Spiral Bound: Spaces, Selves and Cosmologies of Contemporary Magick

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## Contents

Introduction 4  

Part 1  

1. Phenomenology: What Does Magick Feel Like? 8  
   Pre-Fieldwork: Jason 8  
   Fieldwork: Waking Up To My Informants’ Universe 9  
   A Night In The Field 26  
   Later That Evening 36  
   Much Later That Evening 39  

2. Taxonomies and Definitions: What is Magick? 43  
   Previous Categorisations of Magick 44  
   The Historical Roots of Contemporary Magick 51  
   What the Natives Say 56  
   Subdivisions Within Magickal Practice 68  
   Magick: Mainstream, Alternative, Countercultural or Subcultural? 69  
   Modernity, Late Modernity or Postmodernity? 72  

3. Data and Interpretation: Method and Theory in the Study of Magick 74  
   Length and Breadth of Fieldwork 77  
   Remarks on Representation 83  
   Theoretical Orientations of Previous Scholarship 83  
   Theoretical Orientation of *Spiral Bound* 90  

Part 2  

4. Here Be Dragons: Space, Magick and the Mainstream 95  
   Zones of the Other 96  
   Magick and the Mainstream 110  
   Where Does Magick Happen? 113  
   Practical Spaces 114  
   Spaces of Symbolism 127  
   Spaces of Resistance 130  
   The Re-enchantment of the World 137  
   *Dérives* or “Sidewalking” 141  

5. Magickal Identities: Searching High and Low 145  
   Orpheans and Dionysians 146  
   The High Path Towards the Light 147  
   The Low Road Down into Darkness 150  
   Starhawk’s “Darklight Philosophy” 154  
   Indexical Locations 156  
   So, Where Are You From? 156  
   Dress 158  
   Other Beings 159  
   Morality 160  
   Lifestyle: Diets, Drugs and Sexualities 161
To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behaviour of a sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of a palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors -
To explore the womb, or tomb, in dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware road.

Introduction

*Spiral Bound: Cosmologies, Spatialities and Selves in Contemporary Magick* is an ethnography based on over four year’s participant observation in/of the western magickal subculture, and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to University College, London in September 2003. In this Introduction, I will initially supply a outline of its structure and argument, which falls into three parts.

**Part 1: Phenomenology, Taxonomy, Method and Theory**

Chapter 1 comprises an introduction to the ‘magickal scene’. It is descriptive, and largely phenomenologically so. My aim is to describe in a ‘stream of consciousness’ manner what it feels like to be a member of the magickal subculture as much as to provide factual reportage. I should also stress that there is not one word or image in Chapter 1 which is unnecessary, but true to the tradition of phenomenological ‘bracketing’, the majority of images and events will be explained (as opposed to simply reported) retrospectively, in later chapters. It should also be noted at the outset that throughout this thesis, certain details have been changed to protect the identities of certain individuals: other than in the few cases where a full name (as opposed to just a forename) is used, all biographical details will have been altered beyond recognition.

In Chapter 2, I address what might appear to be the simple matter of what magick is. Defining magick is however no easy matter. We will initially survey some of the previous scholarly conceptualisations of magick. We will then examine the history of western magick, and subsequently survey native definitions thereof. At the end of Chapter 2, a definition of magick will be suggested and, I hope, a complex of scholarly controversies will have been laid to rest.
In Chapter 3, I detail the theory and method of this work. The latter is in the mainpart conventional, but the theory is relatively novel in itself, and all the more so in the context of this data. It can be ‘boiled down’ to a threefold proposition.

1. The discourse and practice of contemporary magick will be approached as socially-constructed. ‘Why this, why now?’ is a double question fundamental to my approach because (pace T.S. Eliot 1963:212), magick is not as it is “on the shores of Asia” when it makes appearances “on the Edgware Road”, and the reasons for this must be related to contemporary western society and culture. Basic as this may seem to a social anthropological examination of anything, such an approach has not been taken by the majority of previous scholars who have worked in this area.

2. I suggest that it is not possible to fully comprehend the magickal subculture itself nor its problematic relation to the mainstream without attention to its cosmology. It is all the more surprising therefore that very little attention has been paid to the matter of cosmology in previous work in this area. The one major exception is the work of Prince and Riches (2000), though I will show that their argument is ultimately unconvincing.

3. In order to analyse magickal cosmology, I will draw on an interdisciplinary innovation sometimes glossed as the ‘spatial turn’. Initially occurring in cultural geography and then sweeping through sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, the spatial turn simply entails viewing ‘space’ not as a Kantian absolute, but as socially-constructed, as a process rather than a ‘thing-in-itself’. Throughout this thesis, space will be shown to be as metaphorical as it is empirical; cognition will be shown to be spatial, and conversely, space will be shown to be cognitive. Space, I will be arguing, is good to think with, and it may indeed be impossible to think without it.

By the end of Part 1, the theory which informs my approach should be clear and we will have a basic understanding of what contemporary magick entails on which I will build in Parts 2 and 3.
Part 2

In Chapter 4, the relation between magickal discourse and practice and the mainstream will be examined. It will be argued that practitioners of magick enter into and occupy various conceptual, symbolic and/or cognitive zones, none of which are coterminous with the realm of the ‘normal’ but are in various ways distinct from the mainstream, all Other. These zones relate in various ways to where magick actually takes place, and they also account for the sometimes problematic social relations between practitioners of magick and the mainstream.

Chapter 5 addresses the phenomenon of magickal identity within the magickal subculture itself (rather than in relation to those outside it as was the case in Chapter 4). Magickal identities will be shown to sometimes demonstrate a metaphorical parallelism to the physical spaces which we surveyed in Chapter 5. Social cohesion and tension within the magickal subculture is readily explicated by attention to these different types of magickal identity.

Chapter 6 address the otherworlds, the non-material dimensions held to exist by practitioners of magick. Again, these will be related to the symbolically-meaningful locations in which magick takes place which we surveyed in Chapter 4, and the identities adopted and negotiated by practitioners of magick which we surveyed in Chapter 5, and by the end of Chapter 6, analogies will have been shown to exist between magickal practitioners’ use of physical space, their identities relative to one another, and the various types of otherworlds.

Part 3

As we move into Part 3, the more overtly postmodern facets of contemporary magick come into focus. Chapter 7 focuses on another fundamental aspect of magickal discourse, practice and cosmology: qi, prana or “orgone”, a mysterious “force” or “energy” which permeates the magickal universe.
Chapter 8 builds on this aspect of magickal cosmology and examines topographical and cartographical and metaphors employed by magickal practitioners, for these are unique in both their quantity and quality. In Chapter 9, magickal directionality will be examined, and we will see how modern notions of ‘forward progress’ are problematised by metaphors of circular and spiralic directionalities. By this time, the magickal universe will have been fully explicated, and shown to be related to a condition of postmodernity.

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1.

Phenomenology: What Does Magick Feel Like?

Pre-Fieldwork (circa September 1997): Jason

A British Telecom callcentre somewhere in the U.K. I have recently started a job answering emergency 999 calls, and am undergoing a probationary period during which I am being mentored by the long-haired and taciturn Jason, a considerably more experienced operator. We are taking calls together via a double headset.

A call comes in, and a distressed female manages to say the word “police” before the telephone handset is apparently punched or kicked from her hand. We have no location details, and no choice but to perform an address trace, a laborious and protracted procedure. The assault continues throughout this time, and we are unable to avoid hearing it, every punch, kick and yelp. This would be a challenging call for an experienced operator; fresh from training as I am, I immediately find myself in a state of borderline panic. However, thanks to Jason’s calm presence and occasional assistance, I successfully complete the trace; the address established and a police unit is immediately dispatched thereto, though by this time the line is silent.

Jason suggests I go for a cigarette on the grounds that I “look like I need one.” I am visibly shaking, and we are entitled to short “stress breaks” in such circumstances. Already the feeling that I should have done more, or done what I did more quickly, is overwhelming; totally irrational, but quite overwhelming nevertheless. Wondering whether I am cut out for this job, I stand up to leave the room.

Jason reaches into his rucksack and pulls out a slim, pointed rose quartz crystal. Even after the shock of the last few minutes, I can’t help but give Jason a slightly quizzical look.

“Just clearing the negative energy left over after that bloody mess,” he explains.
Fieldwork (January 2000): Waking Up To My Informants’ Universe

Shrill soundwaves slice through sleep. Ouch, I think. I knock the offending alarm-clock onto the floor in an uncoordinated attempt to hit the snooze button, and then and only then do I attempt to open my eyes.

I find myself confronted by a blue tea towel drying on the electric heater. The word ouch is written on the towel:

![Image of a tea towel with the word ouch written on it](image)

Fig. 1.1: View upon waking.

So fascinated am I by the tea towel bearing the exact if rather limited contents of my mind thus far today that I get up out of bed immediately and examine it. Strange, but I had never before noticed that the towel is decorated with the words Royal Touch, but obviously only the last four letters had been visible.
I cast a longing glance back at my bed:

Fig 1.2: Duvet cover given to me by Chelsea, friend, informant and flatmate.

Tempted though I am to burrow back under that duvet and remain there for several hours more, I shamble out of my room and down the corridor, fortifying myself with the splendid irony that people living in a council flat in Brixton could own a tea towel bearing the slogan *Royal Touch*. As I walk through the dining room I am struck, if bemused, by this piece of art:
At this point in my fieldwork, I had not the faintest idea what the painting represented to either he or Chelsea, to whom he had given it as a gift.

Through the dining-room window I register a small portion of dark blue sky cut with neon-pink clouds far above the dark towerblocks which loom on all sides. The juxtaposition of the monochromatic soot-stained brick and luminous cloud is surreal to say the least.

I continue into the kitchen itself, and see Angel, one of my flatmates, staring hypnotically into a cereal bowl she is stirring. (Angel and myself are the only two inhabitants of the flat who can be said to be ‘gainfully employed’, and I am unlikely to encounter the others at this hour unless they have been up all night.) She jumps slightly and looks up.

“Morning,” she says, a little too cheerily.

“Hi there. More rabbit food?”, I ask, jokily.
“It’s high energy food,” comes a faux supercilious reply.

“I’ll stick to my bacon sandwich,” I throw back.

“Your bacon sandwich will stick to your arteries and your energy will continue to vibrate on the base level it so patently does.”

“Thank you for that. I’ll bear it in mind. ... How did you sleep?”

“Nightmares,” Angel reports, serious all of a sudden. “Weird nightmares.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I say, and as the kettle hisses to boiling-point, my bleary eyes drift to the wall behind it, on which is an A4-sized poster consisting of two halves. The right-hand side is headed “Dragon Environmental Group”. Below this heading is a “sigil” (a magickal symbol) which is explained thus:

The symbol as a whole represents the World Tree - Yggdrasil - in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon myth.

The tree reaches deep into the earth with its roots; into the realm of the death goddess, Hel, feeding from the deep well of the ancestors and the dead and rotting vegetation. This represents our ability to recycle that which has passed its life-span. It also reminds us to heed the simpler life and wisdom of our ancestors who are dead and gone.

The point in the fork of the arrow at the roots of the tree represents the realm of Swartalfhelm, the deep subconscious; that which is intuitively in touch with the earth and the dark elves who busy themselves with the mineral wealth and the crafting of our landscape. This reminds us to stay in touch with the deeper workings of the earth’s movements and act instinctively with it.

The first pair of branches represents Midgard, or Middle Earth. This is the realm we ordinarily inhabit. It also encompasses the elements. For us it is the realm of being and doing and the material state of our action and neglect towards the earth.

The second pair of branches on the tree represent the realm of the Ljossalfheim, the realm of the light elves. They are creatures of the intellect and represent our thinking, or higher consciousness. They remind us that, as a human in the greater cosmic scheme of things, we must be conscious and thoughtful of our actions.

The topmost branches represent Asgard, the home of the gods and the realm of the super-conscious. The cosmic tree is hardly complete without its top branches, and to reach them and keep it intact we have to make sacrifices of our time and energy.

It also reminds us that if we are to achieve any sort of cosmic awareness and true integration with the planet on all levels, we must first endeavour to climb the tree and face its challenges.
The environmental sigil: use it - do it - be it!

On the right-hand side of the poster is a breakdown of which runes have been combined to form the environmental sigil. Below is another poster:

_**Anicca: The Law of Impermanence**_

The second _laksana_ is _anitya_ (Pali: _anicca_). _Anitya_ means 'impermanent'... it asserts that all conditioned things, all compounded things, are constantly changing... this is happening of course all the time. Perhaps it is easier to understand this truth nowadays than it was before. We know now from science that there is no such thing as hard solid matter - scattered in lumps throughout space. We know that what we think of as matter is in reality only energy in various forms.

The same truth of impermanence applies to the mind. In the mental life there is nothing unchanging; there is no unchanging permanent immortal soul; there is only a constant succession of mental states. The mind changes even more quickly than the physical body. We cannot usually see the physical body changing, but we can see our own mind changing, if we are a little observant. That is why the Buddha said that it is more reprehensible to identify oneself with the mind than with the body: to think that I am the mind is more reprehensible then to think that I am the body because the body at least possesses a certain relative stability, whereas the mind does not possess any stability at all.

To put it very broadly, the characteristic of _anitya_ shows us that the whole universe, from top to bottom, in all its immensity, in all its grandeur, is just one vast congeries of processes of different types, taking place at different levels, and all interrelated; nothing is standing still, nothing is immobile, not even for an instant. It is easy to forget this. We think that the sky and the mountains are always there (the 'everlasting hills') we think that our bodies are relatively permanent. It is only when increments of change add up to a great change, add up perhaps to a catastrophe, or when something breaks or comes to an end, or when we die, that we realise the truth of impermanence.

On an adjacent wall is another poster which has been typed in the same font:

_**The Principle of Nonviolence**_

In order to achieve peace - world peace - we have to deepen our realisation of the indivisibility of humanity, and act on that realisation with even greater consistency. We shall have to regard ourselves as citizens of the world in a more concrete sense than before, and rid ourselves of even the faintest vestige of nationalism. We shall have to identify ourselves more closely with all living things, and love them with a more ardent and selfless love. We shall have to be a louder and clearer voice of sanity and compassion in the world. We shall also have to bring to bear on the governments and peoples of the world, and on ourselves, the same kind of pressure that was required for the abolition of nuclear weapons but to an even greater extent. Above all, we shall have to intensify our commitment to the great ethical and spiritual principle of nonviolence, both in respect relations between individuals and in respect of [sic] relations between groups.

Ever since the dawn of history - perhaps from the very beginning of the present cosmic cycle itself - two great principles have been at work in the world: the principle of violence and the principle of nonviolence, or as we may also call it, the principle of love - though love in the sense of _agape_ rather than _eros_. The principle of violence finds expression in force and fraud, as well as in such things as oppression, exploitation, intimidation and blackmail. The principle of nonviolence finds its expression in friendliness and openness, as well as in such things as gentleness and helpfulness, and the giving of encouragement, sympathy, and appreciation. The principle of violence is reactive and ultimately destructive; the principle of nonviolence is creative. The principle of violence is the principle of Darkness, the principle of nonviolence is a principle of Light. Whereas to live in accordance with the principle of violence is to be either an animal or a devil or a combination of the two [sic], to live in
accordance with the principle of nonviolence is to be a human being in the full sense of the term, or even an angel.

Shortage of time, slight nausea (and perhaps Angel’s rather dire prediction) have deterred me from my customary bacon sandwich, and I head back into my bedroom content with a strong black coffee. Images hit me: lightening over Stonehenge (a poster behind my easy chair), giant waves crashing against a lighthouse (a poster opposite my easy chair), and my attention is caught by an unplanned collage of newspaper and magazine advertisements on the floor comprised by a collapsed pile of cuttings from newspapers and magazines. Amid the avalanche lie a travel advertisement for Mystical Marrakesh, adverts for Genie (somehow Arabo-Muslim jinn have lent the Anglicised form of their name to western mobile phones) and a photograph of a beautifully-dressed Chinese woman captioned with Chinese Zodiac, Feng Shui, Yin Yang, Shanghai Tang; 1.3 Billion Can’t be Wrong, concludes the advertisement for the Shanghai Tang clothing label. I see a P.C. so powerful as to be a Speed Demon, and learn that the Honda Accord, sprouting as it is an ethereal forked tail, is Possessed. On the other hand, it is Divine Inspiration which lies behind the furniture of Chaplains of London, and a trip to Selfridges will constitute a One Stop Shop To Party Heaven! It is with the Jaguar XKR that things get more ambivalent: it is a Bat Out Of Heaven, though, we may rest assured, For All The Demonic Power Of The XKR’s Supercharged V8 Powerplant, The Car’s Adaptive Cruise Control, Satellite Navigation And Computer Active Technology Suspension Make It Absolute Heaven To Drive. A cream cheese, angelically depicted spread on a bagel floating amongst the clouds, offers another such ascension from the demonic to the angelic: one can apparently Recover From the Hangover From Hell via the Little Taste of Heaven that is Philadelphia Light. There is paradoxical chromatic juxtaposition inherent in the Black Magic of Mont Blanc pens, and on a more affordably graphological note, a depiction of beams of power shooting forth from the tips of Pentel Energel pens accompanying the slogan, The Power is in Your Hands! Likewise, I see the Peugeot 206 surrounded by a crackling electric forcefield, set to the caption, You Know It’s Love When Every Touch Is Electric. A Nokia advertisement depicts science fiction-obsessed teen boys asking, “May The Force Be With Us”, and The Safest Way For Kids To Explore The Internet Is With An Alien, advise the people at Kzuk, which claims to be “the U.K.’s first child safe I.S.P.”
There’s an advertisement for *Hi-Tech Make-Up That’s Out Of This World* and Sharp L.C.D. television is apparently *Moving Into A New Dimension* with its new L.C.D. television. A can of *Carlsberg Special Brew* clasped in the hand of a gargantuan Egyptian statue, towering above tiny tourists: *The Beer of the Gods*, and *Probably The Most Special Brew In This World Or In Any Other*. And all this time, *The Magic Has Never Been So Close*, at least, according to the folk at the Walt Disney Company.

Removing my eyes from this mosaic of consumer manipulation, I sit down, placing the mug of coffee on the arm of the chair. It is a black mug, with gold illustration depicting and text detailing character traits associated with the astrological sign of Cancer. It came into the kitchen via Tim, another one of my flatmates; I think inevitably of the previous owner of the mug, a man I never knew who was found dead, needle-in-arm, in a Glasgow bed-sit. Allegedly he had psychological problems because his father, a well-known U.K. media personality, was nothing like as nice and smiley as his televisual persona suggests. Tim’s going through a rough patch at the moment, for not only has one of his childhood friends died recently, quite possibly by his own hand, but even more recently his aged mother ended her own life via an overdose. (“This is year of the suicides,” Chelsea had muttered, grimly, and that was before the man who squatted the flat upstairs had hanged himself.)

Then as the coffee kicks in, my mood lifts and my thoughts move to more cheerful places. Time is pressing however, and I need to banish. I never leave the house without banishing, for drawing negative energy to oneself on the streets of Brixton can have dangerous consequences on a physical level. (The phrase “white faggot” echoes through my mind as it had reverberated through Electric Lane that night. But I am absolutely not allowing myself to think about that, not now. Banishing is after all partly about clearing one’s mind of what one informant describes as “psychic crap”.)

As ever for the banishing ritual, I stand facing East, holding my hands, palms up, in front of me at chest height. I take three long, deep breaths. I feel vortices of energy buzz in my thorax and palms and so I know the time is right to move onto the next phase of the ritual. With a pointed index finger, I inscribe an ‘imaginary’ pentagram in the air in front of the Stonehenge poster. A pentagram, should the reader be unfamiliar with the symbol, is simply a five-pointed star like this one:
The pentagram (or pentacle) in the form of a vehicle window-sticker. The most common ‘native’ explanation therefore is that it symbolises the five elements of air, fire, water, earth and ether or spirit.

As the East corresponds to the element of Air, the visualisation is aided by the lightening bolt in the poster. To me at any rate, lightening suggests air, and so the pentagram is visualised as being made of pure lightening. Mentally I intone, “I banish thee, shells, back to thy hells! Cacadaemons, hence!” I turn to the South, location of the element of Fire, feel my palms charged with energy and inscribe a pentagram of blazing fire against the heavy blue curtains with the same intonation. I turn to the West, home of the element of Water and draw a pentagram of water easily against the backdrop of the wave smashing against the lighthouse in the poster. After the same
intonation I turn to the North, domain of the element of Earth, and eyes on the stone steps in a print of a 1959 photo on the North wall (the steps I used to walk down each day to get to work at the emergency call centre years previously), I draw a rocky pentagram in the air. I raise my hand towards the ceiling and banish in the High, and then drop my hand down and banish in the Deep. I am at the very centre of my own universe. A gyrating, crackling electrical sphere now surrounds me. The atmosphere in the room is tangibly cleaner.

That’s better.

Just then I see an intensely bright pinpoint of blue light in the air. It vanishes immediately I become aware of it. Either I did not get anything like enough sleep last night and that was a minor hallucination, or there’s something in magick. Given how tired I feel, I strongly suspect the former, but the ethnographer in me chooses to believe the latter, at least for the time being.

Anyway, I am getting later by the second and more prosaic matters beckon: deodorant choice. Voodoo, Atlantis, or Apollo? (I don’t particularly care for the aromas of Africa, Phoenix or Inca, and they don’t make my old favourite, Oriental, anymore. For better or worse, my armpits will exude the aroma of Voodoo for the rest of the day.¹

I head down the corridor. On the walls are Isis, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Saint Peter, and Elvis Presley. I pass by shelves of stones, shells, starfish, animal horns, feathers, fir cones, a fragmented plaster head of an ancient Greek figure, smaller statues (Buddha, Ganesh), crystals, and a small forest of incense sticks:
Also, not visible in Figure 1.5, is an aerosol can, labelled Most Powerful Helping Hand. The main text of the label (in English; it is also provided in Spanish) reads:

NOVENA

Let us, with confident trust invoke his aid and protection, O Glorious Archangel St Michael, watch over us during life, defend us against the assaults of the demon, assist us especially at the hour of death, obtain for us a favourable judgement, and aid us in all our necessities, particularly, (concentrate on your desires). Amen.

The spray is made by the Lama Temple\textsuperscript{TM}, apparently a division of one Candle Corporation of America, based in Chicago.

Entering the toilet, I register three posters of crop circles. Well, they are termed ‘crop circles’, but most of those depicted comprise more elaborate patterns, including a dizzying spiral, and a diagram of the Cabala, a Hebrew cosmology which, I am
beginning to learn, is integral to magick. I push the door to; there’s no lock and anyway the door doesn’t shut properly. By now I could not care less, nor could my flatmates, but even at this horribly early hour I am capable of a smile as I remember how upset my brother was about this absence during his recent visit. As far as he is concerned, it simply is not civilised not to have a lock on a lavatory door.

I ought to be focussing on negative energy leaving my body or a negative phenomenon exiting my life as I defecate, because defecation, I have been taught, can be a profoundly magickal act. However, my bleary eyes drift onto the posters on the walls...

**Crystal Health and Wealth**

**The efficacious use of Gems and Minerals**

If you have marvelled at the beauty in the shapes, colours and forms held in the vast spectrum of Crystal Gems and Ores, discovering within the clearer ones, phantom shapes and energy locked within, or simply wondered at these lovely manifestations of the Creator’s love, that in itself would be healing. For Love and Beauty are nature’s way of reminding us who we are in relation to the universe.

