation and of possible appeal to a broader public, thus lending itself as an entry point to the theory of hypermediation. In other words, hypermediation occurs in the middle of the triangle of tensions between religion, the secular, and the post-secular, and the negotiations of public-private, mainstream-alternative, and real-imaginary. It is intersecting discourses and publics across space, and as I suggest: time. The importance of paying attention to time and chronology in constructing identity in these hypermediated spaces are made apparent through the narrative analysis, both lending itself to oscillate between narratives relating utopian, dystopian, historical and contemporary time. By participating in discourse and activities in both online and offline settings, especially regarding the witch trials, the Witch identity is hypermediated through several spaces. It also indicates an intention of addressing and reaching a broad public, as it elicits strong feelings relevant to secular and non-secular understandings of the historic event, namely a feminist and social justice discourse. Sometimes, religious articulations, such as those of a direct connection between "witches", ancient wisdom, and the Contemporary Witch identity, are less apparent in texts regarding the witch trials. I view this as an example of both antagonistic negotiations and what Evolvi conceptualizes as negotiations between the secular, post-secular, and religious in third spaces. Moreover, it also functions as an important site to communicate and recruit, by highlighting secular-coded values.

As for future investigations, conducting research in different spaces in general would be a way to test the findings in this study, to be able to ask specific questions regarding how the Witch is constructed and mediated across several spaces (and time), who the intended audiences are, and what narratives are activated. Interestingly, as anyone seems to have the right to call themselves a Witch, there were patterns of slight distinction between a Witch and a Priestess in the material. The focus of my Bachelor's thesis was Goddess Temples during the pandemic, and it would serve as an interesting convergence point of topics. Questions would center on how these identities are constructed, their overlaps, and their discrepancies, and importantly, their discursive significance. Just viewing the material, several threads appear. For instance, as mentioned above, authority would be an interesting future studies venture, as there are several more prolific posters in the collected sample. This might indicate experienced authority and would be an interesting topic to investigate further with Warren's theorizing on the horizontal-vertical axis of authority. Additionally, there are a few but interesting occurrences where a style

of post, namely the missionary styled posed post, titled “the call,” explicitly aimed for recruitment, is copied by other posters in the sample group. This, I think, illustrates Warren’s take on aesthetic and formative authority in the mediation of Witchcraft and Witches online (Warren 2020), which would also be interesting to investigate across spaces.

# Appendix

Note that skips in numbers are due to additional rounds of sorting before coding.

## **List of *Instagram* posts**

10001.2024-10-31  
20001.2023-08-26  
30001.2024-03-28  
40001.2022-08-06  
40002.2022-12-06  
40003.2022-03-09  
40004.2023-04-17  
40005.2023-01-22  
40006.2023-10-22  
40007.2024-12-11  
40008.2024-03-21  
50001.2023-08-04  
60001.2024-03-27  
60002.2024-03-28  
60003.2024-03-29  
70001.2022-02-04  
70002.2022-11-06  
70003.2022-04-14  
70004.2022-09-22  
70005.2023-11-02  
70006.2023-11-06  
70007.2023-04-09  
70008.2023-04-19  
70009.2023-09-24  
70010.2023-02-26  
70011.2023-04-30  
70012.2024-09-05  
80001.2022-11-27  
80002.2024-10-01  
90002.2024-11-07  
100001.2023-04-06  
100002.2023-09-05  
100003.2023-09-14  
100004.2024-12-06  
110001.2024-03-12  
110002.2024-10-29  
120001.2023-11-26  
130001.2023-03-19  
130002.2024-03-31  
140001.2023-05-28  
150001.2022-07-12  
150002.2022-04-30  
150003.2023-11-09  
150004.2024-11-05  
150005.2024-12-07  
150006.2024-12-13  
170001.2023-11-01

180001.2022-10-09  
180002.2024-10-01  
190001.2023-06-19  
200001.2023-09-15  
210001.2022-11-04  
210002.2022-10-05  
210003.2022-10-33  
210004.2022-01-21  
210005.2022-03-22  
210006.2022-10-26  
210007.2022-05-27  
210008.2023-07-03  
210009.2023-07-07  
210010.2023-11-11  
210011.2023-11-14  
210012.2023-10-19  
210013.2023-04-25  
210014.2023-12-31  
210015.2024-11-01  
210016.2024-03-07  
210017.2024-12-10  
210018.2024-02-22  
220001.2022-11-05  
220002.2022-11-06  
220003.2022-11-16  
220004.2022-11-25

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