Contained within these writings are simple guidelines designed to bring you an understanding of the healing powers of Crystal Gems, and Mineral Ores. This reflects my personal understanding, experience and intuition of how stones and precious metals can work for us. Do not limit them or yourself. Play with them, experience and follow your own inner guidance.

**Amethyst**

The ‘Elevator’. Strengthens the endocrinal and immune systems while having a good effect on right brain activity, pineal, pituitary glands and an exceptional blood cleanser and energiser. Very powerful aid to spiritual enhancement by bringing the lower natures to a higher consciousness. Cuts through illusion and is a helpful friend to meditators, inspiring healing, divine love, inspiration and intuition.

**Calcite**

The ‘Balancer’. A variably coloured stone, it benefits the kidneys, pancreas and spleen. Alleviating fear and stress, it has the ability to balance the male/female polarities as well as the emotions by helping you to ground excessive enthusiasms. Inspires joy, lightness of being and some claims indicate an improvement in astral projection.

**Carnelian**

The ‘Friendly One’ is a highly evolved healer, aiding kidneys, lungs, gallbladder, pancreas, aids tissue regeneration while vitalising the blood. Energises the physical, emotional and mental self. A good balancer, it connects you with your inner self, giving good concentration and in opening your heart it brings joy, sociability and warmth.
Celestite

This ‘Stone of Heaven’ reduces stress by giving relaxation and peace of mind but also accelerates spiritual growth by helping you to expand your creative expression, adjusting and knowing your higher self and other forms of divine awareness. Revealing truth, reliability and the clarity of thought and speech.

Chrysocolla

This is the ‘Woman’s Friend’. Excellent for period pains, pre-menstrual tension and other related problems, strengthening feminine qualities in both genders. Generally aids in the prevention of ulcers, digestive problems, arthritic conditions, toughens lungs and the thyroid glands, enchanting the metabolism. Alleviates guilt, tensions and phobias while inspiring creativity, personal power, joy and serenity.

Chrysoprase

A very subtle quartz, this ‘Joy Stone’ helps to ease sexual frustration and depressions by balancing neurotic patterns and by enchanting personal insight. A very inward looking stone it also helps with calming, balancing and inner mental healing while underlining light-heartedness, joy and your inner talents.

I head towards the bathroom. No lock here either, but the light isn’t on so it is safe to enter. I wash my hands with a grit-studded soap bar from the local health shop and grab my toothbrush and some of Nature’s Own toothpaste. Minty-mouthed but still behind schedule, I head out. I exit my block through its heavily grilled door into a polluted urban drizzle.

Walking briskly down Effra Road, I pass the Richard Budd Memorial, and cannot help but be reminded of what certain of my informants make of it. The memorial, technically a mausoleum, was erected by one Henry Budd in 1825 in memory of his father, Richard Budd (1746-1821), treasurer of the Royal College of Physicians Madhouse Commission and (in all probability) Freemason. According to Chelsea, this site is on an intersection of various “ley lines” (a.k.a. “energy lines” or “lines of force”) and it is also over an underground river (the Effra). The memorial’s Greek-and Egyptian-style ornamentation includes the ourobouros (a snake eating its own tail), a symbol laden with magickal significance and which we have in fact already seen on my duvet in Figure 1.3.
Upon learning of the carven *ouroboros* in this particular part of Brixton, one of my informants commented:

Hmmm, this merely confirms some of my theories about the Masonic Lodge that meets at Lambeth Town Hall. The apex of the capstone [of the memorial] would align with some of the cellars that extend out from the Town Hall. It is quite possible that they’re using some form of occult ritual to capture and magnify the ‘edgy’ urban vibe of Brixton. It is entirely plausible that the first Brixton riot was caused by an accidental release of some of this energy!"
Feeling a slight tingling sensation in my legs and stomach (from the walk over the ley-line intersection and/or cellars used for rituals of dubious intention?) I perform an instinctive, quick and entirely mental banishing ritual, just in case.

I head right, into Coldharbour Lane. I note the shop Joy. A poster in the window of Joy invites one to enquire within for “Palmistry, Tarot, Psychic [sic], Hand writing analysis, Spirit Guides” courtesy of one Delores. Joy predominantly stocks gifts of a slightly kitsch nature, but amongst them are books on magick. There is Lauren White’s *Spells for Self-Improvement: Using Magic For Personal Success*, and alongside, Solala Towler’s *Chi: Energy of Harmony*. These might be the sort of books which at least some of my informants would frown on for being “lightweight” or “tame”, but nevertheless, books on magick they are. On the opposite side of the road, The Book Monger boasts a selection of more “serious” magickal books for the more “serious” buyer.

If I had time I’d pop into the Binal Newsagent, and grab a selection of mainstream newspapers to decode and generally deconstruct on the tube, but right now time is the last thing I have to spare. (Nevertheless, I must digress, that newsagent was later to become important to me and my work, because it was here that I first found the magazine *Spirit & Destiny: For Women Who Want The Best Possible Future*. The front page of the February 2003 edition included:


Again, the sort of thing which most of my informants regard as rather “dumbed-down”, but such a publication falls within the category of alternative spirituality and certainly includes magick. It was also in this newsagent early in 2003 that I first saw *Mind, Body, Spirit*, one of those weekly, limited series of magazines commencing in early January which one builds up into a collection. My informants generally regard *Mind, Body Spirit* as more “serious” than *Spirit and Destiny*; ideally at least, it comprises a ‘course’ in various aspects of magick. The magazine has multiple contributors, and at least two of them are informants of mine. Finally on the subject of
Binal Newsagent, I should note here that its proprietors have been most helpful when I have needed them to order the Jewish Chronicle, The Catholic Herald or the Church Times. It is worth underscoring that one does not actually have to order Spirit & Destiny or Mind, Body, Spirit from this newsagent, which is more than can be said for any of the other major religious or spiritual papers. However, back to native being…)

I turn left down Electric Lane, feeling a slight twinge of satisfaction that at this time of the morning at least, I am allowed to walk down it unhindered. At night, this street belongs to the drug dealers and one is not always made to feel particularly welcome as I have previously mentioned. Now all that remains of the dealers is the acrid stench of urine, broken beer bottles and a scattering of small plastic baggies. On the wall is a graffito calling for More Police Funerals. There’s something absolutely unique about the energy in this street, something very “edgy” indeed.

Just before the entrance to the Market Row arcade is the Natural Fragrance Co., a shop specialising in incense, oils, candles and other magickal equipment. It was from this establishment which Chelsea purchased the Most Powerful Helping Hand. From what I have observed, the shop’s clientele displays an approximately equal ratio of blacks to whites, though its small selection of books covers ‘Afro’ and not ‘Euro’ magick. Though it is not quite within sight, I inevitably think of the other purveyor of magickal equipment, just a few yards away in the arcade: Original Products Ltd. Religious Artefacts: Herbs. Products From Haiti & USA. That shop seems to cater mainly to black clientele, though it does keep a small stock of books on ‘Euro’ magick.

Into Electric Avenue. Electric Avenue (and likewise Electric Lane) is so named on account of having been amongst the first streets in London to have been lit by electric lighting, and another historical detail worth noting is that it was in this street that mage and writer Iain Sinclair attended the London Film School. I pass Index Books. In its window, amongst other texts are Harry Potter novels, various sumptuous editions of The Lord of the Rings, and tarot cards. Index Books boasts a large ‘Mind, Body and Spirit’ section while apparently stocking for no other religious or spiritual persuasion whatsoever. (It was here wherein I was later to find Flowers from Hell: A Satanic Reader, a book much loved by those of my informants who chose the Left Hand
Path.) Energy-wise, Electric Avenue has a slightly different feel to any I have registered thus far this morning. Effectively the main street of the market, it is crowded with shoppers who, relative to my commuter’s pace, lumber along like sloths. The wet concrete is visually fascinating, so obscured in places as to be grouting a mixed-media, multicultural mosaic of mashed mangoes, battered breadfruit and soggy sprouts which have fallen from stalls or delivery lorries alongside the more predictable urban refuse of rags, cigarette ends, McDonald’s packaging and excrement. In my nostrils, the tang of disinfectant. Then the commemorative plaque on the supermarket wall at the spot of militant right-winger David Copeland’s improvised explosive device (cue distant memory of a newspaper picture of an x-ray image of a nail embedded in a baby’s brain) which always makes the energy here feel more than a little dubious, at least to me.

I enter the tube station, buy a ticket, make my way down to the platform and right to the end of the train, and find an empty carriage. I sit down, facing a graffito which claims: England Shit Rotten Island. I close my eyes.

When I open them, two other men have entered the carriage. They could not be more different. Opposite me on my far right is a casually-yet-expensively dressed white thirtysomething male; he looks like a stereotypical white-collar gay man with no shortage of disposable income. Directly opposite me is a far from well-dressed fortysomething white male, who, I suddenly note, issues forth that unmistakable scent of unwashed human animal.

“Mind if I smoke?”, he asks me, completely ignoring the other man and vice versa.

“Nope,” I reply.

He pulls out a crack pipe and proceeds to smoke. I glance at the other man. He must have noticed, but is still ignoring the crack piper and eyes tightly closed, is (slightly melodramatically?) performing autoaccupressure on his forehead. Odd, I think... in their own way, both men are performing acts of magick.

I close my eyes again.
At Victoria, as usual, the carriage fills up with people, many of whom are reading the latest Harry Potter novel. Warren Street is a ‘deep station’, and I have to travel up two escalators to reach street level. As I do so, I quasi-register a number of advertisements, their messages a blurred barrage of information and imperatives. In My Break, I Take a Pilgrimage To Me, and At lunchtime, I Feed the Unicorn are both slogans for Oasis fruit drink. Mind, Body and Spirit, Solgar are the Vitamins I Trust and Our Lives Dance With Nature, Listen To the Rhythm both advertise Solgar Vitamins, Essentials For Life’s Journey. Meanwhile, a music shop boasts Advanced Music, Primitive Price. I am also informed that Abusing People Because of Their Race, Faith, Religion Or Disability Or Because They Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Or Transgendered, Is A Crime, and finally leave the station with the thought What If Magic Ruled the World?, courtesy of an advertisement for a computer game.
A Night In the Field (April 2001)

A morning’s teaching and an afternoon’s writing-up. It’s been a long day, and it is not over yet. I switch off the computer and with a blissful sense of relief and head for the bar. As I walk to the University of London Union, I see this advertisement for a seminar soon to be held there:

Fig. 1.7: Oasis soft drink advertisement.
Once in the bar, I order a pint of Guinness from a female student barmaid who is dressed all in black. As I wait for the pint to be poured, I notice that she’s wearing black nail polish. Eventually she passes me the pint. Sometimes the bar staff pour the Irish shamrock into the head of a pint of Guinness, but tonight, instead of a shamrock the head of froth is engraved with a pentagram. I smile knowingly at the woman, and she knowingly smiles back. But apart from this, the quick drink is not unusual, and nor are the quips about ‘weirdness’ and ‘weirdoes’ which my colleagues make as I stand up and say my farewells before I head off into the field.

I head past Russell Square (once home to the Richard Budd whose memorial I passed this morning) and along Montague Place, passing the back entrance to the British Museum. Lines from William Empson’s Homage to the British Museum (2001:55) spring to mind:

Attending there let us absorb the cultures of nations  
And dissolve into our judgement all their codes.  
Then, being clogged with a natural hesitation  
(People are continually asking one the way out),  
Let us stand here and admit that we have no road.

As I pass the wooden boarding along the Montague Street side the British Museum, I notice a pentagram has been scratched into it. Stickers catch my eye: one advertises the Summer Solstice festival at Stonehenge (with a drawing of a flying saucer soaring over the megaliths). Another advertises 2000AD, a science-fiction and fantasy graphic novel which at least two of my informants write for.

Into Great Russell Street and immediately I catch sight of a shop sign to my left with a lightening bolt on its hanging-sign: Electricians And Art Noveau Clocks. In front of
me is the Scotch Shop with its tartan-filled window. Opposite, adjacent to the Forum Café, is Westaway and Westaway, another shop with a similarly tartan-oriented window display. I wryly note that they stock MacGregor tartan, beloved of one Samuel Mathers whose love of things Celtic inspired him to style himself Samuel McGregor Mathers and who, in 1888 (along with Dr William Wynn Westcott and Dr Robert Woodman) founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an influential early magickal group which included the poet W.B.Yeats, writers Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Sax Rohmer and Bram Stoker, and the famous occult figures Dion Fortune, Gerald Gardner and the notorious Aleister Crowley.

I zip across Great Russell Street in order to avoid the tourist hordes thronging the main entrance to the British Museum. I’m into Bury Place now, passing Parthenon: Fossils, Antiquities and Ancient Coins, its window full of artefacts from the Ancient Near and Ancient Far East: statues, vases, bowls, ammonites, crystals... a quartz point like the one Jason had, only clear, not rose. I pass the Museum Gallery which is similar to Parthenon but focused more on ‘Egyptiana’, real and reproduction: Egyptian Bazaar, Ancient Art, Antiquities, Books, Papyrus, Artefacts. Opposite is Afribilia which as its name suggests is a stockist of: African Art and Antiques, boasting, Collectors’ Gallery, Coins and Medals, Postcards and Ephemera, Memorabilia.

I turn right, cutting through Gilbert Place with its graffitied walls: twisted and crazee. Into Museum Street: left, Ulysses, one of a number of bookshops specialising in rare and antique books. Beyond it is The Focus Gallery, its burglar alarm decorated with the ancient Chinese Yin-Yang motif. As I cross the street I catch sight of Fine Books Oriental and the Cafe Pyramid [sic]. I am now immediately in front of The Plough, a pub which my informants say was frequented by Aleister Crowley. To the right, in the window of Roe and Moore Rare Books, a print of a 1968 lithograph by Alexander Calder catches my eye: an abstract design comprised mainly by a spiral. Just beyond the Thai Garden Restaurant is Playin’ Games, a shop dedicated as its name suggests to all things ludic. Its basement is one of a number of sources of fantasy and science fiction texts and games often played by my informants and drawn on in their magickal practices, and upstairs the shop keeps a small stock of Tarot cards. A cardboard figure of Yoda from the Star Wars mythos stares inscrutably at me from the window. Most
viewers of the *Star Wars* films are in all probability unaware of the Cabalistic and hence magickal echoes in names like Yoda and Darth. (Infuriatingly for certain people, when George Lucas, director if the *Star Wars* films, nipped into *The Atlantis Bookshop*, no one recognised the Hollywood colossus until just after he had left.)

I pop my head into *The Plough*. There is no sign of my informants, but the *Golden Dragon* fruit machine catches me eye, or rather, its three Yin-Yang symbols catch my eye. I head back out of the pub and down Museum Street, noting a magickal graffito on the way. I glance at *The Atlantis Bookshop*. It is closed and empty of human life, though a five-foot high statue of the ancient Egyptian cat goddess Bast looms large in the book-lined darkness.

![The Atlantis Bookshop](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Fig. 1.8 The Atlantis Bookshop.* (This photo was taken since the shop was refurbished in 2003.)
Into Bloomsbury Way, and as I wait for a break in the rush hour traffic I have time to glance at Hawksmoor’s Parish Church of St George’s, its tower a replica of the tomb of Mausolus in Turkey.

Fig. 19 Hawksmoor’s replica of the tomb of Mausolus.

When lines are drawn connecting Hawksmoor’s churches, they are said to form magickal symbols, and Iain Sinclair (1975) and Peter Ackroyd (1993) both associate both these buildings with malevolent energies. Further down Bloomsbury Way are the
headquarters of The Swedenborg Society; the work and ideas of Christian mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg are familiar to some of my informants. I cross Bloomsbury Way eventually and head along New Oxford Street. Behind me is Forbidden Planet, dedicated to science-fiction and fantasy texts and artefacts and also a frequent port of call for magickal practitioners. Beyond that, that great modern monolith, the Centrepoint building, looms large. It is generally held amongst the natives that the site of the building was cursed by Aleister Crowley (e.g. Greenwood 2000:3).

I pass the San Ling Chinese Medicine Centre (more Yin-Yang symbols, of course) and then either The Well Spring or the Wellspring Bookshop, depending on whether one reads the window sign or hanging sign; either way, both signs agree that it is a shop dedicated to Rudolph Steiner Books.

Then, into High Holborn and more or less immediately after that, into The Princess Louise public house where my informants are having a “pub moot” in the private room upstairs as they do every other Wednesday evening. This particular meeting was originally called Talking Stick by founders Caroline Robertson and Amanda Prouten. The Talking Stick Magickal Journal is an occasional product of this meeting. The cover describes the journal as A Modern Anthology of Paganism and the Occult, and (around the sides of the cover) the following list of subtopics is provided:

Thelema, Angels, Aliens, Wicca, Druidism, Herbalism, Cabala, Mythology, Folklore, Mysteries, Tantra, Ley Lines, Crowley.

It is commonly observed that the only distinctive thing about the individuals present at such meetings is their diversity. In V.Crowley’s (1996a:33) words:

It was not that any one individual looked unusual, but it was the combination of elderly English ladies with walking sticks, middle aged men in sports jackets, leather-jacketed Goths with pierced noses and Doc Martin boots, families carrying babies, hippies whose dress style had not changed since 1972, men with pony tails, men and women with hennaed hair, perms and shaven heads... Yes, collectively, we were an unusual group.

The only obvious sociodemographic point to be made is that the majority of people are white. Just three identify as ‘Indian’, ‘Anglo-Indian’ or, in Steve Wilson’s case, “Indo-Saxon”. Just one is of Chinese origin. There is no one of ‘Afro-Caribbean’
ethnicity present (though Dan’s partner is Afro-Caribbean and makes occasional appearances on the magickal scene). The female-to-male ratio is, as usual, approximately equal. I notice two young women kissing in a corner and some two of the men are unusually ‘feminine’ by mainstream ‘standards’, sporting long hair and nail polish. There is no case for saying that the individuals present are predominantly of any one particular ‘class’.

On a table in one corner sit three of the Thelemites, those who have been inspired predominantly by the work of Aleister Crowley. All are middle-aged males. Thelemites tend to be males; an approximate gender quantification being that three-quarters of the ones I met were. All are dressed smartly yet look somehow dishevelled. Their suits have seen better days and don’t seem to fit all that well. Typically, they are drinking and smoking heavily, and one of them has suspiciously small (‘pinned’?) pupils. They are talking, as one would expect, about matters of Thelema. Or rather, one is talking while the others listen, recounting an unexpected appearance made by the archangel Raphael at the foot of his bed. I catch the end of the anecdote: the Archangel apparently had the courtesy not to wake the mage’s “darling wife”.

At another table sit a group of Wiccans/witches. Some of them are wearing black from head to toe, a uniform commonly topped off with a silver or silver-coloured pentagram worn about the neck. Others are dressed slightly more colourfully, in ‘ethnic’ (i.e. Oriental clothing). Crushed velvet seems popular with some of the older women. In contrast to the Thelemites, there are more women than men at this table. In East Coker (1963:196-204), T.S.Eliot provides a suitable introductory image for witchcraft, although as far as I am aware he was never involved with the practice:

In that open field
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
Of the weak pipe and the little drum
And see them dancing around the bonfire
The association of man and woman
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie -
A dignified and commodious sacrament.
Two and two, necessaraye coniunction,
Holding ech other by the hand or the arm
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Wicca or witchcraft, in V.Crowley’s words (1996b:82) “worships some of the earliest forms of deity - the Great Mother Goddess and the Horned God. [They] are seen as sexual. The Goddess is the Great Mother who gives birth to the world. The Horned God is seen as part animal, part human and part spirit [and] is usually depicted as phallic. Wicca worships the gods through a seasonal cycle of eight festivals and also at the thirteen full moons.” (It is worth noting that many involved in magick, not just Wiccans and witches, observe the former eight festivals, especially Beltane (celebrated on or around May 1) and Summer Solstice (celebrated on or around June 21).)

On another table, a quietly-spoken man with a London accent and occasional stammer chats with a ‘well-spoken’ middle-aged woman. These two individuals are key members of the Illuminates of Dionysus, a group dedicated as its name suggests to the ancient Greek deity Dionysus, an androgynous being associated with anarchy, alcohol, and madness and who played, of course, a important role in Nietzschean philosophy. Bruce is studying for a masters qualification in the philosophy of science, and Jocelyn Chaplin is a relatively well-known feminist psychotherapist and author. The pair are anarchists, and are discussing a forthcoming public ritual, part of the May 1st anticapitalist demonstrations.

Meanwhile, at another table, a huge bear of a man with a white beard is chatting to the equally imposing and slightly younger Steve Wilson. It’s very hard to tell which man is bigger, louder and more ‘traditionally masculine’. The bearded man is one Terry Dobson, who, as usual, has come all the way from Avebury on his motorcycle. Terry
is the Keeper of the Stones, the stones being the megaliths for which the village of Avebury is famous. Terry is an ex-biker and in fact has the dubious honour of having been thrown out of the Hell’s Angels, his career in this particular biker gang cut short when he admitted to being involved with the 1968 Grosvenor Square riot (i.e. fraternising with “poofs and niggers”, which is most certainly not acceptable in the eyes of the right wing Hell’s Angels). When Steve Wilson (a Chaoist as well as a Druid) moves over to the bar to talk to the Chaoists, Terry finds a fellow biker from Pat’s “Celtic mysticism” group to talk motorcycles with.

At the bar, behind where the speaker will be standing, stand the Chaoists (a.k.a. Chaos magicians or Chaotes). All are relatively young; only Steve Wilson is over thirty. Apart from those of them who have come straight from the office, they are with just one exception dressed in black from head to toe. A number of them wear not pentacles, but an eight-pointed star about their necks, and some sport facial piercings as well as tattoos. There’s Dan, his long hair hanging in a pony-tail down the back of his leather raincoat. Dan works in a magickal bookshop (there are several in this part of London apart from The Atlantis Bookshop) and his frequent (and to him cathartic) accounts of his working days often prove to be extremely useful data. There’s Ben, who sports an array of facial piercings and is fashionably dressed in black cargo pants and a black designer ‘T’-shirt. There are just three women amongst this group. Sam has a masters qualification and is a sociologist/penologist based at one of the University of London’s various colleges. Paula, with whom I was involved for a short time, works in community education. Gale has a Ph.D. and is a civil servant. A number of these individuals are members of a magickal group which will here be referred to as the Haunters of the Dark, and whom we will encounter in more detail below. The Chaoists are standing up because it makes slipping out during a talk they find dull more practical. They do this a lot, seemingly having no respect whatsoever for those who do not identify as Chaoists. There is undoubtedly a certain amount of tension between the Chaoists and the others in the room. Chaos magick has a reputation for being “dark and dangerous”, a view clearly shared by some of my scholarly predecessors, for example Luhrmann (1989:97), Greenwood (2000:46n7). Even the Thelemites do not entirely approve of the Chaoists. At this moment in time, Ben, an undergraduate art student, is deploring the fact that Wicca is merely
“Christianity for hippies”. Ben has had problems with Wicca; some years ago now, he was thrown out of his Wiccan group (or ‘coven’) when he came out as a gay man.

It must be said that far more people in the room would claim to be ‘eclectic’ in their approach to magick than would be happy to identify exclusively with the magickal “paths” we have just seen. Many avoid labels altogether, seemingly finding it easier to define what they are not than what they actually are. This ‘eclectic majority’ will often talk of being “self-initiated”. Some attempt to avoid hierarchy and group politics by not joining groups; others may be in several groups at once. Even some of those whom we met above might quibble with fixed labels: as well as Chaos magick, Ben is heavily into Thelema and the Northern Tradition, and we saw that Steve Wilson practices Druidry, Chaos magick, an occasional mixture of Druidry and Voodoo (which with typical magickal humour, he calls “Drudu”). Moreover, Steve is also a priest in The Fellowship of Isis, a goddess-oriented group based in Ireland whose founder, Olivia Robertson, personally knew William Butler Yeats.

Also amongst the ‘eclectic majority’ is Stephen Grasso, a shaman and voodoo priest. Stephen used to be a Chaoist, and belonged to the Haunters of the Dark, but he left the group some months previously when he was struck by physical health problems, and dedicated himself to what is best described as Voodoo-shamanism. Nevertheless, he remains on good terms with the Chaoists, and waves at them from across the bar. (I wince inwardly on his behalf; his leg must be especially bad tonight, or he would have got up and gone over to speak to them.)

Sitting at the next table with his thirtysomething female partner is the octogenarian Conroy Maddox, a celebrated English surrealist artist who has exhibited work in the Tate gallery and whose collages were once considered so subversive that they were seized by the police.

As I buy a drink or several and meet and greet, I am surprised to bump into Jason, the man who had trained me to be an emergency operator in another part of the country years previously. The magickal world, it seems, can be a small one.
The purpose of *Talking Stick* is both social and didactic. After the private room is opened at around seven-thirty, people will talk until around eight forty-five. Then a chairperson introduces the evening’s speaker. The range of talks is as vast as the topics of interest to magickal practitioners. Even I myself have done a talk there, on the maverick psychologist Wilhelm Reich.

**Later That Evening**

Dan, Francis, Alex and myself are standing on a carpet of desiccated fox excrement in the boiler room of a derelict hospital in Clapham. The former trio are part of the aforementioned group which will here be referred to as The Haunters of the Dark (H.O.D.). The group began as an attempt to work magickally with the deities posited in H.P.Lovecraft’s fictional Chthulu mythos. Since then, information gained via possessions and trances pointed the group towards an entity by the name of Orizaz, an extra-dimensional being about whom or which relatively little was then established. The H.O.D. discovered an abandoned hospital in Clapham, and, after some initial explorations, concluded that it would make a marvellous venue for their rituals.

“What’s the plan then?”, I ask, as I fiddle with my camera.

“As ever,” says Dan. “We wing it and just go completely banana-tits mad.”

“Um, can we be a little more specific?”, I push.

“Am I scrying into the Ghooric Zone and having a natter with Orizaz?”, asks Alex.

“Why not?”, answers Dan, pulling the cap from can of spray paint and proceeding to spray the H.O.D.’s magickal sigil on the wall nearest him. Alex does likewise:
"Is this Ghooric Zone the same as the astral realm?" I enquire.

"Yes, Bill, we’re taking you up the astral," replies Francis.

"Thanks for that, darling," I say. "Are we here to do any magick, or just make adolescent innuendoes?"

"Er, yes, it is all the same place. Probably," Dan hedges.

"'Kay, cheers. Nice to know where’s one’s going, after all," I respond.
"You’ve got your astral travel card?", asks Francis, with a smirk. "You’ll need Ghooric Zones one to six."^7

"Very good," I reply, unable to help smiling. "Er, what exactly am I doing?", I enquire, rather more seriously.

"Open you’re mind and see what comes into it," says Dan.

"Oooooo-rrrrrr-zzzz-aaaa-zzzzzzzz," Alex begins to chant, and with that the rite begins.

The ritual is remarkably spontaneous. Somehow, everyone knows what to do and when to do it, even me. I am a little vague about the details from this point on. Not only do I find myself becoming dizzy from the repeated circling and chanting, but I am growing increasingly affected by the fumes from the spray paint. Eventually I stumble and fall to my knees, a loud buzzing ringing in my ears and mental images of a strange, entemoid [i.e. insect-like] being flashing before my eyes.

Some time later (only about a minute according to my audio recording, though it felt like centuries) I come to my senses. Other than a headache, I seem to be none the worse for the last few minutes.

Alex, also having fallen onto his knees, has been scrying [i.e. looking] into the Ghooric Zone, reporting what he sees into the tape recorder. Now he is just kneeling in front of it, looking a little dazed.

"You two alright?", Francis asks. (He’s dropped the macho stance and seems rather concerned.)

"Er, yeah, um, I was miles away then," I report.

"What didja get?", Francis asks Alex.

"Insects," he says, rather shakily. "Scary, white, some eyeless, horrible scary fucking insect things, and this... this deafening buzzing noise they made. Insects... they
were... angels, but they were insect angels, spiralling down through black space...
screaming in my ears... .

Cool, huh?

Much Later That Evening

At Dan’s insistence, we leave the hospital “through the round window”:

Fig. 1.11: “Through the round window”: exiting Temple Ooranachai.
The level of irony in parodying the BBC’s *Play School* (as it had been back when we were children) with a group of Left Hand Path magicians in an abandoned derelict building the middle of the night is not lost on any of us. We exit without incident.

Having said my farewells to the Haunters, I walk from Clapham back to Brixton and arrive home by one o’clock. Angel’s dinner-party has obviously yet to wind-up. I’m slightly annoyed that this is the case; it’s not that I dislike Angel and the majority of her friends, far from it, merely that none of them would have approved of the type of magick in which I have just been involved. The transition from one set of magickal practitioners to another will in this case constitute something of a culture shock (or a subsubculture shock, to be more exact). On top of that, I am by now thoroughly exhausted and yet it would of course be both rude and ethnographically unproductive to go straight to bed.

All of the guests, if they had to chose a label, would fit into the category of Eco-mages, that is to say, magickal practice based in ‘nature’ and with a specific aim of reducing environmental damage through magickal means. Though not quite Wiccans or witches, (those assembled tend to be just slightly more eclectic and anarchic), they are not hugely dissimilar to them in their general outlook.

“I love your flat,” gushes one of the guests as I walk into the dining room. “I love the way it meanders. Don’t you?”

“Um...”

Mercifully Angel chips in before I can attempt to explain that I had not given the fact that the flat is ‘I’-shaped any thought. “But it’s too dark though,” Angel says, pulling a face. “There’s just, like, not enough light.”

“There’s you though,” someone quips. Angel shoots him a grin. I have a feeling she has an admirer there.
“Yeah, well, it’s like a lot of London isn’t it?”, I offer. “You only have a tiny patch of sky right up above all the flats. It’s... I mean, I imagine, it must be something like being in prison.”

“Yeah, you could pretty much say that,” says a dreadlocked white individual who somehow has the locutionary gravitas to indicate that he does indeed know what it is like to be in prison. I don’t ask though, and nor does anyone else. Either they know already or assume, as I do, that it was on account of so-called ‘eco-terrorist’ activities; he certainly looks the type and if he’s a friend of Angel’s then it is not unlikely. (I later found out from Angel that this was indeed the case. I should also make clear that eco-activism as practised by my informants, like eco-activism generally, was of a non-violent nature. However, in the United Kingdom, since the Terrorism Act 2000 one does not need to be prepared to damage human life in order to be classed as a ‘terrorist’.)

I nip into the kitchen for more wine and by the time I too return to the lounge, the conversation has drifted to racial issues: Angel is explaining how she took someone to task for using racist language in Brixton Market recently and that as far as she is concerned, individuals “on our level” have a duty to attempt bring others “up to it”.

Things wind up shortly thereafter, and I retire to my room to write up the evening’s events in my field diary, perform the evening banishing ceremony and, finally, sleep.

Notes

1. Since that time, Lynx have added two more scents, Gravity and Dimension, to their range of deodorants.

2. This comment refers to the Brixton race riots which occurred from April 10-12, 1981.

3. I have employed the narrative device of space-time compression in the above passage, that is to say, not all of these advertisements were necessarily all visible on this particular route on this particular day. The effect I have deliberately created for the sake of expository clarity is a synchronic collage of what were
diachronically disparate phenomena. My collecting/photographing of advertisements began in early 2001 and as far as this project is concerned, ended in mid-2003. That stated, the relation between alternative spirituality and advertising is still of great interest to me and this aspect of data collection is still ongoing at the time of writing. A sketch of the relation between alternative spirituality and advertising will be provided in Chapter 4.

4. ‘Pinned’ is a slang term for the constriction of the pupils caused by heroin ingestion.

5. Here I will use the words ‘witch’ and ‘Wiccan’ (and ‘witchcraft’ and ‘Wicca’) synonymously. Sometimes however, there can be significant differences in their meaning (for details see Pearson 2002:153-4, and also Greenwood 2000 wherein “Wicca” is distinguished from “feminist witchcraft” on the grounds that it involves essentialised gender constructs).

6. The otherworld is sometimes loosely referred to as ‘the astral’ or ‘astral plane’, and some magickal practitioners (especially heterosexual male ones) find this a constant source of crude humour.

7. Journeying to the otherworld can be referred to generally as ‘astral travel’. The H.O.D. refer to otherworld (or the area therein which they explore) as “the astral”, and also more specifically as the “Ghooric Zone”, a phrase which they claim Lovecraft used in his correspondence. A Travelcard is a common kind of bus or underground ticket, and can cover any or all of London’s six travel zones, hence Francis’ joke about an “astral travelcard” for “zones one to six”.

42
What is Magick?

Tim: My magickal career started when I dialled God and got the ‘number no longer in service’ message. I realised I had to become my own divinity...

The Conway Hall event seemed promising: a day’s symposium on “Real Magic”. That’s assuming that everyone could agree on what was magic, let alone what was real.


Ask two of us the same question, and you’ll get three different answers.

A common native quip.

We dance to our own tune. And we’re all tone deaf.

King Arthur Pendragon, explaining to a journalist why a group of magickal practitioners apparently could not readily agree on anything.

Introduction

The previous chapter offered a largely phenomenological introduction to magick, detailing what it feels like to be a magickal practitioner doing some of the things magickal practitioners do. In this chapter, I wish to approach magick from some different angles. One of the greatest sources of controversy surrounding the existing work in this area is the matter of definition and taxonomy. What is ‘magick’? Why is it spelled unconventionally? Is it, as some have argued, part of the ‘New Age’? What then is the New Age? Or is magick an integral part of ‘Paganism’ or ‘Neopaganism’? If so, what is this? What might be the relation of Paganism or Neopaganism to the New Age? Whatever magick, the New Age and/or Neopaganism are, and however they are related, do they constitute a religious phenomenon or phenomena? If so, do they then constitute a ‘New Religious Movement’ (N.R.M.), or two distinct but similar N.R.M.’s? Or is this formulation misleading? Is what we are dealing with
‘religious’ at all, or might aspects of what is going on be better referred to as examples of ‘spirituality’? What, precisely, might be the difference between religion and spirituality? What moreover might be the connection between such labels and equally commonly-encountered ones like ‘occultism’, ‘mysticism’ and ‘esotericism’? Furthermore, what the natives refer to as “the magickal scene” has also been viewed as comprising both a ‘counterculture’, and a ‘subculture’. We will need to assess such viewpoints, and this in turn will lead us to address the related issue of whether the contemporary constitutes a ‘modern’ or a ‘postmodern’ condition, and likewise whether magick is ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’.²

Previous Categorizations of Magick

[I]t is important that we do not try and find one term or one concept to understand this set of phenomena but retain some sense of multiplicity of terms and concepts.

Hetherington, K., Expressions of Identity (1998:4)

We are somewhat less horrified today by the nasty habit of things spilling over their definitional boundaries, or even by the premonition that the drawing of such boundaries with any degree of lasting reliability defies human resources. [...] We are not at all appalled by the necessity to settle for ‘family resemblances’ [...].


It is a commonplace yet very necessary point to make that the data in question is extremely complex and also rather fluid; natives and commentators alike readily acknowledge this fact. When we turn to previous scholarship in this area, we see that some have classed magick, aspects thereof and/or synonyms therefor as ‘New Age’ (e.g. Luhrmann 1989; Heelas 1996; Hanegraaff 1998a). Others have implicitly or explicitly denied that magick should be placed in this category (Greenwood 2000:8-10; Pearson 1998). Still others have argued that the term ‘New Age’ ought by now to have been abandoned altogether (Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe 2000). One of the primary reasons for such stances is the looseness of the formulation ‘New Age’: as Eileen Barker (1995:347-8) notes, there is simply “no agreement about the boundaries of the New Age, which may merge with complementary medicine, the Human Potential
Movement, Neo-paganism, New Thought, Occultism, Shamanism and/or Wicca or Witchcraft”.

The ‘New Age’ used in a narrow sense (see Hanegraaff 1998a:Ch5) refers to the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, implying an astrological millenarian phenomenon. However, it has been variously argued that there is a great deal more to the New Age than this. The most significant and culturally-specific feature of the New Age for one scholar is that it comprises “Self-spirituality” (1996:3), or exhibits a “Self-ethic” (1996:23). In The New Age Movement, Paul Heelas (1996:19) states:

[T]he most pervasive and significant aspect of the New Age is that the person is, in essence, spiritual. To experience the ‘Self’ itself is to experience ‘God’, the ‘Goddess’, the ‘Source’, ‘Christ Consciousness’, the ‘inner child’, the ‘way of the heart’, or, most simply and, I think, most frequently, ‘inner spirituality’.

Of such experiences of a “Higher Self” (1996:19), Heelas (1996:23) elaborates:

The basic idea [...] is that what lies within - experienced by way of ‘intuition’, ‘alignment’ or an ‘inner voice’ - serves to inform the judgements, decisions and choices required by everyday life.

There is no doubt in my mind that Heelas isolated and analysed a most important aspect of the “New Age”. In terms of the data we have so far seen in this thesis, the reader may recall that the phrases “inner guidance” and “inner self” both appeared fairly early in Chapter 1, on the Crystal Health and Wealth poster on the toilet wall. Rather than quibble with his observation, if anything I will be building on Heelas’ insight throughout this ethnography. We should note that, as witnessed in later publications (e.g. 2000), Heelas changed his terminology (though not his ideas in any major sense), taking from Talcott Parsons (1978:320) the notion of the “expressive”, writing of an “expressive spirituality” which is defined (2000:243) as “the spirituality which has to do with that which lies ‘within’ rather than that which lies over-and-above the self”. M.F.Brown in The Channeling Zone, though confining himself to but one single aspect of the complex of practices which are or have been labelled ‘New Age’, has made a similar observation and linked it to Charles Taylor’s concept of “subjectivist expressionism” (1989:507), which in Brown’s (1997:91) summary comprises the “outlook that values above all else “self-expression, self-realisation, self-fulfilment, [and] discovering authenticity”.”
Rather than treat Neopaganism as part of the New Age as did Paul Heelas (1996) in *The Emerging Network* (1995), sociologist Michael York treats the “New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements” as related but separable; both in his view include elements of magick, and vice versa. The term ‘Paganism’ stems from the Latin word *paganus*, meaning ‘country-dweller’, and currently denotes either ‘nature religion’, or more generally any pre-Christian religion. The ‘neo-’ prefix, common on the etic but also sometimes found on the emic, stresses the invented nature of many of the supposedly traditional details. As noted in Chapter 1, one also encounters the label ‘Heathen’ (generally held to stem from the Gothic word *heath*) when dealing specifically with the Paganism drawing on Northern European sources. For some, ‘Heathen’ and ‘Pagan’ are simply synonyms, though some Heathens much prefer to be labelled thereofas rather than as Pagans. (This label caused particular problems in relation to the latest UK census data, its compilers misinterpreting this word as meaning ‘atheist’ whenever a respondent used it.) In terms of the similarities between Neopaganism and the New Age, Michael York observes (1995: 45) that both feature:

- eco-humanism or some variant, the belief in the intrinsic divinity of the individual, epistemological individualism, and exploratory use of theonymic metaphors not normally associated with the Judeo-Christian mainstream. Stewardship of the earth as a top priority associates both phenomena with the ‘Green Movement’ as their primary political expression. On the individual level, the focus is invariably on personal growth, and here both developments converge with the aims found within the Human Potential Movement. Both New Age and Neo-paganism are structured along the lines of religious consumerism […]. […] Individual exegesis is the norm, and active proselytization is not practised.

In York’s view (1995:167) the major difference between the two lies in the fact that “Neo-paganism” demonstrates a more ‘this-worldly’ approach to spirituality, while the “New Age” has inherited a “worldview of the mental-spiritual as the sole reality – one composed only of goodness and light – [which] is part of the Swedenborgian/New Thought and Eastern monistic heritages of the New Age.” York (1995:168) continues to denote how the [New Age] “vocabulary is structured hierarchically into “higher realms”, “higher selves”, etc […]”, while the “Neo-pagan view is more ‘horizontal’.” I will allow York’s rather generalised comments to stand for now, though later we will see that there is more to it than this. Finally here, we ought to note that certain other scholars flatly refuse to even attempt to define the New Age (*e.g.* Pike 2001:95).
If we may put the matter of the ‘New Age’ and ‘Neopaganism’ and their contested boundaries aside for just a moment (we will return to it), it is clear that to some scholars at least, magickal practice is not in its current form entirely separable from what we may be accustomed to think of as ‘religion’. (It was Aleister Crowley who first argued that the word should be spelled with a ‘k’ on the end and pronounced ‘mage-ick’, the stress falling on the first syllable, recalling the Greek words mageia and magikos and the Latin word magus, all of which may be translated as ‘priest’.) Many of my informants will describe their practice as “religious” (though there are some dissenting voices as we will see below), and many will refer to themselves as priestesses or priests. Hence on the etic level, James R.Lewis can edit a collection of scholarly essays on the subject published under the title Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft (1996), quite justifiably blurring the common (though hardly unproblematic) anthropological dichotomy between ‘religion’ and ‘magic’. A host of other scholars have approached magick primarily as a ‘religious’ phenomena, be that ‘religion’ as in ‘nature religion’ (see Pearson, Roberts and Samuel 1998 or Albanese 1990), Paganism or Neopaganism (see Hardman and Harvey 1996; Harvey 1997), or ‘religion’ as in ‘western esotericism’ or ‘Western Mysteries’ (e.g. R.Sutcliffe 1996; Gibbons 2000; what exactly is meant by the terms ‘western esotericsm’ and ‘Western Mysteries’ will be detailed below). Finally on the matter of magick as ‘religious’, we may note that some scholars, including Greenwood (2000), and more explicitly Blain (2002) and Wallis (forthcoming) have perceived and stressed a shamanistic element to magickal practice.

Still further analytical permutations have been taken by those who conceptualise magick as somehow, or to some extent, religious. Magick has occasionally been approached as ‘vernacular religion’ (e.g. Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe 2000:11). More importantly for us, magick has been classed within those phenomena which are termed ‘New Religious Movements’ (or N.R.M.’s, e.g. York 1995, Brown 1997), a conceptualisation which is part of the ‘staple diet’ of many sociologists of religion. However, there are various others who have partially or wholly problematised this approach. Some regard the ‘New’ as dubious (e.g. Hetherington 1998:29-31; Heelas 1996:9, 42; M.Green 1986) on the not unreasonable grounds that none of what is going on is actually very new (as we will see when we turn to the history of magick below). Perhaps more problematic however is that the term ‘Movement(s)’ has been
questioned and rejected by some (e.g. Prince and Riches 2000:18; Heelas 1996:9). Is it as the former scholars claim an ill-considered metaphor which functions as a distorting reification? If a social or religious ‘movement’, by definition, has a relatively formal organisation and a set of agreed goals pertaining to the alteration of one or more aspects of the wider society, can we really see either in this instance? Or are we dealing with a phenomenon which while indisputably collective, is too eclectic, diffuse and semi-organised to conform to many sociological definitions of a ‘movement’? The answer to this of course depends on precisely how ‘movement’ is conceptualised, but it can be said that the majority of sociologists veer toward the latter stance.

So much for the problematisations of the ‘N’ and the ‘M’ in ‘N.R.M.’. There are also scholars who have questioned the validity of the term ‘religion’ in this context. Some have suggested classing magick as a facet of ‘spirituality’ (e.g. Heelas 1996:23; Prince and Riches 2000:91), or more specifically “alternative spirituality” (e.g. Brown 1997:viii, 116; Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe 2000:8-10) due to its detraditionalised nature. (Though Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe themselves (2000:10-11) as well as others (e.g. Hetherington 1998:5) have questioned the validity of the term ‘alternative’ and the implied neat binary between ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’, a recurring problem which we will address below.) Greenwood (2000) and Gibbons (2001:title) also use the word ‘spirituality’, though without any explicit definition or advocacy thereof. Paul Heelas meanwhile (2000) has as we noted recently used the term “expressive spirituality” to characterise the phenomenon in question. Though some natives will sometimes use the words ‘religion’ and ‘religious’ to describe what they do, some have other ideas. One Paul Eden writes:

So do you think this Wicca stuff is actually, you know, a full-on, belief-based, capital R, ‘Religion’? Because if it is, then I have to tread very carefully, because my default position is to run screaming from the room at the very mention of the word. I mean, I’m an Essex boy ex-Catholic: that’s as anti-religious as you can get. Spiritual pathway, yes; occult experience, yes; critically-engaged belief structure, yes. Religion? Nooooooooo!

Such sentiments are not uncommon (see Brown 1997:116 for similar data from his informants), hence magick has furthermore been seen as ‘occultism’ or an integral part thereof (e.g. Gibbons 2001:1; Greenwood 2000:2), and has also been seen as involving ‘mysticism’ or at least somehow being related thereto (e.g. King 1999;
Luhrmann 1989: 187-191; also Prince and Riches 2000:87, 203, 210; the latter scholars are subtle to the point of being almost underhanded in their use of this term). Finally, particularly in historical approaches, we find the term ‘esotericism’ makes appearances (e.g. Hanegraaff 1998a), and Gibbons (2001) uses the terms ‘occult’, ‘occult spirituality’, ‘esotericism’ and ‘mysticism’ as synonyms, yet still occasionally uses the term ‘religion’ (e.g. 2001:135). Tiryakian (1972) and Hanegraaff (1998) have in different ways attempted to distinguish the two, though such a distinction strikes me as unhelpful and as R.Sutcliffe (1996:113) has noted, is rarely evident on the emic level.

Some scholars use a plethora of different and variably (un)defined labels in the same text. Brown (1997) for example is happy to use three labels in one book, namely “alternative spirituality”, “New Age” and “N.R.M.”. Greenwood (2000) goes further, beginning Magic, Religion and the Otherworld with a whistle-stop terminological tour. Initially (2000:ix) she describes her data as being located “within the western esoteric tradition” and in the next sentence indicates that her informants may be referred to as “magicians”. She reports that she began ‘native’ involvement however, through “feminist witchcraft”. By the next paragraph (2000:ix), she is writing of a “Pagan alternative to organised religion”, which she believes constitutes a “countercultural movement”. Moreover, the “essence of magic”, she argues, is “the spiritual experience of the otherworld” (2000:ix). Before long (2000:1), we hear of a “Western magico-spiritual counter-culture commonly termed Paganism” which encompasses “ceremonial magic or ‘Western Mysteries’ [...] witchcraft or wicca, druidry, [...] the Northern magical traditions of the Scandinavian and Germanic peoples, [and] chaos magick.” Without so much as an attempt to define the “esoteric”, “magic(k)” and “magicians”, the “Pagan alternative”, or this “spiritual” “essence of magic”, Greenwood proceeds with her autoethnography, though she does define the term “occult”... as “esoteric” (2000:2), and throws in the word “‘mysticism’, of which magical practices are part”, for good measure (2000:9; why the inverted commas?). Somewhat later on in the book, the word “‘religion’” is used, first within inverted commas (2000:5), then without (2000:8); in the second chapter (2000:39, n.13) it is suggested that a distinction between religion and magic is not helpful. One also notes that within just a few pages (2000:3), Greenwood has dropped the word ‘counterculture’ in favour of the word ‘subculture’ without letting the reader know
why (surely these formulations are not synonyms?). A little later on (2000:8), we encounter the notion of N.R.M.’s and finally, that of “cults”. Ultimately, Greenwood’s philosophy of labelling seems to be one of ‘the more the merrier’; apart perhaps from the word ‘sorcery’, there are no possible labels I can think of which Greenwood has not applied to her data at some point in the first thirty-nine pages of *Magic, Religion and the Otherworld*.

Penultimately, we should be aware that some scholars have used ostensibly the same data referred to by different labels at different points in their careers. We have already noted that Heelas’ (1996) early work on *The New Age Movement* (defined as “Self-spirituality”) varies from Heelas’ later work (e.g. 2000) whereby the same phenomenon is labelled “expressive spirituality”. Or, Greenwood can write the book-length autoethnography, *Magic, Religion and the Otherworld* (2000), yet can still contribute work to books such as Pearson, Roberts and Samuel’s *Nature Religion Today* (1998), Hardman and Harvey’s *Paganism Today* (1996) and Bowman and Sutcliffe’s *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (2000) which is clearly based on identical or very similar data. Finally, we need to note that conversely, certain scholars have used the same label to denote very differently defined data at different points in their careers; compare for example the “New Age” as defined by Hanegraaff (1998a) with the far from identical “New Age” defined by Hanegraaff (1998b:31, n.11).

In the light of this extraordinary taxonomical multiplicity, some of which is deliberate and at least supposedly justified but much of which remains tacit and unquestioned, it is not surprising that no scholar who has previously examined ‘New Religious Movements’, the ‘New Age’, ‘Paganism’ or ‘Neopaganism’, ‘magick’, ‘magical religion’, ‘the occult’, ‘mysticism’, ‘esotericism’, ‘expressive spirituality’ and/or ‘alternative spirituality’ has been able to escape a problematic and complex situation when it comes to neatly defining her or his data. As is often remarked of Daoism (e.g. Creel 1970; Ching 1993:85), it sometimes seems that there simply is no ‘definitive’ definition in the case of contemporary magick either. However, this is not so. A definition can be arrived at. It may be multiple, but this should not be particularly problematic or unusual. The field may be broad, but it is still a field, and its inhabitants are not secular humanists, Christians, Jews or Muslims. I can only support
the exhortations of scholars such as Prince and Riches (2000:8,10) or Gibbons (2001:4) to the effect that the variety we encounter is something to be acknowledged and studied, not a justification for withdrawing from the academic endeavour because things ‘on the ground’ are rather complex.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will proceed to answer the title question in two ways. First, we will take into account an historical dimension; second we will ask the native what she or he thinks. These very different analytical routes will all bring us to a similar destination. Finally, we will address the issues of whether or not magick can be said to be in any sense ‘countercultural’, and relatedly, whether we should conceptualise both the ‘magickal scene’ and society-at-large as ‘modern’, or ‘postmodern’.

The Historical Roots of Contemporary Magick

It is not my intention to provide a thoroughgoing historical analysis here. Like social anthropology generally, this piece of work is synchronic in its focus. For the purposes of this thesis however, the following sketch will be vital, for magick in its contemporary form is not explicable without a brief account of its historical genesis.

The roots of contemporary magickal practice are most commonly referred to as ‘occultism’, a term which in itself is rather unenlightening, given that it stems from the Latin word *occultus* which merely means ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’. The word ‘esotericism’ (from the Greek *esoterikos*, ‘within’) occurs almost as frequently, usually synonymously and generally indicating ‘inner teachings’ (as opposed to ‘outer’ or ‘popularly received’ teachings), will not greatly clarify the situation either. The historical work of B.J.Gibbons (2000:3-5) is however more elucidatory. In *Spirituality and the Occult*, he has shown there to have been three major sources of what he terms “occult” thought: Gnosticism (including its Hermetic form and Jewish Cabalism), Presocratic ancient Greek philosophy (including the ideas of or attributed to Pythagoras, Empedocles and most importantly, Heraclitus), and Christian Neoplatonism. Despite the fact that this may sound rather vague and suggest a
potentially polymorphous syncretic morass, the ‘net result’ is simple and surprisingly crystalline: occultism was neatly defined by Gibbons (2001:5-7) as:

[A] gnostic system in the broadest sense of the term, a religion whose basic soteriological principle was knowledge (gnosis) rather than forensic notions of vicarious atonement. [...] The occult philosophy can be reduced to a single principle, which is given its classic expression in The Emerald Tablet of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus: “whatever is below is like that which is above, and whatever is above is like that which is below”. The doctrine of “as above, so below” means that everything that exists is related through a series of correspondences. There is, in particular, a tripartite correspondence between God, the world, and humanity. Man [sic] is the central term in this cosmic analogy, since he is not only a macrotheos or “a complete image of God”, but also an image of the world or microcosm. In Paracelsus’s words, “the sun and the moon and all the planets as well as all stars and the whole chaos are in man... For what is outside is also inside, and what is not outside man is not inside”.

(The andrologocentrism reflects Gibbon’s sources rather than an adrocentric bias to magick generally; we will look briefly at gender in magick in Chapter 4.) Later (2001:10) Gibbons expands on this basic but perhaps seemingly eccentric notion of self, citing Norbert Elias’ (1994:204) observation that a basic tenet of modern identity is that the human body is a “vessel which holds the true self locked within it”, the skin “the frontier between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.” (Prince and Riches 2000:135 use Strathern’s (1987:281-2) identical observation to contrast what they term “New Age” identity with mainstream western conceptions of the person.) Of this hegemonic modern sense of self Gibbons writes:

Such an understanding of the self is a complete antithesis to that found in the occult philosophy. The esoteric mystic did not experience the self as something that was closed off from all that lay beyond a particular boundary, confronting its environment as ‘Other’. On the contrary, the ‘Other’ is also the substance and essence of the self. This is the meaning of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy: [...] that man [sic] and the world share an ultimate existential identity.

As we will see, this construct of self remains absolutely basic to contemporary magickal discourse and practice. In this regard at least, little seems to have changed since the Renaissance. Gibbons’ analysis (2001:11) proceeds to note how occultism was increasingly marginalised and forced ‘underground’, with some of those involved with it dying as martyrs. Occultism nevertheless survived its ‘bad press’ (in Gibbon’s view, that was an important part of its appeal), and underwent a “series of transformations” which brought it to a point whereat it may now be characterised as a “mystical humanism” (Gibbons 2000:11). Exactly what these “transformations” were is something which Gibbons is as vague about as he is regarding precisely what this ‘mysticised’ humanism might be; strong as it is in terms of a thorough presentation of
historical ‘occultism’, Gibbons’ work is marred by a distinctly snobbish attitude to apparently “vulgarised” (2000:16) contemporary ‘occultism’ which he sees as somehow less ‘authentic’ than its historical antecedents, and it seems that he looses both interest and accuracy in the reconstruction of its details from around the turn of the twentieth century.

We need to note that there was a period which is generally referred to as the ‘Occult Revival’ in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see for example McIntosh 1972). Though some might question such a sweeping historiographic move, it is doubtless fair to say that during this time interest in the occult was significantly stirred. It is in this context, a context famously captured by J.-K. Huysmans’ novel Là-Bas, that we encounter figures such as Eliphas Lévi and Madame Blavatsky. The former is chiefly remembered for integrating the Tarot with the Cabala. The latter was co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Though Theosophy is no longer strong (see Tingay 2000), its offshoot Anthroposophy, initiated by Rudolph Steiner, still endures as we saw from one of the bookshops passed on New Oxford Street in Chapter 1, and magickal practitioners readily acknowledge that they are in some sense heirs of the Theosophists. (In 1888, just over a decade after the Theosophical Society was founded, the other main occult group of this period came into being, namely the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as we noted in Chapter 1.) Finally here, the Occult Revival approximately coincides with the heyday of spiritualism, again no longer strong but acknowledged as an important influence on contemporary magickal thought and deed (see Brown 1997:50-57 for a sketch of the links and differences between spiritualism and certain aspects of what he labels the “New Age”).

As well as a simple increase in the quantity of occultism, we can observe (at least) two important qualitative changes therein about the time of the Occult Revival. First, there was an orientalisation of occultism: an ‘eastward’ gaze begun at this point (not, as Gibbons 2000:138 has hazarded, around the heyday of the beat writers). Not only were westerners looking east however, but they were looking east for something very specific, what Aldous Huxley termed The Perennial Philosophy (1969) or, in William James’ (1985:404) famous phrase, a universal religious ‘essence’ with “neither birthday nor native land” (see also Heelas 1996: 27-8). It should be noted that the orientalism we witness here is one in which the primary focus is on Hinduism.
Second, in addition to orientalisation, we see the ‘scientification’ of occultism. Though depending on precisely how one defines ‘science’, there could be a case to be made that this process had earlier manifestations (in the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg in the 1700’s, for example), it is around this time that occultism became integrally associated with scientism in a way which no other religion has. At times, occult scientism and orientalism are hard to separate: the notion of ‘energy’ for example begins to make its first appearances around this time could equally be said to be scientistic and orientalistic; Mesmer’s notion of ‘animal magnetism’ or Wilhelm Reich’s “orgone energy” (detailed in Chapter 7) are the former, whereas Daoist Qi energy or Hindu prana energy or kundalini energy are obviously the latter. In the last analysis, we may allow Aleister Crowley (cited in Symonds 1971:23) to sum up the rapprochement between science and the occult:

We place no reliance
On Virgin nor pigeon,
Our method is science,
Our aim is religion.

Slightly later on, we find analytical psychologist Carl Jung making a significant contribution to magickal discourse: as well as continuing the orientalisation process by introducing Daoist concepts into ‘the mix’, he was without a doubt its major ‘psychologiser’ in the first half of the twentieth-century. (Another erstwhile pupil of Freud’s, one Wilhelm Reich, was (after his death) to make an impact on magickal discourse through his notion of ‘orgone energy’ which as stated, will be addressed in Chapter 7.)

We should also note that either despite or because of his dubious reputation, Aleister Crowley has been a major influence on the development as well as spelling of magick in many of its current forms. We know that Crowley travelled widely in the Orient and imported certain ideas and techniques therefrom. Another vital figure is one Gerald Gardner, generally regarded as being responsible for the innovation of the nature-oriented magickal practice of Witchcraft or Wicca in England during the 1940’s (this is despite his claim that he discovered a Wicca which had existed for centuries). As we saw in Chapter 1, Gardner and Crowley were both members of the
Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (and they certainly knew one another) and Gardner also travelled and worked in the East. However, current scholarship suggests that similarities between Wicca and Tantra are coincidental and shallow, and not indicative of any direct line of transmission (Samuel n.d.). As Greenwood (2000:4-5) has been at pains to stress, Wicca was a continuation of western esotericism.

The beats during the 1950’s and the ‘hippie’ counterculture during the 1960’s drew on and contributed to magickal ideology. The latter decade moreover witnessed a major innovation in the form of the Human Potential Movement (HPM); York (1995:8), for example, places the HPM so centrally in his analysis that “the New Age and Neo-Pagan movements” are viewed to a large extent as “developments of and outgrowths from” it (see also Puttick 2000).

The most recent innovation within magick was the development of Chaos Magick in the 1980’s. Though chaos magick claims to be the ‘latest and greatest thing’, in fact what it seems to have achieved is the intensification and celebration of tendencies which were already amply present in magick, namely eclecticism and relativism. Chaos magick presents us with an ontology which is considerably more idealist than realist. The closest thing it has to a ‘central tenet’ is that there is no absolute truth, and no magickal system is better (or worse) than any other. Understandably, Chaos magick is labelled ‘postmodern’ by its practitioners. However, as we will see, there is a strong case for R. Sutcliffe’s argument (1996:127) that Chaos magick represents “an updating of terminology rather than any genuinely radical innovation in occult theory”. On top of this, Chaos magick runs up against problems of self-refutation and inconsistency when its extreme ‘postmodern’ rhetoric is compared to its practice.

So much then for the occult roots of contemporary magickal practice in the syncretism of Gnosticism, Presocratic Greek philosophy and Christian Neoplatonism which became ‘esotericism’ or ‘occultism’ and the late-nineteenth and twentieth-century orientalisation, scientification and psychologisations thereof. Histories of magick remain to be written, but this brief sketch will suffice for our purposes, at least at this point in the thesis. The reader is directed to the work of Hanegraaff (1998a) for one of the most thorough diachronic historical accounts of western esotericism, though his ultimate conclusions regarding contemporary magick are more
questionable. As we saw was the case with Gibbons’ synchronic historical work, an
historian can be breathtaking in their historiography but then spoil an otherwise
splendid thesis with a poorly-researched and poorly-argued set of remarks on the
contemporary which should have been left to sociologists and anthropologists to deal
with.

What the Natives Say

At this point I think we should hear from the native on the matter of definition. I will
therefore supply some offers of a definition of magick which were requested from
various magickal practitioners by an individual who had no clear idea what magick
was. The discussion took place on an internet bulletin board. I will generally cite the
contributions to the discussion one by one and offer detailed commentary
immediately afterwards.

Ali Bi: What is my magickal belief? You know how people debate whether you can be in love with
two people at once? It’s sorta like that with me... half of me honestly believes this is utter shit! But the
other half (I guess, the little kid in me) knows that is this real. I am the centre of the universe (and you
all are at the centre of yours). Everything is an extension of me and by wishing, willing, praying,
drawing, writing, and creating symbols or sigils I can make things happen. I change myself and my
reality to suit me. It seems egocentric but only superficially... ‘cause if everything is me I’m forced to
look at everything differently. With a bit more compassion and understanding. It’s a working paradigm
I’ve gotten over the past two years and it’s helped me grow a lot. Once I outgrow it though, well...
we’ll see.

That said, playing with magick has changed my life/world considerably. The little kid in me is yelling,
“Told you so!” and I’ve had to sort out the why’s and how’s of my mucking about with reality.

It is then the occult construct of self, and a desire to alter the self and the world which
are fundamental for Ali. As a magickal practitioner, she or he is not, subjectively-
speaking, separate from ‘the world at large’, though what we are given in the above
statement is actually two propositions. First, that the magickal practitioner is at the
centre of her or his own universe (“I am the centre of the universe (and you all are at
the centre of yours)”), and second that the magickal practitioner is the entire universe
(“everything is me”). Obviously there is a contradiction of sorts between these two
propositions, for one cannot be located at the centre of the world and yet be the entire
world at the same time. However, it is with both these axioms somewhere and
somehow in mind that the magickal life is lived. Magickal awareness may appear then
to veer between two extremes, the narcissistic or egocentric ‘I am the centre of it all’, and the solipsistic ‘it’s all me’ (see also Gibbons 2000:143 and Luhrmann 1989:165n.2). I mean ‘narcissistic’ and ‘solipsistic’ neutrally here, though some critics have used these terms with a highly negative valence. (As York 1995:14 has noted, the frequent charges of narcissism are usually on a level of mere linguistic puns. Exceptions would be those few scholars who are still prepared to use psychoanalysis, specifically ‘primary narcissism’, to explain a collective phenomenon, such as Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism* (1980) or Friedman’s work on narcissism and postmodernity (1992). I am not inclined to attempt to use psychoanalysis in a thesis such as this one; Luhrmann (1989:105) has already done what can be done in this regard, and done so with due caution. Though doubtless there will be a psychoanalytic dimension to what is going on in magickal practice, this does not constitute an explanation of either why people practice magick or why contemporary magick takes the form it does.)

It is also worth underscoring that we see in the above definition a belief that magick is associated with the childlike and playful (Ali “playing with” magick). This has been noted and stressed by many others (e.g. Luhrmann 1989:13; Pike 2000:ch.6), and it is an aspect of magick which we will return to in Chapter 4. When pressed on this point, magickal practitioners often paraphrase Oscar Wilde, claiming that what they do is “far to important to be taken seriously”.

We also see a clear and relatively high level of scepticism in the above individual’s mind, and we see an interesting expectation that ‘Ali Bi’s’ “working paradigm” will eventually be outgrown. I am by no means the only scholar to have noticed this latter aspect of magick either. S.J.Sutcliffe (2000:28) has written in relation to “alternative spirituality” of an “individualistic spiritual pragmatism that is ruthlessly accommodated to the cultural flux of the modern world”. It is not so much the obvious point that any system of belief cannot be entirely static; what I think we have here that is ‘(sub)culturally specific’ is an overt acknowledgement, indeed an overt expectation that one’s “working paradigm” or belief-system will have to change over time. In magickal discourse, there is a strong implication one would not be doing it right if it did not. We see the same point in the next definition of ‘magick’ proffered.
Anna Qi: There are many different attitudes towards Magic. Magic is a very personal and subjective thing, which can lead to difficulties in finding commonalities in experience. Even the language we use can be a barrier. Some of us couch our words in pseudo-scientific and academic language, which may not be understood by everyone, while others use the language of fantasy and myth, which may be dismissed as overtly fanciful by others. Neither of the two examples I cite are right or wrong, by the way, [I mean] merely that language can be a hindrance at times.

Many of my personal experiences are often very difficult to translate into words. Of course that’s because I have not received the information that way. When doing a shamanic journey, for instance, you are given information in a multi-layered way. Someone or something might be talking to you, but underneath the words is a layer of emotional and non-linguistic information that is received by other parts of your brain. Or so it seems to me. It’s like when you dream, and sometimes you just know something, even though you may not remember being told it through normal means.

OK, I’ll do my best to explain.

First off I’m very sceptical about my experiences. I do not necessarily believe everything I have experienced, but I often cannot doubt the impact of the experience itself. I always look for validation, and for signs that what I’ve been told, seen, etc. has some basis in normal life. This is not always forthcoming, because some of the experiences have nothing to do with everyday human life, but sometimes there are spectacular confirmations.

Of course, one of the first questions you get bogged down in when you get involved in this work is: what is the nature of reality? I tend to have a more fluid attitude towards that now, and don’t take reality to mean “what I can see and touch” because I’ve experienced reality in more non-tangible ways. Once again, I’m falling into the language problem, because the concepts are not always easy to impart.

Some of the basic ideas that I’ve been able to extrapolate from my experiences (and this [sic] changes regularly) are:

1. We are all fundamentally connected.
2. Each of us is innately powerful.
3. We all have the potential to affect the world in tangible and non-tangible ways.

From my shamanic work I would say:

1. Each living thing has a Spirit.
2. We can communicate with these Spirits.
3. There are many other Spirits that are not confined to our notions of time/space to whom we can communicate [sic] also.

As for the business of belief, despite what some people say, I don’t think that belief is necessary for magic to work. Why I make this point is that beliefs can end up being dogmatic assumptions, and I try to have as few of them as possible. Every time I think I come down to a core set of beliefs I have the rug yanked from underneath my feet. I’ve been pretty much told that having set beliefs can hinder your experience of Magic, and it is best to have as open and flexible an attitude as possible towards it. Not always easy, and I’m not perfect and have been tripped up by this more than once.

Like Ali Bi says, some of the power of Magic is that it should be play, and it should be fun. There is nothing wrong with using Magic in a playful manner. While Magic requires a certain amount of dedication and discipline (which can put off many people who expect it to be easy), it should also be humorous and fun.

I’m taking the question to basically mean: ‘do you just believe in something when you have no conclusive proof’. My answer would be, ‘No’. I have many experiences, and I’m told many things that I can’t necessarily prove at the time. What I do is accept the information, and carry on with life. It’s placed in a “could be true/may not be true” space. A great deal of the time what I’m told comes to pass, or proves to be accurate, and then it gets shifted into the “true” box. From past experiences, some of the information might be put into the “quite likely to be true” box, because I know from past experiences that the source that gave me the data has been consistently reliable.
The biggest problem with all information received in this manner, however, is that it's been taken in via my own set of filters that can put a spin on how I understand what I'm being told. I'm always aware of this difficulty, and I do my best to put in as many safeguards as possible against jumping to conclusions.

I think it's entirely possible to have many different ideas about how valid something is at the same time. I often do.

I hope I've made some sense.

Here again, we see a relatively high level of scepticism in the mind of Anna Qi, an expectation that her 'belief-system' will, like her experiences, change over time, and here again we see the sense of playfulness. In terms of cosmology, we have an holistic animism, a universe of interconnection with all living things imbued with "spirit". (Later on we will encounter an extension of this latter notion, whereby inanimate objects are likewise experienced as imbued with 'spirit' or 'energy'.)

Another definition takes us from the animistic into the realms of the 'New Physics':

_**Loki:**_ The problem with Magick is that it is so subjective. You see a twist [in] the structure of reality, and when you point it out to someone, they may or may not see it. That's why I like the idea of making it both an experiment and fun.

So... the way my thinking works and how it all clicked for me...

I was reading about how sub-atomic particles change how they act when they are being observed and how the actual act of observation changes the tiny parts of reality. If that is true, then why can't you imagine that you can affect reality by how you chose to observe it? That would be why all sorts of different magick works for people, and different results are had by people. It's what they believe. They make their own reality on both a large and small scale.

But if you know you make your own reality, and how you observe it changes it, why not play around with your perception of that reality? The best example is that you can think of for people who don't think magically is if yourself as a loser... that thought process affects how you act in way that you act like what you think a loser acts like. People begin to see you as one, and therefor [sic] your thought has become reality.

With magick, it's more complex and ritualised in order to access that part of your thought process that you can't get to through other means.

That is how my thinking works, if that makes any sense.

It's not that I am changing the universe, just that I believe it is different long enough that it becomes different.

It is worth noting that a psychiatrist acquaintance of mine commented that this definition of magick makes it sound extremely reminiscent of certain types of
psychotherapy, such as cognitive and behavioural therapy, or at a less professionalised level, ‘positive thinking’ of the Norman Vincent Peale variety, a.k.a. New Thought. Likewise the next contributor would not disagree with the proposed ‘psychological dimension’ to magickal practice.

Ellie Mental: I’ve spent a lot of time trying to wrap my head around just how it all works, what it does, what it is, just what is really going on etc., and it’s broken my brain repeatedly.

There seems to be a connection between consciousness and information, and between the consciousness we experience subjectively and a meta-consciousness that is the workings of reality, which we exist within. Magick as an art depends on the idea that reality is to some extent malleable, and that by exerting the will one can cause change in ways that are indirect and probability based.

The other side is exploration of the psyche and cognitive self. Magick is also psychology. Esoteric systems are representations of systems and relations within the self, “laws of magick” are laws that hold true for internal cognitive processing, etc. One can look at that aspect and easily conclude that spirituality in total is a metaphor for internal change, and perhaps does not exist outside of our skulls. Magick is a means to change the self.

The jump to objective change happens when one has faith in the belief that these changes within themselves can cause change in the world, as the conscious patterns within the psyche align with the conscious patterns of nature and reality, change to one causing change to the other. Faith being the operative energy to fuel the change, more so than belief. Belief is a matter of programming. Faith is the energy put into that belief.

And what comes from Faith but Spirituality? When you work with it close enough, your beliefs become your spirituality. Magick can lead to mystical experience, a time honoured, cherished, and brutally fought over concept as old as man [sic]. In this, asking if there is something to magick is akin to asking if there is something to God or to the idea of an immortal soul.

Anyway, I guess my point being, it’s more than casting spells and making sigils. The study of the Art of magick is one of ontology, psychology, theology, and science itself. As Art is an abstract way to depict the world, Magick is an abstract science. It is venturing into the realms of what we do not understand and know, but guess or hope to exist. And perhaps, by looking there we create rather than discover. We’re still far from the answers to that one. Not everyone is as into the fringy theoretical meta side of magick as I am; many magicians mostly focus on practical results and application. But I get the impression that’s the direction you were asking about.

Here then we encounter the multiplicity of labels: “magick”, the “esoteric”, “spirituality” and “mysticism” are all integral as far as ‘Ellie Mental’ is concerned. Moreover, a concern with the individual self, and the changing thereof, is clearly evident.

Not everyone took the initial interrogative seriously as the next comment indicates.

Zen Zombie: I study magick because I am easily deceived and amused.

Just kidding.
One Dao Jones has a little more to offer on the matter.

**Dao Jones:** The *Dao* which can be spoken of is not the *Dao*.

Obviously magik's [sic] a subjective experience... perhaps it's the study of subjective experience within a framework we tend to call objective reality.

For me, all of this hinges upon the development of intuition as 'world' changing force equal to that of intellect. The technology behind my computer is very nearly an apex of intellectual achievement. Very likely intuition has also played an equally significant role, yet more than likely overlooked.

The test and try method of adopting various modalities has always seemed like a filtering system that ultimately strengthens the intuitive self... hence the priority placed upon What Feels Right.

It was once scientific to view the world as flat... in that same way I would view the cumulative knowledge of the nature of the universe and 'our' place/relationship to it as only a limited portion of a grander scheme.

At this point I view magik [sic] as an incomplete system for accessing the world... sometime[s] more effective, sometimes not. Sometimes more fun, othertimes a pretentious bore... Still, my priority is to strengthen my intuitive self, past experience has proven it to be an invaluable resource... it would be foolish of me to leave it ignored or place arbitrary barriers in the way of any method that may prove useful...

Jeeze, was any of that coherent [sic]?

I trust it was coherent enough for us to get the point that the development of what Dao Jones terms an "intuitive" aspect of the self is, for him, what it is all about. (Heelas 1996:23-4 has collated data which support this point.)

**Bone Idol:** I sometimes categorise two classes of magic. They do not partition the whole of magic, nor are they always unambiguous, but I find them helpful, sometimes.

The first kind is the kind that works to change the world around me. I would like to have tickets to the game on Sunday, or I would like to see that girl with the green eyes that I haven't seen for two years and don't have any way of contacting. To affect [sic] this change, I am supposed to use my mind, primarily, and possibly something else as a tool. I might cast a spell, or charge a sigil, make a servitor, pray at the altar to some god, and so on... Any number of these tools have magical proponents. A chaote would say that any of them should probably work, but if one does not, then try another. For many of them, the tools themselves are regarded as helpful but unnecessary. It is the mind that causes the change.

The second kind is just the opposite. Rather than affecting the outside world with the inner one, I affect the inside world with the outside world. The goal here is to change who I am.

I should note that I still have no reason to believe that the first category actually works. I have not been successful with it, with one exception.

There are other forms of magic, of course. Astral projection, journeying, conjuring, divination, and so on. Again, I have not had much success with any of these. Divination is especially difficult for me, because I can't ever figure out what some symbol is supposed to mean.
Hell's Belle: The Hermetic response to Bone Idol’s comments is: When you do magic on the outside world, it’s called *thaumaturgy*; when you use it on the inside world, it’s called *theurgy*.

Of course, we have now seen something of a contradiction to the notion that the self and the world outside are not separate in the above distinction of magick which works ‘on the outside’ and that which works ‘on the inside’. To see individuals ‘managing’ relatively high levels of contradiction however is not something which will shock the anthropologist, and we must bear in mind that it is all too easy to discern such ‘seams’ in the patchwork that is magickal discourse when writing or reading a report such as this; on the emic level, ideas are less likely to ‘clash’, though that is not to say that they never do.

Bone Idol would appear to be unusually sceptical in his or her almost total rejection of the possibility of the magickal practitioner altering what the western mind would usually think of as ‘external reality’. However, he or she is not entirely alone in this.

Freudian Slap: As a non-magickian [sic], I have more than my fair share of ignorance and curiosity. However, by hanging around here I am finding some common ground.

I’ve been becoming aware of Bone Idol’s separation of magick’s [sic] into types - *thaumaturgy* and *theurgy*, as Hell’s Belle says. I would very much like to believe in the former, magick that directly affects the outside world, but I don’t. I’ve inserted the word “directly” precisely because I don’t have problems with magick that affects the inside world and thus, potentially, indirectly affects the outside.

Anna Qi: Regarding magic working directly, perhaps you would like to define what you mean by “directly”. You make it sound like it’s a Hollywood kind of magic, like throwing fireballs, or something that can be tangibly seen.

What would do you think about healing, for example? I’ve seen enough of it myself, and read enough about it to know that people can heal one another. Hands on healing is a very old tradition after all. That seems pretty direct to me. Do people consider healing to be magic, or something else entirely?

On the whole, they did. The “fireballs” reference, it is worth noting, harked back to a young man who appeared on this particular bulletin board demanding instruction on how he could hurl fireballs at his schoolteacher. He did not stay long, and presumably departed somewhat disappointed. I now want us to ‘jump ahead’ somewhat now to the contribution of one Antichrist Superstar.

Antichrist Superstar: I agree with most of what has already been said and very much agree with the conclusions that Anna reached regarding her experiences.
When one is interested in practising magic(k) there is a strange landscape of study/activity that one needs to navigate.

You need to be critical enough to be honest with your skills/abilities/results/experiences to continue to further and grow but at the same time you need to dive in with both feet. There is always the danger of either becoming a ‘religious fanatic’ about your own experiences as well as becoming so distant that you effectively become an occult voyeur (similar in some ways to the attitudes of some anthropologists whose idea of participant observation is to sit as close as you can while other people do the acts that fascinate you).

In my shamanic practice I’ve experienced that spirits will respect and work with you more as your personal power grows. To this end, focusing on increasing your thaumaturgic power will also help you to increase your theurgic power.

Also, being very aware of when you are doing theurgy will help you be in a proper mindset for dealing with spirits which can be a slightly different mindset then when you are in a thaumaturgical mindset.

While a good number of practitioners are more interested in doing theurgic magic of a self-transformative nature, getting proficient at thaumaturgy (in the sense of external magic) can very much help you become proficient at theurgy (your internal magic) for the very reason that thaumaturgy is easier to be critical about.

If I want to do work that is about becoming enlightened, opening my awareness, etc. For all I know my belief in my success could be anything from dementia, to hubris, to actually being successful.

If I do a ritual to get a long lost friend to call me within the month, or to see a woman wearing a red dress who is walking a small poodletlike [sic] dog in the next week I can be more critical about my results. If my friend didn’t call, or I didn’t see anyone walking any sort of dog then my magic failed. If my friend calls within 6 weeks or I see a woman in a red dress with a parrot then maybe my magic had some stuff that was right, or maybe it really was coincidence and more data and experimentation is necessary in coming to any sort of conclusion.

But, if after a period of time, I’m able to do a bunch of thaumaturgic spells with intents such as those above, and they are continually successful to the point of it hard to chalk it all up to ‘coincidence’ then I think I can be fairly confident that I’m getting my magic right.

Now, I can put the same magical elements or factors that I know work in my thaumaturgy into my theurgy. There’s no guarantee that it’s going to work the same but in my experience they seem to work pretty closely and doing work in the ‘lab’ has definitely helped my work in the ‘field’.

The main problem for most beginning practitioners is in having either enough faith or arrogance in the early stages to get through the ‘shit, none of this works’ part to the ‘wait a minute, some of this is working’ stages and beyond.

My early shamanic experiences were very helpful for me in that I was able to see my teacher getting info and doing healing for clients where the clients were not only verifying the information brought back but usually follow up with info on how the healing or info has significantly changed their lives. That’s by no means hard scientific proof that it worked but it gave me enough faith in my early stages to continue my own studies and practice.

I think I’ve rambled enough now. Hope I didn’t bore everyone to tears.

Hell’s Belle: *bursts into tears*

: )
Throughout the above discussion, an individual calling himself True Will had been responding in the form of still photographs from John Carpenter’s (1986) film *Big Trouble in Little China* which depicted bolts of lightening-like magickal power shooting from one side of the set to the other. He was repeatedly rebuked for apparently ‘using up bandwidth’ without actually contributing anything of substance to the discussion. At this point, True Will switched from a figurative to discursive mode.

**True Will:** Okay, okay, sorry! Two pictures really is enough [*sic*], but there is reason behind this.

As Freudian Slap mentions with regards the magickal effect being one that is inherently internal, which I have to say is the primary access or gateway to meta-creation, I do have a few examples of rather direct external energy effects. And before you cry ‘charlatan’, hear me out.

Many moons ago I was married to a rather fiery Irish lass. Our energies were creating flash points in social interaction, generating psyche demons that would do battle, creating arguments and emotional dramas, where our logical/lucid selves would be shocked by the situation. Occasionally a form of dual communication would occur, with the combative energy continuing over our heads, literally.

Now there are two situations that really freaked me:

1. Occasionally when my wife was stressed out, the lightbulb would blow above our heads. I read up and investigated into this, and discovered that it was a known/recorded phenomenon [*sic*].

2. After these experiences I would occasionally try tests on different forms of energy manipulation for my wife, to help her focus her ability. One test was the creation of energy balls, with the hands. Early experiments resulted in her generating a ball and lobbing it through the air towards the television, disrupting the signal to static, whilst it passed through. This phenomenon [*sic*] was witnessed by a very sceptical friend. My ex-wife repeated this several times and his reaction was classic. Have you ever seen the face of a person whose reality just melted?

3. Just the other year, my [...] friend Sam and I were drawn to hold a meditation ritual at a sacred place set up in some wonderful woods. He had had a rather intense dream, with regards drawing out some primal bestial ego energy from me, so without hesitation upon him recounting it, we planned the nights [*sic*] practice. The manifestation occurred whilst we sat opposite our fire, which was a good 3-4 foot in diameter and we sat at least the same again back from it, so as not to be burned. It blazed about 2-3 foot high. We were both practising a breathing technique to synchronise our energies and deepen our state of meditation, this involved the combined drawing and expulsion of three deep breathes [*sic*]. On the third out breath with my eyes closed, I noticed the fire had flared up incredibly and received a warm flash across my face. Instantly I opened my eyes to witness the rising and depleting fire ball from the fire. It quickly died off, leaving sparks and smoke in its wake. My eyes quickly looked over to Sam, whom was at that moment looking over to me, his eyes were filled with a mix of astonishment and shock. We tested our sanity by both blowing, not breathing, but blowing onto the fire to try and achieve that same results, without success. The nights [*sic*] practice was continued and was extremely eventful.

Energy manipulation, *qi* generation, whatever you want to call it, as far as I [*sic*] have found exists as a distinct phenomenon [*sic*]. This I see as the bridge between a totally internal magickal practice [and totally external magickal practice].

Freudian, may I suggest that you look into some reputable healing practitioners[?]
True Will thus has a lot to say when he expresses himself discursively. He has attempted to offer the notion of an ‘energy’ to clarify what we saw above to be the inconsistent matter of distinction or lack of between the outer world and the inner world (‘energy’ exists in both and can be transferred from one to the other). This ‘energy’ is fundamental to magickal theory and practice, and True Will here has identified one of the major, perhaps the major addition of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century thinkers to the occultism which was ‘handed down’ from the Renaissance. Though we will encounter it repeatedly as this thesis progresses, it comprises the main subject of Chapter 7.

I will let ‘Antichrist Superstar’ have the last word in the native definitions of magick:

**Antichrist Superstar:** True Will’s experience has proven to him that magic is real and that things can be done externally to the satisfaction of the individual practitioner (if not to the satisfaction of a ‘scientific observer’) and that this proof may actually be valid. I think that most serious magicians have to have experiences and proof like that in order to continue with a magical path. Dilettantes will get bored and for the delusional it gets harder and harder to be functional within society.

That said, walking a magical path is walking a minefield. How many other mages, after seeing *A Beautiful Mind*, if only for a brief instant thought, “Holy Shit! What if that’s me?”

After reading your thoughts Freudian, I kept thinking to myself. “How do I ‘know’ that I haven’t deluded myself this whole time? How can I ‘prove’ that I’m not, to some degree, bugfuck?”

Answer: I can’t and any personal experiences that I relate can always be countered with the arguments of “you’re lying” or “you’re delusional” and then everything devolves into an “is so!”, “is not!” dialogue.

Part of the magical experience as well as the difference between schizophrenic hallucinations and magical interaction with ‘spirits’ is in subtle impressions and what parapsychology would call 6th, 7th, etc. senses. Things that whether real or not, do not fall (yet at least) within a scientific, empirical ontology.

When I get into an altered state I don’t ‘see’ or ‘hear’ spirits or magical energies, etc. in the same way that I’m now seeing this computer monitor or hearing the clacking of the keys on my keyboard. It’s... different and very hard to explain.

After doing enough magic you feel and sense certain things and you can recognise when they happen to greater or lesser degrees. These feelings and sensations contribute to the individual ‘proof’ of magic working or not. When you feel nothing, you can be pretty sure you were just going through the motions. But when those feelings and the whole experience blows you over by the intensity and then the ‘coincidental’ effects of the magic start to happen (usually, in my experience with an accompanying recurrence in some of those ‘extra-sensory’ feelings) it’s hard to deny their reality, even though to other people you may seem completely deranged [sic].

Even then, how are you sure? Do the doubts ever completely go away? Not for me at least and to some degree, it gives me a modicum of humility when the work ‘works’. I’m continually amazed and grateful for what I have and continue to experience so my ‘doubts’ work for me. For others it [sic] might be a hindrance.
But ultimately, I can’t guarantee that I’m not completely deluded but my life has continued to improve. My willingness to take on responsibility and my personal discipline has improved since actively following this path so since my quality of life [is] better than it was before, I feel safe in saying that I’m not deluded. There may be people who disagree with me though so what the Hell do I know?]

We will examine the complex relation of magick to mental illness in Chapter 4, but it is not particularly surprising that a ‘mad genius’ film loosely based on the life of mathematician John Forbes Nash, John Howard’s A Beautiful Mind (2001) should strike a cord in the mind of Antichrist Superstar. Open to the possibility that, in his own words, he might be “bugfuck”, Antichrist is no dogmatist. The level of agnosticism we have here is on the whole very high, though not, as we will see, so high as to prevent magickal practitioners from denouncing one another as evil or idiotic from time to time.

So, magick integrally involves a cosmology in which ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are, while distinguishable, not absolutely separate. The magickal practitioner’s work can be split into that which works towards changing the outside world (thaumaturgy, a.k.a. ‘results magick’), and that which aims to alter the inner world (theurgy, a.k.a. ‘self-development’). A link is provided between the inner and outer by a concept of ‘energy’. It is worth underscoring the fact that more than one individual cited above thought the notion of directly altering the outer world (thaumaturgy) was rather far-fetched.

One thing which might strike the reader as being conspicuous in its absence from the above is any reference whatsoever to the ‘New Age’. Is magick, as far as our natives are concerned, ‘New Age’, or at least part of the ‘New Age’, or not? A parallel discussion on the same bulletin board included this request:

**Hardcore Pawn:** I’m sick of all the new agey crap and I’m ready to expand my knowledge... Please, help!

The works of Aleister Crowley and other Thelemites were recommended to Hardcore Pawn by many who responded. The ideas of Kenneth Grant regarding the Dark Side of the Cabala also featured; in Chapter 6 we will see exactly what this entails. The use of Lovecraftian entities (i.e. those from the horror/science-fiction writer H.P.Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos) was generally agreed to be the most “hardcore”
variety of magick, though theurgic (inner-oriented) only, and not at all thaumaturgical (that is to say, not oriented to changing the outside world). What primarily concern us here however are these two contributions:

**Andy Pandemonium:** Here’s an idea… try re-reading some of that “new agey crap” with more of an open mind.

**Hell’s Belle:** Quite. Some of that “new agey crap” as you so eloquently put it is actually pretty full of useful information. The Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, meditative exercises, visualisation techniques, energy exercises, all of these and more can be found in “new agey crap”. Sure, there may be a fluffy bunny on the cover, but some of the New Age books can be just as good as anything by Crowley or Grant. You’ve just got to separate the wheat from the chaff. Read with an open mind and you may learn more than if you try to go straight for the “hardcore” books.

These two individuals illustrate that not everything ‘New Age’ is regarded as ‘beyond the pale’ of the magickal practitioner, but show that there are clear reservations about certain aspects thereof, in particular, “fluffy bunnies”. At times, ‘New Age’ was not a complimentary description for anyone or anything. Ben always referred to Sarah as “that New Age lady” with a sneering valence. Druid Terry Dobson once referred to a group from Glastonbury who performed a ritual at Avebury as “all flowery”, and again his tone made it quite clear that this was absolutely not a compliment. I did on a number of occasions however hear the term ‘New Age’ deployed other than as a term of derision. For example, Angel, who is generally regarded as “a bit New Age” by many magickal practitioners, mentioned a group of individuals whom she held in high regard but qualified this with the statement, “but they’re a bit New Age”. Immediately I was confused, because Dan and Dave Lee, practitioners of Chaos magick (the latter being the author of the well-received book *Chaotopia*), both associated with the group in question, in particular its subgroup dedicated to Tantric practice. I mentioned Angel’s stance to Dan. “Ah,” he said, “the thing is you see, there’s New Age, and there’s New Age.” We will see exactly why the term ‘New Age’ has an ambivalent status amongst magickal practitioners as this thesis progresses, particularly in Chapter 5 when different types of magickal identity are compared. For now, it will suffice to note that the emic valence of the term is variable. The term ‘New Age’ will not be employed on an etic level in this thesis; the newer term “alternative spirituality”, used by Brown (1997:viii) and more strongly advocated by Bowman and S.J. Sutcliffe (2000) is preferable, largely due to the fact that ‘religion’ is associated with rules, doctrines and a level of organisation or institution which magick generally lacks.
(However, below we will have to address the issue of just how ‘alternative’ this ‘spirituality’ is.) Alternative spirituality includes magick, though by no means everything which goes on within the category of ‘alternative spirituality’ can be put into the category of magick, especially western importations of Buddhism (see Heelas 1996:71n.15 for a bibliography of works thereon). It penultimately remains to be noted that the term ‘alternative spirituality’ is rarely used on the emic, though I see no reason why it should not be and whenever I have employed the term in front of my informants, no one has expressed any objections. Finally in this context, there is one other label/category for what my informants do which is most likely to be encountered in bookshops, namely the ‘Mind, Body and Spirit’ section. The reader may recall both this phrase from the *Crystal Health and Wealth* poster on the lavatory wall and also that we noted a magazine of a very similar title, in Chapter 1. Also worth mentioning is the large ‘stalls, talks and workshops’ event known as the *Mind, Body and Spirit Exhibition* in London each spring (for an analysis of which, see Hamilton 2000). Not polluted with a valence of either daftness or dangerousness, and vague enough to constitute a conveniently broad ‘catch-all’, publishing companies and bookshops in particular have picked up on this label, though while virtually all natives recognise it, they rarely apply it to themselves or their own practice.

**Subdivisions Within Magickal Practice**

A useful continuation of initial or introductory explanation would be to remind ourselves what those of my informants whom we ‘met’ in the first chapter and the above discussion called themselves. They all agreed that they were involved in ‘magick’, but some had different labels for themselves beyond this. Some were content with relatively broad labels such as ‘Pagan’ (the ‘neo-’ prefix is generally, though not always, resisted on the emic), ‘mage’, ‘occultist’, or ‘esotericist’. Others identified themselves somewhat more specifically as Wiccans or witches, Chaoists (a.k.a. Chaos Magicians or Chaotes), Thelemites, Druids, Heathens and shamans. We also saw more idiosyncratic labels such as Jedi Knight, Voodoo Priestess, New Age Priestess (I only encountered one of each), and some self-consciously hybrid labels: Steve Wilson for example at one point claimed to practice “‘Drudu’... a mixture of Druidry and Voodoo”, and Steven Grasso describes himself as a “Voodoo-shaman”.

68
Many ‘answer to’ more than one label, and some may label themselves differently depending on to whom they are talking or the topic being discussed. The vast majority cannot be fitted into neat ‘boxes’, speaking as they will much more vaguely of “my journey”, “my path”, “my system as of right now”, or just “my thing”. One or two of my informants deliberately resisted being labelled at all. “Paganism’s the first religion not to define itself as anything,” I was once told (the full exchange is reported in Chapter 4). When I asked Francis whether he identified as a Chaos magician, he replied, “no real Chaos magician would ever call himself a Chaos magician”, a comment roughly analogous to a certain academic’s semi-serious claim to be “so postmodern I will not even be labelled a postmodernist”. Dan proffered perhaps my favourite ‘native agnosticism’ when, upon asked to define magick, he thought for a moment and then said, “If you can pin it down, it’s not magick.” If this state of affairs seems desperately confusing, this will not be the case for long. There is a simple way of classifying the subdivisions within magick, which will be fully detailed in Chapter 5.

Magick: Mainstream, Alternative, Countercultural or Subcultural?

The issue of taxonomy raised various problems ‘within’ the data, as it were. It is equally necessary however to address certain issues ‘outside’ the data, for it is a predictable characteristic of many approaches to the study of ‘N.R.M.’s, ‘marginal’ or ‘peripheral’ groups, or ‘subcultures’ that they attempt to establish in what ways the object of study stands in opposition to the culture and society in which it occurs, in what ways it shares the characteristics and values of the same, and whether one can be said to ‘outweigh’ the other as far as its ‘overall significance’ is concerned. Ultimately, the two are integrally related, two sides of a single coin as it were and hence this section will be in many ways a continuation of the previous ones.

We need to make some enquiries along the following lines. Do practitioners of magick, as some (e.g. Greenwood 2000:1) have claimed, constitute a ‘counterculture’, or at least a part of a ‘counterculture’? What exactly is a ‘counterculture’? Can we at this point in history still discern anything which warrants the label ‘counterculture’? If so, what ‘culture’ exactly is being ‘countered’, and how? Or might the term
‘subculture’ be more appropriate? Or is neither valid? Can we still claim the existence of a ‘mainstream’ to which any counterculture is in some way opposed and/or any subculture in some way distinct from? Or are we to follow those more ‘postmodern’ scholars who present more centrifugal models of contemporary society and culture in which there is a bewildering multiplicity of ‘streams’ but none which can be said to be ‘main’? Relatedly, is the current cultural climate in which magick is practised best referred to as one of ‘modernity’, ‘late modernity’ or ‘postmodernity’? Is magick simply going to be assigned whichever label we elect to bestow upon the wider culture? Or could things be more complex? Could magick be seen as, say, a postmodern phenomenon within a modern condition, or as a modern phenomenon within a postmodern condition? Is the ‘modern or postmodern?’ line of enquiry useful anymore? Indeed, was it ever?

As we might expect, there are very differing stances on this in the available literature. Bowman and Sutcliffe (2000:11) are deliberately equivocal as to how precisely their term ‘alternative’ ought to be interpreted, and whether a static binary model of ‘alternative vs. mainstream’ is always going to be useful. There are those who have gone so far as to have totally abandoned the term ‘mainstream’ in favour of a model of the contemporary stressing ‘fragmentation’. Hetherington (1998:5) for example has stated that “it is just as difficult to locate the mainstream as it is the alternative to it”. Such ‘postmodern’ scholars, I will argue, here amply demonstrate their tendency to be a little too agnostic.

More valid to my mind are stances on this such as that of Prince and Riches (2000:23) who take their analysis in completely the opposite direction and hold that a divide between the mainstream and what they term the “New Age” is analytically “crucial”. Though hardly unaware that the mainstream is not homogenous, their argument is that in this particular instance, the similarities between discernible sections of the mainstream outweigh differences between them, and such a mainstream may be sharply contrasted with the Glastonbury “New Agers”. It is also worth noting that Gibbons’ (2001:ch.9) entire analysis of occultism since its Renaissance heyday, Marxist and outdated though it might be, also rests largely on the assertion that occultism lost the hegemonic status it once had (hence not, paradoxically, its appeal).
Magick, I will argue, cannot be regarded as mainstream. The evidence for this assertion is quite simply that magickal practitioners are regarded as dubious and deluded by the majority of the population. (I will provide more details of the precise ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of the disdain of and discrimination against magickal practitioners in Chapter 4.) However, is this to say that magick is ‘countercultural’? As with the debated existence of the mainstream, there is also a certain amount of debate as to whether there is a counterculture anymore. McKay (1996) has claimed that the counterculture has remained, alive and well, if underground. Martin (1981) has argued precisely the opposite and sees the counterculture as having been co-opted or recuperated back into the mainstream. Tipton (1982) has viewed what he defines as the “New Age” as a response to the failure of the sociopolitical movements associated with the Left in the late 1960’s, a classic opium of the people.

According to my observations, both Tipton and Martin are out of touch with social reality. At times my fieldwork dovetailed with anticapitalist demonstrations, demonstrations which became riots and during which some police officers and some demonstrators injured one another (again, such incidents will be detailed in Chapter 4). That said, the majority of demonstrators may well not have had anything to do with magick (in fact, some of them seemed to have little to do with politics and been motivated by more purely aggressive urges). Moreover, there were times when some of my informants behaved in ways which are far from anything which could be described as anticapitalist (we may recall the Crystal Health and Wealth poster from Chapter 1). Heelas (1996:61) has discerned what he terms the “prosperity wing” of the “New Age” and certainly during my fieldwork I heard comments in favour of free markets which would make the blood of the average anticapitalist boil. (Likewise Prince and Riches (2000:115) include a report from two “New Age” informants who magickally attempted to quell the London Poll Tax riot in 1990, and a comment from another (2000:154) to the effect that political matters such as the rights and wrongs of taxation are not relevant to the truly spiritual individual.) In the last analysis, magick, like other ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ phenomena, can take politically radical or conservative forms. To use Wallis’ (1984) well-known Weberian formulation, magick can be world-rejecting or world-affirming, but is generally world-accommodating. In this regard we must take things on a case-by-case basis, for any generalisation will immediately be an overgeneralization. It has been claimed by the media that Prince
Charles and Cherie Blair, and on the other side of the Atlantic, Nancy Regan and Hilary Clinton have all been associated with practices which would all fall within the rubric of magick. It ought to go without saying that none of these individuals is especially 'countercultural'.

Heelas (1996) reasonably holds that what we have in what he then termed the “New Age” presents a mixture of the countercultural and the mainstream (he uses the word “modernity” to denote the latter). This version of events, ambivalent though it may be, is closest to the truth. Magick can be a business which warrants the label ‘countercultural’, and this is so on both an emic and an etic level. That said, magick can be manifest in less obviously countercultural and sometimes very mainstream terms; the fact that it often presents itself as scientistic (Hess 1993) is a clear indication of the latter point. This thesis is concerned to show that while magick may be a response to a postmodern condition, it is ‘always already’ constructed in hegemonic terms. Here then we come to the conclusion that magick must in general be regarded as a subcultural phenomenon, as it is in Greenwood’s work, apart from the occasional use of the word “counter-culture” (2000:1). At its most basic, the term ‘subculture’ denotes a subgroup within a culture in which hegemonic symbols, values and beliefs are distorted, inverted or exaggerated (see Marshall 1998:649), and as Hodkinson (2002) has argued, is at this point in time far from a sociological obsolescence.

Modernity, Late Modernity or Postmodernity?

A choking dry-ice smog of disappointment, pooling in the drops and troughs of suddenly uncertain ground. Mudyards, with here and there the smoking wrecks of ideologies, their wheels and radios gone.


We saw that Heelas (1996), Luhrmann (1989) and S.J.Sutcliffe (2000) at least discern a current state which may be termed “modernity”. However, the many and varied sections of the academic community which address the current state of society and culture have not been able to reach consensus on precisely what the current state of
affairs is and how it should be referred to. Those who write simply of a condition of modernity are by now in the minority. Some, notably Giddens (1990; 1991) and Beck (1992) write of a state of "late modernity" and "reflexive modernity" respectively. Others such as Lyotard (1984), Jameson (1984; 1991), Harvey (1989), Bauman (1987; 1991) and Featherstone (1991) perceive a condition of postmodernity, though it is worth noting that the latter stance is seemingly less fashionable than it used to be. Needless to say, rarely is any one of these scholars using their chosen term in exactly the same way as any other who may be using the same term, and nor of course do they necessarily remain static in their opinions, hence the fact that, for example, the Paul Heelas of The New Age Movement (Heelas 1996) is not taking the same stance on this issue as the Paul Heelas of Detraditionalisation (Heelas et al. 1996).

Just so that the entire range of scholarly potentials is covered here, we may note that all the while, Bruno Latour (1993) has been arguing that We Have Never Been Modern, reminding one of Brian Morris' quip (p.c.) that "I am neither modern nor postmodern, I am premodern." The situation is already complex enough, and I have refrained from using terms such as "ultramodern" (Davis 1998:1), "amodern" (Murphey 1997) "hypermodern" (C.Bürger 1992), or "transmodern" (Lash and Friedman 1992), or muddying the waters with attempts to distinguish, say, 'high modernity' from 'middle modernity'. Nor have I yet noted that certain thinkers who are often associated with the postulation of a condition of 'postmodernity' can write contributions to a collection of essays published under the rubric of 'modernity' (see for example Zukin 1992 or Featherstone 1992, in Lash and Friedman 1992). From this example, it would seem that scholarly labels, whether achieved or ascribed, are hardly binding. Confusion as to exactly how the 'post-' prefix is to be interpreted may explain or excuse some of the ambiguity here. Is 'post-' meant teleologically, to denote 'after' or 'behind' as in the usual Latin meaning? Or 'with' or 'alongside', minus a chronological 'rupture', as some seem to imply? And of course, the suffixes can also confuse; there is a difference between the '-ism' and '-ity' (usually the latter is philosophical and the former social).

It thus becomes understandable that some more recent commentators can be thoroughly disparaging of this particular controversy. It had by some years ago become "internal and arcane" according to Keith and Pile (1993:1), and Hetherington
(1998:6-12) has written off the whole debate with characteristic agnosticism, arguing that his more narrowly descriptive approach is the only epistemologically-valid one “whatever type of n-modern society we live in” (1998:8).

Nevertheless, we will of course have to use a descriptive term for the current state of socio-cultural affairs, a definition of it and a justification for it. Despite the confusion or at least multiple versions of events which have been offered regarding precisely what has happened to modernity, it does seem to be clear that there is something the matter with it, that it is not quite what we were promised. Modernisation has not solved all our ills, nor has it avoided creating new ills as it has come into being. To say as Hetherington (1998:7) does that modernity is “less sure of itself” than it once used to be seems something of an understatement. It is my intention to refer to the contemporary as a postmodern condition, but use this term in a specific and fairly limited sense. ‘Postmodernity’ as it appears in this thesis may be taken to mean two (related) things:

1. The notion of ‘progress’ is problematised.
2. The experience of a world in which change (as opposed to progress) takes place at an extremely high velocity. Like the authors whose papers appear in Lash and Friedman 1992, what concerns me (and my informants) is an experience “of movement, of flux, of change, of unpredictability” (Lash and Friedman 1992:1, authors’ italics).

Not so much an utopia then as an ever-changing ‘mutopia’, such is the postmodernity to which I will refer throughout this thesis, though I will also draw on the work of thinkers such as Lyotard (1984) who famously writes on the problematisation of knowledge, and Bauman (1997) wherein it is argued that an ethic of individual liberty is a defining and important feature of postmodernity.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have, with a little help from both Gibbon’s historical work and some of my informants, defined what magick is. We have seen that there is a multiplicity of
labels both emic and etic for what magickal practitioners do, but this is something to be acknowledged, studied and hopefully explained, not an ‘inconvenience’ to be circumnavigated, a point made by both Gibbons (2000:4) in relation to occultism, and Prince and Riches (2000:8,10) in relation to what they define as the “New Age”. My informants most commonly refer to what they do as ‘magick’ and so this is the term I shall employ to denote what they do. A magickal worldview can now be defined relatively simply as entailing:

1. A distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ that is at least more fuzzy than in more mainstream definitions of self/other, and at times totally absent. The prime example of such a principle working in practice would be Carl Jung’s notion of synchronicity or meaningful coincidence, an example of which was provided in Chapter 1 when my thoughts (if Ouch can constitute a ‘thought’) were mirrored in material reality, i.e. the ouch on the tea-towel. It is not so much a ‘magickal universe’ as a “magickal youniverse”.^  
2. A belief that one can effect change in the ‘outer’ world, sometimes called ‘thaumaturgy’ but also and more simply known as ‘results magick’.  
3. A belief that one can alter the individual self and this ‘inner change’ is as important as effecting change in the ‘outside’ world. This may be called ‘self-development’ or referred to by the Hermetic term ‘theurgy’.  
4. A belief that there is an energy which pervades everything, animate and inanimate. This energy provides a link between the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’. Any magickal act will involve working with an ‘energy’ of some sort. Terms for this energy vary, and it can be referred to via the Daoist concept of Qi or a more scientistic term such as Wilhelm Reich’s ‘orgone’.  
5. Despite the fact that Greenwood’s (2000) work will come in for some criticism in this thesis, there is no doubt that this autoethnographer is correct in her proposition that an Otherworld is integral to contemporary magickal discourse and practice. Magick integrally involves other dimensions. It is to these other dimensions which one (‘imaginatively’) travels when, say, “shamanic journeying” or “astrally projecting”. In Chapter 7 we will examine in detail contemporary magickal conceptualisations of these Otherworlds.

The term ‘New Age’ is one which I will not use unless it is in quotation. In Chapter 6 I will present a ‘deep’ explanation as to precisely why the term is controversial amongst many of the natives, why some of them are happy to identify as “New Age” while others deride what Hardcore Pawn referred to as “new agey crap”.

‘Mysticism’ may for the purposes of this thesis be summed up in the first part of King’s (1999:7) definition as “religious knowledge gained by means of an extraordinary experience”. Though originally a Christian idea, ‘mysticism’ has been applied to various non-Christian (indeed, non-theistic) religions and spiritualities, sometimes with due caution, sometimes without. As King (1999:8) notes, “few voices have been heard to question the experientialist dimension of contemporary definitions”. “Extraordinary experience” readily includes altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.’s) brought about by one means or another. Though one or two
of my informants still label themselves ‘occultists’, this is relatively rare and the term seems to have dated (as Bowman and Sutcliffe 2000:8 have also remarked). I heard the term ‘esoteric’ even more rarely, and so herein these two terms will not be used other than as synonyms to denote historical antecedents of contemporary magick.

Notes

1. Due mainly to this taxonomical problem, I will not attempt to summarise previous attempts to quantify my informants. Heelas 1996:106-32 provides a sound summary of attempts at quantification and the myriad problems therewith.

2. The event in question, Ananke, is reviewed here:
   
   http://www.phhine.ndirect.co.uk/news/ev_ananke99rv.htm

3. See:
   
   http://www.uncarved.demon.co.uk/turb/articles/wicca.html

4. Greenwood 2000:10 has been at pains to contend that magick is a modern resistance to a postmodern condition.

5. I suspect Fraser Clark, who once ran a dance club called the Parallel Youniversity, may be the inspiration for this, though the pun could have been arrived at independently by others.
3.

Data and Interpretation: Method and Theory in the Study of Magick

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first outline the research methods employed during fieldwork. Then I will summarise the theoretical groundings of the more important previous work in this area, and finally I will detail the theory on which this study itself draws. In terms of methodology, this work is relatively conventional. The theory on which this thesis draws however is both relatively novel in itself, and has not been applied to magick before.

Length and Breadth of Fieldwork

As Lurhmann (1989:17) and Pike (2001:xv) have both noted, individuals such as themselves and I fit relatively readily into London’s contemporary ‘magickal scene’, and people do indeed seem to quickly forget that one is a researcher as one of my predecessors has noted (Luhrmann 1989:17). Only on two occasions did I encounter any coldness towards me on the grounds that I was conducting fieldwork, and fortunately, it was temporary. Generally, I found myself more popular on the ‘magickal scene’ than I had hoped or intended to be, though of course this was not so instantly. Unlike some previous researchers moreover, I did not confine my fieldwork to certain ‘schools’ of magick, but attempted to achieve an overview of all that goes on under the rubric of ‘magick’. This is not something which has been attempted previously; Greenwood (2000) excludes Chaos magick from her study and Luhrmann (1989) excludes all Left Hand Path magick (of which Chaos magick is one recent kind) from her analysis. Such deliberate omissions flaw both pieces of work, a fact which will become apparent in Chapter 5, when different types of magickal identity are compared.
It is not a new observation to note that the ‘magickal scene’ in London is comprised of a network of groups with overlapping memberships. Luhrmann (1989:ch3) has made this observation early on in *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, and sociologist Michael York (1995) has based an entire book-length study on the same point (as we will see in more detail below). The structures of these groups vary, from the relatively hierarchical and organised through to the very *ad hoc* and (in theory) anarchic. What is important for us to note is that the latter type is increasingly common. At their most improvised and ephemeral, magickal groups may simply be comprised by a number of persons who meet up in or around a sacred site such as Avebury, get on well, decide to perform a spontaneous ritual and then go their separate ways, perhaps never managing to meet up again. Hence, while it is easy to list some of London’s more regular and structured groups such as the *H.O.D.*, the *I.O.D.*, the *Abysmal Sorcerers*, the *Companions of Horus* and the *Temple of the Midnight Bimboes*, what is harder to establish is exactly when and how a much more ephemeral collective of individuals constitutes a ‘group’. How long do individuals have to remain together? Is a spontaneous ritual which occurs at a sacred site or on a dance floor at a squat party performed by ‘a group’? Not all the participants will necessarily know each other or see one another again.¹

Whatever their degree of formal organisation, these group formations always tend towards the ephemeral; in the words of magickal practitioner and writer Gareth J.Medway, they have “a short half life”. Even if the group itself is not an entirely ephemeral phenomenon but attains a degree of structure and formal organisation which endures for perhaps years, membership of it may well be brief on the part of the individual magickal practitioner. On the whole, the feeling amongst magickal practitioners was that the more organised, hierarchical groups are best avoided. Allowing groups of like-minded individuals to “naturally and spontaneously” occur was more favoured. John put it well when, speaking of structured and organised groups, he reported:

> Around the mid-eighties I developed a bizarre delusion that I might benefit from membership of a formal magickal order. By the mid-nineties, London’s magickal groups could be split into two types: those who had thrown me out and those who had had the good sense never to let me join in the first place.
The point finally needs to be stressed that it is by no means unusual for an individual to be a member of more than one group at the same time; if anything, this is normal, and seasonal festivals such as Beltane and Summer Solstice often see individuals ‘hopping’ from one ritual to another.

Permanent structure then is something which magickal practitioners’ social formations tend towards avoiding. (The work of the Turner-inspired ‘communitas theorists’ such as Prince and Riches (2000) and Hetherington (1998) will be criticised in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7.) The patterns of association characteristic of the ‘magickal scene’ are best described as a ‘network’, one which is Heraclitan in that it is ever-changing, and the less organised and formalised associations are quite impossible to quantify. Even were they not, any such assessment would be out of date by the time it had been carried out, never mind published.

Just as my fieldwork was not limited to any one group, it was not limited to any one place. My informants occupy a multiplicity of ‘empirical’ spaces and are at least as mobile as any other group of contemporary westerners. Though the majority of my fieldwork was carried out in London, if my informants visited say, Glastonbury or Avebury, then obviously I would accompany them. We would meet like-minded individuals there, and sometimes powerful bonds were formed. *Ad hoc* ritual groups coalesced, and even if genuine promises to stay in touch proved impossible to keep, such events will not be readily forgotten. Sometimes an overheard snatch of chatter or a chance encounter in the queue at a bar would yield more ‘data’ than a lengthy interview with a ‘key’ informant, even if the individual in question and I never had time to properly introduce ourselves before one of us finally succeeded in catching the barperson’s eye and our paths through the evening and beyond once again diverged.

The “radical empiricism” (Jackson 1989) approach is to my mind the most effective way of going about fieldwork (see also Luhrmann 1989:17). However, I was in a position to use sources of data other than my own experiences. Many of these would not be available to an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in a less developed society.

As we will see throughout this thesis, magickal practitioners produce a great deal of textual information in the form of books, magazines and pamphlets, and magickal bookshops such as *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in Leeds and *The Atlantis Bookshop*,
Watkins Books, or Mysteries in London are an integral part of the magickal life. S.J. Sutcliffe (p.c.) has called for research into this specific aspect of what he then termed the “New Age”, and this would indeed be a fruitful angle of approach; I was brought up as a Christian, yet Christianity as I experienced it involved just two books, the Bible and a Concordance thereto, and no visits to Christian bookshops. When making overtures to join a magickal group however, it was not unusual to be sold or loaned books (which had sometimes been written by the person to whom one was talking) and told to come back after having read them. Magickal practitioners will speak of their libraries and this is not an abuse of the word ‘library’ insofar as they will accrue shelf-fulls of magickal books which they may or may not feel able to display openly. (Heelas is proud to have his own a “New Age library” (Heelas 1996: 106), and Luhrmann (1989:261-3) has attempted to list the contents of an ‘idealtypical’ magickal library.) Elizabeth Puttick (p.c.), a publisher of native books has argued that the publishing industry and the concerns thereof do not merely reflect the state of things but to a degree shape contemporary spirituality. Relatedly but with important differences, internet websites constitute an integral part of the dissemination of magickal ideas, and many magickal practitioners and groups have their own websites. Some of these websites are to be ‘just read’, others include, e-lists, bulletin boards and chatrooms whereby individuals can interact more directly.

For me, joining partially internet-based communities was new experience. I did this at the behest of some of my informants, for whom such a pattern of social interaction is not unusual. I cannot say I noticed anything approaching a ‘different type’ of magickal practitioner attracted to internet contact as opposed to ‘real life’ interaction, or any type of magickal theory or practice being discussed in cyberspace which was not happening in ‘real life’. Having a computer with internet access at work and a boss whose back was frequently turned seemed to be the most vital criteria for membership of internet-based magickal communities, though a few of their members were based in remote locations and their interaction with like-minded individuals in ‘real life’ was very limited. The fact that both my informants and I used the internet to contact like-minded individuals further contributes to the deterritorialised nature of this ethnography, for though I only used sites on which the medium of communication was English, they were populated with British, American and Australian citizens.
The length of my fieldwork period is no more clear-cut than exactly how many ‘groups’ I conducted fieldwork within or neatly establishing the geographical locations/boundaries of ‘my field’. I could report that I spent four years in the field. However, such an answer is something of an oversimplification, for I knew of the existence of magick long before I started this research, as a ‘pre-fieldwork’ encounter such as the one with Jason detailed in Chapter 1 indicates. Moreover, given that this thesis inevitably concerns the relation between practitioners of magick and the wider culture, my experience of western culture generally is also of relevance and this of course is something which has been ongoing throughout my life and remains a fact of it.

I initially met magickal practitioners (as opposed to encountering them in the media) as an undergraduate student. When I attended the University of Leeds I browsed, fascinated but rather bemused, in Chris Bray’s bookshop, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*. The shop claims to be:

Arguably the best access point in the universe for occult books and lessons on Paganism, Wicca, Cabala, Thelema, Yoga, Divination, Mind Control, Shamanism and Sorcery, plus ritual magic regalia, psychic and dowsing equipment, magic herbs, herbalism, alternative healing, aromatherapy oils, crystals, gemstones, magic candles, inks, occult cassettes, ancient wisdom, Theosophy, spells, runes and more.

I also encountered Chaos magician Phil Hine’s shop, *Id*, and found myself even more confused and slightly taken aback by its more specialised contents. Why would anyone want to buy statues of horror/science-fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft’s monstrous Cthulhu? I purchased an issue of the magazine *Gnosis* and walked home through the dark streets of Leeds rather ‘spooked’ by it all.

I came a little closer to one or two magickal practitioners at Bristol University, but still, I never understood them. They dressed differently and spoke differently, using some words I could not understand and using familiar ones with different and to me quite elusive meanings. “She talks about ‘energies’ all the time,” I remember a bemused flatmate reporting of a “mystical” woman from whom she occasionally purchased cannabis. Above all, ‘the magickal lot’ seemed to have an eccentric cosmology to which ‘we’ found it hard to relate. Throughout my undergraduate life ‘they’ remained socially peripheral in relation to ‘us’, their ‘tribe’ rarely involving
itself with mine for very long. It was only when I wrote an E.S.R.C.-funded M.Sc. thesis on Neopaganism at University College, London that I began to take a serious interest in the magickal worldview.

Just as I find it impossible to establish an exact starting-point to my fieldwork, it is impossible to establish a precise end-point. As I write this, it is approximately four years since the beginning of my Ph.D. course. I have been conducting fieldwork throughout this period, and I have not yet ceased to have contact with my informants. I have no wish to do so, because some of them are now among those whom I regard as friends. Even if I did, I would hardly be able to escape magick because ‘popular culture’ is increasingly saturated with it. Even during the most intense phase of the writing-up period when I was thinking about very little other than this thesis, I remained in touch with magickal practitioners and continued to practice magick with them. What I can be clear about however is that by the time I had begun writing-up, I was practising magick while I certainly did not ‘believe’ in it. During the most intense phases of fieldwork however, I cannot be so clearcut. ‘Belief’ is not necessarily a matter of choice, and when one talks, thinks, acts and socialises like a magickal practitioner, magick does seem very real indeed at times. If any conclusion can be drawn from my experience of fieldwork, it is that the anthropologist will benefit most from ‘believing as far as possible’ in the native reality for a period, then ‘pulling back’ from such a ‘system of belief’, though in my experience this was not always a pleasant business, and not always entirely within my conscious control. Nevertheless, I feel that I have been not so much ‘anthropologist as hero’ but ‘anthropologist as shaman’ in that I have been to another world, in this case the world inhabited by magickal practitioners, and brought back knowledge therefrom which will add to our understanding of both contemporary magick and the wider culture. (Blain 2002:157 also uses the shaman metaphor for the anthropological project.) That said, I regard my research as ultimately ongoing, and find it hard to imagine that I will ever ‘finish studying’ contemporary magick.
Remarks on Representation

A final note on methods of representation employed in this thesis is necessary. First, anonymity: the majority of informants appear herein under pseudonymous ‘Christian’ names, and where necessary, potentially-identifying details have been altered. Those who were open about their practice (and often this seemed to go hand in hand with being well-known on the magickal scene) are referred to by their full real names. The vast majority of users of internet mailing lists and bulletin boards whose words I have cited on occasion use names which are obviously false and often flippant. (In Chapter 5 I will show that these often flippant nicknames and accompanying location details are important data in themselves.)

A second point is the way in which data has been represented. When I have taken quotes from books and websites, or written, audio and video recordings of my informants’ words and deeds, I have had to retain a degree of editorial control while remaining aware of the political implications of this. However, whenever I have cut a section from any text, I have used full stops in square brackets (i.e. [...] ) to make this obvious. (Three full stops not enclosed in square brackets will have appeared in the original text.) I have refrained from correcting spelling errors and variant spellings of certain words but indicated that they appeared in the original text. (American spellings in quotations however have been Anglicised for the sake of consistency.) Also, during cyberinteraction, ‘emoticons’ are used to express affect. The most common are :-) for a smile, ;-) for a wink, and :-( for a frown. These I have retained from the original texts because they are vital for indicating how a comment is intended to be taken. Individuals also occasionally use ‘stage directions’ placed between asterisks, often again to facilitate self-expression, and I have included these as they originally appeared.

Theoretical Orientations of Previous Scholarship

Before outlining the theoretical stance of this thesis, I will review in some depth the many and varied theoretical stances of important previous work in this area. I have
divided the relevant literature into the following categories of theoretical stance: the
cognitive, the social structural, the methodological individualistic and finally the
phenomenological. (We will of course have already encountered some of these texts
in the previous chapter, taxonomy and theory not always being readily separable.)

First, cognitive approaches. Tanya Luhrmann’s *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*
(1989) is the primary text in this context. It seems to have rightly become a *locus
classicus*, part of a ‘bedrock’ of work in the field, and a reference to her concept of
“interpretive drift” (1989:10,307-15) is *de rigueur* for many (e.g. Prince and Riches
2000:xii; Greenwood 2000:49) in the early stages of their own work on the subject.
However, to my mind one of the many problems with Lurhmann’s work is that she
has defined her project with preconceived ideas and questions at the forefront of her
mind: her concern is to explain how people can “believe” in something as irrational
and false as magick, and thus falls firmly within the realms of what some term the
‘rationality debate’ (Lurhmann (1989:309n.8) is aware of, but argues against,
Needham’s (1972) ‘deconstruction’ of the word-concept ‘belief’.) The descriptive
dimension of Luhrmann’s work is without doubt sympathetic and evocative.
However, after taking nigh on 350 pages to arrive at the quite unremarkable
conclusion that practitioners of “magic”, having undergone an “interpretive drift”,
have different standards of ‘data’ or ‘evidence’ to ‘Jo Public’ or indeed ‘Jo Scientist’
which make their “beliefs” subjectively quite sensible, Luhrmann’s analytical work is
done. There is remarkably little in the way of ‘social constructionist’ analysis in
Luhrmann’s work. Claiming to be doing what she terms “cognitive studies” at a level
“more basic than the cultural” (1989:13-14), Luhrmann does not seem to be willing or
able to address the issue of why “magic” takes the form it currently does, and the
social-constructionist is left reeling at this claim that anything is “more basic” than the
cultural. That said, there is a significant cognitive dimension to my own work; in a
very broad sense, just like Lurhmann or any cognitive anthropologist, I am looking at
my data and asking myself, ‘how do these people think?’, and the fact that they do so
via a set of subculturally-specific territorial and directional metaphors is an essential
part of my argument.

To move onto pre-existing analyses which may be termed ‘social structural’, we will
start with the work of Kevin Hetherington. Hetherington’s work focuses on what he
cautiously describes as ‘New Social Movements’, a category which includes ‘New Religious Movements’. I say ‘cautiously’, because Hetherington is careful to use such terms ‘under erasure’; as we saw in Chapter 2, the ‘newness’ of such phenomena is questionable, as is the claim that we are witnessing a ‘movement’ and that it should be labelled ‘religious’. Hetherington’s analysis is ‘postmodern’ in that his theoretical stance, inspired by the work of Deleuze and Parnet (1987), entails making an endless series of observations and refusing to arrive at a conclusion, a procedure which the latter scholars liken to the writing of an equation with many ‘plus’ signs but no final ‘equals’ sign. As far as Hetherington (1993:12) is concerned, description (or “connotation”) rather than induction (“denotation”) is what the commentator should be concerned with doing, which means that he makes no attempt to directly link what is perceived to be going on to tendencies within the wider culture.

Hetherington’s work belongs in the ‘social structural’ category because he predominantly adopts a Durkheimian theoretical view whereby the collective rather than the individual is supposedly what we should concern ourselves with. He remains sceptical of analyses which stem from the Weberian ‘methodological individualist’ tradition whereby the individual is located at the centre of analysis. Hetherington attempts to make Turner’s (1969; 1974) concept of communitas analytically central, a move which is in my opinion highly questionable as we will see. He also relatedly attempts to revive Schmalenbach’s (1922) concept of the Bund which will also be criticised in Chapter 8. A further difficulty with Hetherington’s approach is its astonishing breadth of field. At the same time as some scholars are suggesting that the label ‘New Age’ is too broad to be of any heuristic value (e.g. Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe 2000), Hetherington attempts to view the situation from an even wider angle, taking as his starting point ‘New Social Movements’ which include “New Age” groups. Hetherington’s work thus not only misses major differences between “New Age” and secular groups, but significant differences between the various “New Age” groups, or types of “New Age” groups.

That said, Hetherington does have a great deal to offer anyone dealing with the phenomenon of late modern magick. His work is as breathtaking in its insightfulness as it is in its breadth and there is much to be gained from engaging with it, despite its inescapable overgeneralization. Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics,
takes as its basic point of focus is what its author terms the ‘expressive’ (presumably, as was the case with Heelas (2000), it is Talcott Parsons (1978:320) from whom Hetherington took his cue, though this is not stated). Hetherington (1993:4) writes:

This book is concerned with how we might come to look at the broad phenomena that make up [...] expressive identities, a view that takes in not only alternative lifestyles (see McKay 1996) and the activists of the social movements and their identity politics, but also some forms of youth culture which overlap with these, certain New Age Movements (see Heelas 1996), green consumption, complementary healing practices and so on.

Later Hetherington (1998:58) explains how:

[Ex]pressivism can be located within the well-established romantic rejection of modernity. It is concerned with feeling, emotion and belonging as a source of symbolic and spiritual creativity and with the eclectic use of totemic identifications often associated with the Otherness of non-modern lifestyles.

Six characteristics of expressive identities are identified by Hetherington (1998:5) as:

1. The search for ‘authentic experiences’ and personal growth.
2. Empathy and identification with the rights and freedoms of marginalised or oppressed others.
3. Emphasis on the importance of establishing some distinct space for groups and networks of like-minded associates to meet, live or protest.
4. Using these spaces as a basis for groupings that are held together by their emotional and moral solidarity.
5. Seeing the body as a focus of well-being and an expressive source of communication and identification with others.
6. Interest in knowledge rejected by the instrumentalism of modern science, medicine, religion and politics.

I will allow Hetherington’s comments to stand for a now, because there is nothing in the above list which does not apply to magickal identities. However, throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis we will see the vast refinement which these very general observations will require if they are to be applied specifically to magickal discourse and practice rather than to a far broader set of contemporary cultural practices.

Ruth Prince and David Riches, authors of The New Age in Glastonbury (2000) also fall into the category of those whose focus is on social structure, and Victor Turner’s (1969; 1974) notion of communitas is central to their thesis. Their concern is to relate what they label “New Age” cosmology thereto. There are many problems with this
piece of work. To my mind the most major is that there is a ‘cause equals effect’
teleology in the Prince and Riches thesis whereby the cause, a specific pattern of
social interaction, leads to an effect, this effect being an “ideology” or “cosmology”
which is labelled “New Age”. Rather than look at what they term the “surface
manifestation” (2000:25) of this “New Age” phenomenon, they attempt to discern a
‘deep structure’, a deep structure which is comprised by “first principles of social
organisation” (2000:203) and then show that from this “it is possible to deduce New
Age social organisation and cosmology in their full glory” (2000:203). The specific
type of social organisation found amongst “Glastonbury New Agers” causes
cosmology then; absolutely not the other way round, nor is there any possibility of the
two being mutually constitutive. The fact that historically-speaking, the cosmology
preceded the type of social organisation found at Glastonbury which Prince and
Riches limit themselves to examining does not seem to concern them in the least, and
nor does the fact that they tellingly contradict themselves on this very point anyway
(2000:14). Though it is refreshing to see an approach to an ‘N.R.M.’ which does not
explain its form and features in relation to the wider culture, ultimately such an
approach is unconvincing, and we should surely be very cautious about any approach
so generalising as to claim that there are parallels between hunter-gatherer
cosmologies and “New Age” cosmology. There may be parallels (assuming, that is,
that we can generalise about hunter-gatherer cosmologies en masse) but this study
will show that there are also vast differences. Hunter-gatherer cosmologies, after all,
did not grow from the western esoteric tradition, and it is something of a moot point
as to how they have transformed in any way(s) via even modernity, never mind
postmodernity. One of the few things which may be favourably observed about the
Prince and Riches approach is that they are, unlike the majority of scholars, at least
prepared to consider the matter of cosmology and make it analytically central. In that
sense at least, their approach is similar to the one taken here.

As mentioned above, Michael York (1996) has produced an important piece of work
in the social structural tradition entitled The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the
New Age and Neopagan Movements. The majority of York’s description consists of
fairly straightforward summarisation of ideology. His analysis is quite traditionally
sociological: he applies the long-established church-sect typology to the “New Age
and Neopagan movements” and concludes that in this instance, we are presented with
neither. Instead, what we are seeing is typologically a S.P.I.N. Devised by Gerlach and Hine (Gerlach 1971; Gerlach and Hine 1973), a S.P.I.N. is a Segmented Polycentric Integrated Network. According to Gerlach 1971, a S.P.I.N. demonstrates:

1. A lack of agreement on movement goals and means.
2. A lack of any list of, or even the possibility of establishing, all individuals or groups who may consider themselves part of it.
3. A lack of any individual(s) who can regulate or ‘lead’ anything but a small part of it.

York’s work has stood the test of time in that it has been and still is accepted by most scholars. Some are currently trying to refine the model (e.g. Corrywright, forthcoming), but refinement is of course not rejection of it.

Moving on to our next section of theoretical stance, some equally important work in this area approaches from a theoretical angle which may be described as Weberian rather than Durkheimian, whereby the fundamental unit of analysis is not the group but the individual. The best known of these would be the work of Paul Heelas, most notably his book *The New Age Movement* (1996) which as we saw focuses on “Self-spirituality”, and Heelas’ later work (2000) where the terminology has been changed to “expressive spirituality” and the problematic label ‘New Age’ discarded. Whichever label is employed, Heelas relates the “New Age”/“expressive spirituality” to modernity and in particular its individualising tendencies, presenting a balanced, non-reductive picture of the spirituality in question as managing to resist various problematic aspects of modernity (1996:ch.5), while at the same time embodying various other aspects of modernity (1996:ch.6).

In the context of the methodological individualist angle of approach, S.J.Sutcliffe’s important essay introducing the concept of the ‘seeker’ needs to be mentioned. Published in Bowman and S.J.Sutcliffe (2000), Sutcliffe titles his contribution ‘Wandering Stars’: *Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World*. Disappointment with the term “modern” aside, this piece is of great significance to this thesis (and to the study of what Bowman and Sutcliffe term “alternative spirituality” generally). Though not marked by any ‘deep’ or “thick description” (Geertz 1973), Sutcliffe necessarily stresses two related points. First, that in the realm of “alternative spirituality”, ideas and techniques are sought or chosen by individual ‘seekers’. Second, that there is a
‘high turnover’ of such ideas and practices, the key phrase here being one of Sutcliffe’s informants who began to answer a question about her ‘beliefs’ with the telling phrase “at the moment...” (2000:27). (We may compare this with the markedly similar comment from some of my informants about “my system as of right now” quoted in Chapter 2.) “Multiplicity” and “seriality” are according to Sutcliffe, the keywords by which we should characterise alternative spirituality (see also Sutcliffe 1997). Insofar as it goes, there is nothing major in this article with which I can disagree. One of the things which I will do in this thesis is to show that there are cosmological elements to this “seeking” which only a deeper ethnographic study will elucidate, a point missed by Sutcliffe due to the rather overly empirical sociological tradition in which his work is situated.

This thesis will attempt to balance the biases in the available literature in the direction of either the individual or the collective. When cosmology is properly considered, the mutually-constituted nature of the two (or ‘two’, if splitting them is more an heuristic device than an accurate reflection of ‘social reality’) will be amply demonstrated. We cannot have individuals without collectives, and a collective is not a hive, but comprised of individual agents. The Durkheimians or the Weberians would I think do better were they to communicate and combine their models of reality rather than setting them up as competing versions of the truth.

Finally, I should mention the more phenomenological approach. A work such as Greenwood’s Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld (2000) is at least partially so in that it is an autoethnography written by an individual whose involvement as a ‘native’ preceded her involvement as an anthropologist. Greenwood’s primary assertion is that as the title of her work suggests, interaction with an otherworld is the essential feature of magickal practice, one which previous studies have completely failed to take into account. This is a suggestion with which I agree, but it will be greatly expanded in Chapter 6. The problem with the autoethnographic approach is that scholars such as Greenwood show an excessive realism in their work. For Greenwood, the otherworld is simply there and that is all there is to it. As a practitioner or ‘believer’, she could hardly think otherwise, and seems either unwilling or unable to approach the otherworld as a socially-constructed phenomenon. By the end of Chapter 6, we will have surveyed an approach to the otherworld which would bemuse or horrify a
‘traditional shaman’ who had never encountered postmodern western magickal
discourse and practice.

Greenwood’s work is not alone in being autoethnographic. A large number of other
practitioners of magick of one sort or another are to be found within and on the
fringes of that portion of the academic world which has examined magick, though
some stick to taking a predominantly historical angle in academic publications. Not
many are as overt as Greenwood in their admissions of involvement but remain, as the
witches and Wiccans would say, “in the broom closet” to varying degrees. They still
have a good set of reasons for doing so as we will see in Chapter 4.

**Theoretical Orientation of Spiral Bound**

What the books there all have in common is a desire to ‘map’ some aspect of contemporary life,
whether literally or metaphorically. As many people have been saying, ‘Space is hot’.

Bertsch and Sterne (1994:np), on the addition of a ‘Topographies’ section to San Francisco’s famous
City Lights Books (cited in Crang and Thrift 2000:x).

[N]ormative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes […] [E]very story is a travel story.


In this section I will outline the theoretical orientation of this thesis. It may be seen as
essentially threefold. First, as I have stated above in relation to Tanya Luhrmann’s
(1989) approach, we need to address the data as socially-constructed, and not as being
somehow “deeper than the cultural”. Magick (*pace* T.S.Eliot 1963:212) is not as it is
“on the shores of Asia” when it is encountered “in the Edgware road”, far from it, and
this fact requires explanation.

Second, remarkably little attention has been paid to cosmology or more accurately,
cosmologies within magick. There is no reason why magickal cosmologies should not
constitute a perfectly valid area of study in themselves. However, I am inclined to go
further, and will be concerned to show in this thesis that a full understanding of
magick is not going to be possible without attention to its various cosmologies. As As
Bowie (2000:28) has suggested in relation to “paganism”, there indeed seems to be a “process in which substantial numbers of people are rejecting metacosmic religions that offer a notion of final salvation (a soteriology), turning instead […] to a pantheistic, magical view of the world”. Though paganism is but a part of magick and there will be more than eco-spirituality to the cosmology which I will outline here, this is precisely the type of cosmology-focussed approach which has been lacking in scholarship thus far.

Third, I have been concerned for some years with the fact that spatiality constitutes a mode of cognition. This is hardly a new point, though it is not one which has received the attention it deserves. Space is good to think with, and I am inclined to take this further and suggest that it is extremely difficult to think without some sort of reference to space. This is as true of an etic level of discourse as it is of the emic; after all, while we are thinking and writing about ‘space’, we are doing it spatially. I am unable to make much progress or get through very many sentences, including this one, without using spatial metaphors. A claim that “space is central,” that “space is where it’s at,” or that “space is where it’s headed,” all illustrate this point (and is even ‘point’ used in a spatial sense there?). Even the subtitle of this subsection involves a spatial metaphor, that of orientation. To say then that spatiality is obvious seems eminently justified, and all the more so given that the Latin root of ‘obvious’ (obviam) implied – quite contrary to its current meaning - an ‘obstacle in the way’. Our use of spatial metaphors is one of those aspects of culture which seems so ‘natural’ and inevitable as to be beyond question. However, as is often the case, it is precisely that which seems unquestionably obvious which may in fact be an obstacle to fuller understanding.

I have deliberately attempted to stay in the realm of the cognitive thus far, but of course, any suggestion of ‘space’ is going to beg the question as to whether we need to encompass space ‘on the ground’, that is to say, space in an ‘empirical’ sense. I am using the word ‘empirical’ in inverted commas here because recently geography and cultural geography, social anthropology and sociology all came to the much-needed realisation that space is socially-constructed like anything else and that therefore the word ‘empirical’ is not entirely appropriate. Space is not ‘just there’ and never has been, at least not since there was such a thing as human culture. Perhaps the best-
known proponent of this line of approach is Henri Lefebvre (1991), though an anthropologist like Ingold (p.c.) has made the same point as have other scholars in various fields. That said, there will be a concern with the use of what for want of better terminology I will label ‘physical’ spaces in this thesis. In the last analysis however, I am using ‘physical’ (as opposed to ‘conceptual’, ‘imaginative’ or ‘symbolic’) as an heuristically useful shorthand. All space is conceptual, that is to say, symbolically and imaginatively constructed, in some sense, and even a mathematician making a simple measurement is engaged in an exercise which is at least as cultural as it is empirical.

I will refrain from italicising spatial figures of writing henceforth in this thesis. By now the reader will I trust have some idea of where this work stands in terms of social theory and perhaps have some idea of where we are heading. It is no longer controversial (though still relatively novel) to suggest that cognition, whatever else it may involve, can be spatial in nature, and that such spatiality is socially constructed just as is everything and everyone else. Such cognitions are very often readily apparent in language as even a limited acceptance of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis might lead us to expect. We will also see how spatialised cognitions appear in dreams, imaginative experiences, in body-language and in the symbology and visual culture of contemporary magick. What will require lengthy examination over the next few chapters is how subculturally-specific the spatiocognitive procedures undertaken by the contemporary magickal practitioner actually are and what this might mean. Before we move on to this however, I have two other points to make, both of which regard the western tendency to think in binaries.

The poststructuralist ‘deconstruction’ of structuralist binary cognition is of course not new, and according to some of the more cynical accounts of the academic world today, has reached an almost cliched status. In my understanding, binaries have a awkward habit of being both present and absent at the same time. (In the wise and witty words of Carl Kendell (p.c.), “We must beware of those who divide the world into two halves. There are those of us who do, and those of us who do not, and I know which side I am on.”) This is certainly the case in relation to the binary pair of ‘space’ and ‘time’. Space and time are sometimes far from easy to distinguish. Crang and Thrift (2000:1) and Ingold (p.c.) have made this point relatively briefly. Feminist
geographer Doreen Massey (1993) has gone into rather more political detail, here, suggesting that one is often privileged over the other in a manner characteristic of binary thinking generally. Though for the sake of clarity I will try to separate space from time in this ethnography, the reader should remain aware that this will not always be possible and occasionally the two will have to be treated as conjoined or in the words of Crang and Thrift (2000:3), “combined in becoming”. Moreover, even when this is not the case, we would do well to recall that bifurcation of the two (or ‘two’) is for heuristic purposes only.

**Conclusion**

I have detailed my various research methods and argued that despite the unusually multi-sited nature of my research (I am not sure the word ‘field’ in its conventional sense is even appropriate), this accurately reflects the multiterritorialised and sometimes deterritorialised nature of the lives of my informants. It is not controversial to note that relatively few in depth ethnographic studies have been carried out in relation to magick and its relation to the contemporary. Certainly very little work has been done which draws cosmology or, more properly, cosmologies into the picture. I have argued that to pay attention to the spatialised nature of cognition and its subculturally specific manifestation in the case of postmodern magickal discourse and practice is vital to an understanding of why magick is the way it is “on the Edgware road”, and this will also shed light on the relation of magickal practitioners to both one another and the culture at large. Space is, so to speak, central to cognition generally; subculturally specific spatial cognitions are an integral feature of magickal discourse and practice, and this is doubly true when it comes to the study of magickal cosmologies.

**Notes**
1. Perhaps the most problematic case in this instance was a ritual performed by Chelsea and various magickal acquaintances of hers (again, none of whom I had met before and few of whom I saw again) at a well-known club in Brixton which featured approximately one hundred individuals forming a circle on the main dancefloor, and the question which endures is “did they all know what exactly they were involved in?” It would seem not; the fact that we were doing a ritual was not formally announced or stated in any detail on the advertising. Energy was raised on the dancefloor during a private ritual before the club was open to members of the public. During the evening, when the time was right, Chelsea and the rest of us simply formed a circle by grabbing the hands of the people next to us and encouraging them to do likewise. We knew about the “energy” which we were dealing with, but it seems likely that many people will simply have thought that taking the hand of the person next to them was a nice thing to do (assuming, of course, that they knew what they were doing at all; some seemed to be drunk, stoned, “pilling”, “speeding” or “tripping”, just as one would expect some clubbers to be on a Saturday night). Within magickal discourse, some voices are raised against such activity on the grounds that individuals are being involved in a ritual without their knowledge and consent.

2. See:

http://www.sorcerers-apprentice.co.uk/homepage.htm

3. The impression will thus be conveyed that there are few significant differences between magick in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. This is a point of which I recommend the reader remains aware. For the purposes of a study with the theoretical orientation of this one, differences are minimal, just as Pike 2001:231 would agree, but it would of course be ludicrous to claim that the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia constitute a monoculture. In the future, work may come along stressing different ‘takes’ on magick relative to the specific countries, cultures and possibly even subcultures which make up what we continue to think of as ‘the West’ or ‘Euroamerican society’.
4.

Here Be Dragons: Space, Magick, and the Mainstream

Dorothy: Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore!

*The Wizard of Oz* (Langley, N., 1939)

Other regions give us back what our culture has excluded from its discourse.


The land of chimeras is alone worthy habitation.


The London Adventure [...] as if the African Magician had suddenly set me down in the midst of Cathay.

*Machen, A., The London Adventure or The Art of Wandering* (1924:30)

Introduction

In this chapter, the relation between magickal discourse and practice and the mainstream will be elucidated. Here it will initially be argued that by definition, practitioners of magick enter into and occupy various zones, none of which are coterminous with the realm of 'normal' discourse and practice, but are in various ways distinct to the mainstream, all Other in some sense. It is these spatio-symbolic locations which account for the sometimes highly problematic social relations between practitioners of magick and the mainstream. Thereafter, I will pose the relatively simple question 'where does magick happen?', and show that 'empirical' locations of magickal practice relate to the 'zones of the Other' already surveyed.
Wherever and however magick takes place, I will suggest that we may best theorise such spaces through Foucault’s (1986) notion of the heterotopia.

**Zones of the Other**

The realms of the primitive, the oriental, the ancient, the imaginary, the romantic, the surreal and the mad, and also (to a more variable extent) the feminine and the natural, these zones usually overlap on the emic, but separate or intermingled, all of them are ideational or ideological territories which are both alluring and familiar to the contemporary practitioner of magick. The same cannot be said of, say, the Christian, or indeed a secular individual. In Chapter 1 we entered some of these zones, knowingly or otherwise, in the flat in which I woke, in the advertisements noted and the shops passed in Brixton and Bloomsbury. To an extent, they readily parallel some the more ‘empirical’ spaces of magickal practice which we will survey below when we examine where magick usually takes place. First we will note the zones which magickal practitioners enter into unambiguously, then I will address the slightly more problematic zones which magickal practitioners may claim to operate within, while also providing reasons to problematise this claim.

In *Gone Primitive* (1990:11), M.Torgovnick describes how her “own particular versions of the primitive formed in girlhood. Steeped in Westerns but unable to identify with the cowboy, I identified frequently with the Indians”. Philip Larkin presents us as with (as we might expect) a considerably less feminist version of the primitive in *Breadfruit* (1980:141):

Boys dream of native girls who bring breadfruit,
Whatever they are,
As bribes to teach them how to execute
Sixteen sexual positions on the sand;
This makes them join (the boys) the tennis club,
Jive at the Mecca, use deodorants, and
On Saturdays, squire ex-schoolgirls to the pub
By private car.

Such uncorrected visions end in church
Or registrar:
A mortgaged semi- with a silver birch;
Nippers, the widowed mum; having to scheme
With money; illness; age. So absolute
Maturity falls, when old men sit and dream
Of naked native girls who bring breadfruit,
Whatever they are.

Luhrmann (1989:172) reports an informant commenting “wherever that is” when told incense came from Sumatra. In Chapter 1, as I made my way through the flat, into college, and later from college to Talking Stick, the primitive made various appearances. Torgovnick (1990:9) writes of primitivism generally:

To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world. That world is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphorical status to control perceptions of primitives - images and ideas that I call tropes. Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces - libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. [...] The ensemble of these tropes - however miscellaneous and contradictory - forms the basic grammar and vocabulary of what I call primitivist discourse, a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other.

Those who study or write about the primitive usually begin by defining it as different from (usually opposite to) the present. After that, reactions to the present take over. Is the present too materialistic? Primitive life is not - it is a precapitalist utopia in which only use value, never exchange value, prevails. Is the present sexually repressed? Not primitive life - primitives live life whole, without fear of the body. [...] In each case, the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive.

Within magickal discourse and practice, the primitive is highly valorised and exercises a marked appeal. As Torgovnick’s lines above suggest, in our case it is through a construction of the primitive that reactions to the present are expressed. After Fox (1992:152) who coined the term ‘affirmative orientalism’, we may term this kind of primitivism ‘affirmative primitivism’. Affirmative primitivism ultimately constitutes an inversion of the more usual, more negatively primitivistic western discourse and a such perhaps represents a progress of a sort. Nevertheless, we are still of course witnessing primitivism; inverting traditional western binaries is not to ‘deconstruct’ them or escape them.

We encounter an affirmative primitivism so frequently that it would be no exaggeration to say that it is a constitutive element of magickal discourse and practice; I have yet to encounter someone involved with magick who does not practice some form of affirmative primitivism. We saw the poster on Chelsea’s kitchen wall which encouraged us to “heed the simpler life and wisdom of our ancestors”. The Druids may claim to be rejuvenating Celtic religious practices;
Wiccans and witches may claim to be practising a fertility religion which stretches back far into the mists of prehistory; those influenced by the Northern Tradition likewise look to the deities and mythologies of the Scandinavian and Germanic peoples; and any practitioner of magick who claims to be a shaman, a neoshaman, or integrates elements of shamanism into their system of magickal practice will inevitably be informed by affirmative primitivist discourse. That what is going on may often be more invention that tradition does not affect this point. Even the close proximity of Afribilia (passed in Chapter 1) to The Atlantis Bookshop is not regarded as coincidental by my informants.

The presence of affirmative primitivism is also inevitably reflected in the reaction of more mainstream individuals to magickal practitioners. In their work on The New Age in Glastonbury, Prince and Riches note that the non-New Age locals, the ‘Glastonians’, refer to the new agers as ‘Glastafarians’ (2000:x). One sometimes also hears the word ‘Trustafarian’ used in magickal circles, applied usually to an individual living a life of apparent simplicity while existing on ‘family money’. There are of course plenty of other terms which could be employed in either context which do not echo the word ‘Rastafarian’. Even scholars are not immune from this primitivism leaking into their prose. Ruth Prince herself (2000:ix) describes her fieldwork experience beginning with the phrase “[i]magine yourself suddenly set down”, a deliberate use of Malinowski’s (1922:4) words to emphasise how ‘alien’ things felt in that particular field. (I am not doubting that things will have felt alien in Prince’s experience, for that is the nature of fieldwork, but we must bear in mind that this comment was set in a manor house in Somerset in the southwest of England, not in the southwest Pacific.) It is worth reiterating the point made in Chapter 2 that this affirmative primitivism is a relatively new element to magickal discourse and practice, dating as it does only from the time of the Occult Revival.

Moving ‘Eastwards’, a similar set of observations can be made about the oriental. In Orientalism and Religion (1999:85), Richard King has remarked of Said’s (1991) work that it has “tended to ignore the ways in which such discourses affect the coloniser as well as the colonised”. A little later on, he briefly remarks that (1999:142) “[T]he lure of the exotic and ‘mystical’ nature of the East and the belief that it can provide Westerners with some much-needed spirituality that underlies the
contemporary interest of many Western new religious movements and New Age groups in the religions of the East.” King is absolutely correct here. In Chapter 1, we noted the shop Parthenon with its window full of artefacts from amongst other places, the Ancient Near and Far East, the Museum Gallery, focussed primarily on ancient Egyptian and Egyptian-style artefacts, Fine Books Oriental (even the word order is suggestively unusual), and Hawksmoor’s partially orientalistic church architecture. We need to ask why such orientalism should be spiritually meaningful to my informants, and why one can find oneself dwarfed by a statue of Egyptian cat goddess Bast or a sarcophagus upon entering The Atlantis Bookshop. Like the affirmative primitivism we encounter within magickal discourse and practice, we also encounter an ‘affirmative orientalism’ or what, after J.Carrier (1992; also cited in Prince and Riches 2000:255) could be termed ‘occidentalism’, an inversion of the more common orientalism whereby it is western culture which is represented as corrupt, ignorant and lacking.

The following exchange between two characters in a graphic novel called The Invisibles by Chaoist Grant Morrison starkly illustrates the difference between affirmative orientalism and ‘traditional’ orientalism of the more negative variety. The year is 1924, and Frederick Harper-Seaton and Lady Edith Manning are in Benares, India (1999:92-3, author’s italics):

Edie: [...] Benares is one of the most outrageously holy cities in the whole world. Much more so than Rome. They say that if one bathes here at the moment of death, one need never suffer rebirth. Isn’t it simply marvellous, Freddie?
Freddie: I would much rather be reborn a thousand times as a coal miner then dip even one toe in that filthy open sewer.
Edie: Freddie, you’re appalling! This is the Ganges! This is the most sacred river in India! Look!
Freddie: Well, I despise India, Edie. It’s quite the most beastly place I’ve ever had the misfortune to visit. It’s too hot, it’s too wet and it’s too hideously sacred...
Edie: I do wish you’d stop being so terribly morbid all of the time. Your father’s been dead for over a month now and all this moping is becoming exceedingly dull. Oh Freddie! We’re here and we’re alive! We must indulge our senses to the limit. We must experience everything! Everything!
Freddie: Including dysentery, I suppose.

Here the more familiar negative orientalism and affirmative orientalism or, after occidentalism are starkly contrasted in the persons of Freddie and Edie. Freddie associates India with disease and dirt, Edie with a highly sensual spirituality.
Moving now (through time rather than space) to the ancient, I have already reminded the reader of shops pregnant with magickal meaning, such as Parthenon with its window full of artefacts from the Ancient Near and Far East, the Museum Gallery with its Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Egyptian-style artefacts, and Hawksmoor’s church architecture, drawing as it does on certain Ancient Graeco-Roman, Egyptian and Persian architectural styles. The British Museum itself, housing so many ancient artefacts, is also imbued with magickal significance (we will note its use for ritual practice below). It seems then that now we come full-circle, back to some of the same data yet this time in the context of the ancient rather than the oriental, and there is an obvious clarifying point to be made regarding the fact that the primitive, the oriental and the ancient can often be intermeshed in social reality. Celtic images and deities seem to fit into ‘ancient’ and ‘primitive’ conceptual realms. An Ancient Egyptian idea, artefact or individual can be considered ancient, oriental, or primitive, or all three at once, and it can sometimes be hard to establish where one stops and the other(s) (or, Others) start. We must therefore allow for polytheistic rather than monotheistic systems of classification (Wittgenstein 1953) whereby a practice, image or artefact can belong in two or all of these categories at once.

A final and perhaps extreme example will suffice: the following is a list of pseudonyms for one Edward Alexander Crowley, better known as Lester Crowley, which illustrates how the adoption of a multiplicity of identities primitive, Oriental and/or ancient was absolutely vital for one well-known magickal practitioner:

Crowley was not a man to do things by halves, but the identities above are unusual only in their quantity, not their ancient, primitive and/or oriental quality.

Now we will move to the realm of the imaginary. Morrison’s *The Invisibles* (1996:86) also includes this exchange between an experienced magickal practitioner, named Tom, and his young apprentice, Dane:

Tom: When you dream, what makes you think it’s not real?
Dane: It’s a fucking dream. You can’t touch it, can you?
Tom: Did you ever hold the hand of the man who reads the news every night on telly?

We noted in Chapter 1 that not far away from that nexus of Bloomsbury streets in which London’s magickal energy is perhaps at its most concentrated in native thinking is *Forbidden Planet*, specialising in science fiction (a.k.a. speculative fiction) and fantasy books, graphic novels and toys. It is not unusual to see magickal practitioners arrive at meetings with *Forbidden Planet* carrier bags stuffed full of fantasy or science-fiction books, or graphic novels by or contributed to by the likes of well-known magickal practitioners such as Allen Moore, Grant Morrison, Pat Mills and Debbie Gallagher. As mentioned in Chapter 1, even George Lucas, director of the *Star Wars* films, has visited *The Atlantis Bookshop*. As Matt Bielby, the editor of *Total Film* once observed, “Star Wars is a religious experience” (cited in Wilkinson 2000:14), and not just any religious experience, but one saturated with the ideology of alternative spirituality.

The role of the imagination in magickal practice has been commented on by other anthropologists (Lurhmann 1989; Greenwood 2000), and it is indeed central to it as these individuals have in their own different ways argued. I will not therefore labour
this point here, but it should be stressed that, as neoshaman Michael Harner (cited in Drury 2000:232) argues:

Imagination is a modern western concept that is outside the realm of shamanism. ‘Imagination’ already pre-judges what is happening.

Put differently, defining something as ‘imaginative’ places it within a specific epistemological category whereby it is at worst not real, at best not as real as other phenomena and therefore one way or the other its importance is denigrated. The common parlance phrase, ‘it’s just your imagination’ speaks volumes in this regard. However, the point cannot be overstressed that for the magickal practitioner, there is no question of anything being ‘just one’s imagination’; there is nothing unreal about the ‘imaginary’ for the magickal practitioner. This point was most strongly underscored for me during this exchange with Dan which took place early on in my fieldwork:

Bill: ... Can’t remember whether someone told me that or whether I dreamed it though.

Dan (rather exasperatedly): Same thing, innit [isn’t it]?

And yet, of course, for all those readers/watchers of J.K.Rowling, J.R.R.Tolkein and the Star Wars films, the imaginative, hugely popular though it may when it comes to whiling away train journeys, is ‘just imagination’, a fact which goes some way to accounting for the fact that mainstream individuals find magick ‘simple-minded’.

Mention of the importance of imagination leads onto a consideration of romanticism, and I am also by no means the only scholar anxious to stress the presence of romanticism in magickal discourse and practice (Lurhmann 1989:38-41; Greenwood 2000:111; Heelas 1996:42; Hanegraaff 1998:415-22), or the converse, for we find magickal ideas present in the work of romantics such as William Blake, Rousseau, Keats, D.H.Lawrence, Emerson and Whitman. Though those scholars who have attempted to establish a definition of romanticism have had as much difficulty in so doing as have those who have sought to define magick, there is no need for agnosticism in this instance either. Gauderfroy-Demombynes (1966:138) defines romanticism as “a way of feeling, a state of mind in which sensibilité and imagination predominates over reason; it tends towards the new, towards individualism, revolt,
escape, melancholy, and fantasy”. Campbell (1987:181) sums up romantic tendencies as “dissatisfaction with the contemporary world, a restless anxiety in the face of life, a preference for the strange and curious, a penchant for reverie and dreaming, a leaning to mysticism, and a celebration of the irrational”. Hetherington (1998:78) writes that “[t]he romantic structure of feeling is one that is organised around ideas of experience, authenticity and identity that derive from the idea of participating in changing the self through engagement with others in forms of localised ‘resistance’ to the symbols of inauthenticity and instrumentalism”. With remarkably little modification, either of these summations could be applied to the discourse and practice of the magickal practitioner.

As well as suggesting a marked romanticism, the role of primitivism and the imagination in magick inevitably suggests similarities between magick and surrealism; indeed, Andre Breton described surrealism as the “prehensile tail” of romanticism (cited in Carrouges 1974:23). Before I commenced my fieldwork, I had no expectation that art or aesthetics would be in any direct way relevant to this thesis. However, quite early on, it became apparent that there was a connection between surrealism and magick in the minds and practices of my informants. For example, I once participated in an open public ritual performed by a Chaos magick group. (The ritual was one of the seasonal rituals organised by the Pagan Federation at Conway Hall and conducted by a different magickal group each time.) After the ritual Pat commented, “Well done, Bill. You were the only one who looked like you knew what you were doing there! I liked it though - it was quite surreal, really.” It was this comment, with the inherent use of the adjective “surreal” as a compliment, which triggered my concern with the relation between the discourses and practices of magick and surrealism. Further examples abound. In March 2001, the requiem ritual (a version of Aleister Crowley’s Gnostic Mass) for the late and much-loved Thelemite Gerald Suster was held in the private room above the Princess Louise public house. The ritual ended when a talking Christmas tree positioned on the bar declared in Gerald’s own inimitable voice Aleister Crowley’s “Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law. Love is the Law, Love under Will!” Such an event might be seen as rather surreal at any time, but nowhere near Christmas, and moreover at a requiem, it seemed all the more so. On a similarly bizarre note, I will certainly never forget a ‘May Queen’ at a Beltane (i.e. spring celebration) ritual held at Avebury, a beautiful
young woman dressed in white and bedecked with flowers standing in the car park of the Red Lion public house. Such a sight would be relatively unusual in itself, but it was the iguana on her head by which I was most taken aback.

Similarity between magick and surrealism is not just conceptual: surrealists were (and are) involved with magick and *vice versa*. We noted the presence of Conroy Maddox at *Talking Stick* in the first chapter, and magickal ideas inform the work of amongst others, Picasso, Kandinsky, Dali and Ernst. If despite its variety and iconoclasm, surrealism is to be defined as an attempt to recapture something lost to the modern world, an attempt to look towards the unconscious as a source of inspiration (and hence to look also towards the primitive as a source of the same, so conflated were the two at that point in twentieth-century thought), then the fact that it is often to be found well-woven into magickal discourse and practice is hardly surprising. For a detailed historical approach to the overlap between magick and surrealism, the reader is directed to Choucha’s *Surrealism and the Occult* (1991).

There is a multiplicity of ways in which the presence of surrealism in magick and magick in surrealism can be theorised, but here I will confine consideration to one which is to my mind especially fruitful. Though Michel Foucault’s engagement with surrealism was problematic (the surrealists’ notion of unmediated access to or expression of the unconscious being a far cry from the *Tel Quel* view whereby there is no ‘beyond’ to linguistic thought), certain remarks of his are of relevance here. Via the work of Jeremy R. Carette, it came to my attention that Foucault (cited in and translated by Carette 2000:44) observed that in certain avant-garde literature:

> reference is constantly made to a certain number of experiences – experiences, if you like, that I will call […] ‘spiritual experiences’ (although ‘spiritual’ is not quite the right word) – such as dreams, madness, folly, repetition, the double, the disruption of time, the return, etc. These experiences form a constellation that is doubtless quite coherent. I was also struck by the fact this constellation was already mapped out in surrealism.

Such thinking, suggests Carette (2000:45), evoked for Foucault “the question of how far the ‘Other’ could be viewed as religious or spiritual”. I would suggest that in the conjunction of magick and surrealism, we see that the ‘Other’ most certainly *can* be viewed as spiritual. We will briefly return to surrealism when we examine the magickal otherworlds in Chapter 6. For now all we need bear in mind is that although
it is far from impossible that Jews, Christians or Muslims might enjoy viewing surrealist artwork, it is difficult to imagine that generally they see very much in it of religious or spiritual significance. For the magickal practitioner however, surrealist art is not just art, it is magick.

The surreal is never far from the realms of the mad, and nor, it would seem, is magick. In Chapter 2 when some basic definitions of magick were offered, ‘Antichrist Superstar’ could not get far without feeling the need to “‘prove’ that I’m not, to some degree, bugfuck”. Comments such as this reflect a widespread perception that mental health levels are lower amongst practitioners of magick than amongst practitioners of other religions, and indeed the populace generally. There is therefore some justification in conceptualising the former as occupying a realm of perceived madness. Moreover, I would not be doing my job properly were I not to address the thorny problem of whether or not this ‘madness’ is more than just perceived; are mental health problems more prevalent amongst magickal practitioners than other social groups?

First, to address the popular or mainstream perception that the magickal practitioner is mad, mad in a way that Jews, Christitians and Muslims are not. Given that the primitive is associated with a lower level of rationality than the modern, and that the magick is associated with primitivism amongst other things, then herein may lie part of our explanation for this situation, and the oriental associations will also play a part in this, because despite an abundance of perfectly good evidence to the contrary, the orient, its culture and its occupants are also frequently represented in the west as lacking in rationality.

Second, a further point here is that magickal practitioners often refer to themselves as “mad”, usually meaning mad in a harmless way, roughly synonymous with ‘eccentric’, ‘kooky’, ‘zany’ or, perhaps, ‘neurotic’. I am under the impression that Christians, Jews, Muslims and atheists do not regard themselves thus. Third, magickal practitioners often regard madness as a magickal phenomenon in itself. For example, urban magickal practitioner Chris Penczak’s (2001:64) work (which will be studied in detail at various points throughout this thesis), contains this idea:
I am certain that most homeless people wandering, particularly in the subway stations, are having actual conversations with spirits and not muttering to themselves, as most people think. Look closely with your second sight and perhaps you will see or feel their conversational partner.

What we are presented with in such cases is a romanticised version of madness as visionary, as revelatory, not unlike the madness of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* (1977). Many informants of mine have chatted to apparently homeless and mentally unwell individuals in the course of their urban magickal practice and as such, the ‘mad vagrant’ is an integral part of the magickal landscape and knowledge base. The Freddie Harper-Seaton of *The Invisibles* whom we met above ‘fell’ from his ‘high’ status and became Tom, a.k.a. ‘Mad Tom’, a tramp who rescues a homeless teenager named Dane and instructs him in the arts of magick as they roam the streets of London together. Grant Morrison’s Mad Tom is of course a deliberate echo of Shakespeare’s Mad Tom O’Bedlam from *King Lear*, who along with the Fool was blessed with insight in a way most of the play’s other characters were not. It is Morrison’s version of Mad Tom who stressed to Dane that dreams are no less real than anything else, as we saw above. I also think it is worth noting in this regard that the H.O.D. initially (and baselessly) believed the abandoned hospital which they appropriated for ritual use to have been a mental hospital. (As it turned out, explorations revealed it to have been a maternity hospital.)

Third, even when mental illness is not romanticised (that is to say, when it is experienced at close enough hand for there to be a distressing dimension to it which there might not be in the case of a muttering vagrant), it is still regarded as magickal. In Penczak’s (2001:84) words, “Remember, the difference between shamanism and schizophrenia is control.” Fourth and relatedly, some magickal discourse seems to imply that the magickal practitioner herself or himself should actually court or even experience “madness” as a strategy for obtaining knowledge. As we saw one example of in Chapter 1, Dan would often talk of *H.O.D.* rituals as essentially being about “going banana-tits mad”.

Fifth, there is however, just next to this rather romantic version of ‘madness as visionary’, a darker, more serious (more real?) construction of madness. It is a widely-held belief on the part of the magickal practitioner that magick or certain types
thereof, if gone about by the wrong type of individual and/or in the wrong way, can
do irreparable damage to mental health. This fact is surely worthy of a pause for
thought; how often, after all, does one hear a Christian, Jew or Muslim say the same
thing of her or his respective faith? The majority of magickal practitioners with whom
I interacted however acknowledged that there are risks to mental health involved with
magickal practice. A wiccan once told me that one of the advantages of working in a
coven (i.e. a closed group of approximately thirteen members) is that it provides a
relatively safe environment should any member have a nervous breakdown. The
statement struck me as astonishing; was I to conclude from this that nervous
breakdowns were something to be expected? Greenwood (2000:193) also mentions
how a “well-known magician [...] told of how he himself had had two full-scale
nervous breakdowns due to his esoteric training”; she does not comment on this as
being particularly remarkable. One recent Beltane Bash held at Conway Hall even
included a warning sign by its entrance to the effect that the organisers would not be
held responsible for damage to “physical or mental health” incurred by any
participants. My own fieldwork presented me with a tragic example of just how
mental ill-health can be ‘read’ by magickal practitioners. During a relatively rare visit
to the home of a well-known magician, I was introduced to his wife who was quite
obviously not entirely mentally well. She emitted frequent yelps and shouts,
sometimes quite unintelligible, sometimes along the lines of “I haven’t done
anything!” I was surprised and shocked (though I did my best not to show this; no one
else seemed concerned in the least). Not long afterwards, one of the other individuals
present had asked me what I had made of the woman I question.

“Well,” I hedge, “she didn’t seem all that well really, did she?”

“She’s a little burned out,” states my informant. “But you see, this is what happens if you do too much
work as a priestess. Or too much too soon.”

Sixth and finally, there is a marked belief amongst magickal practitioners that magick
can attract ‘the wrong type of person’, and that some of the individuals likely to be
attracted to magick will be unstable from day one. It is in this last facet that the native
view might accord most closely with that of the anthropologist. If the observations of
myself and Luhrmann (1989:99-100) are anything to go by, it would appear that there
is a slightly higher incidence of mental health problems amongst magickal
practitioners than amongst the non-magickal population. However, whether this makes the magickal subculture any different to other magico-religious or magico-spiritual populations remains to be seen, and nor need it preclude the possibility that magickal practice is in general therapeutic in one or more ways.

Finally, another space is integrally important to both the magickal practitioner and society at large: advertising space. It is not my intention in a thesis such as this to offer a theory of advertising (were such a thing to be possible), so here I will confine my comments to the simple observation that contemporary magickal ideas (and alternative spiritual ideas more generally) often appear in contemporary advertising (and to an only slightly lesser extent, product design and packaging). In Chapter 1, we saw affirmative primitivism, affirmative orientalism, images of the ancient, notions of energy and force, romanticised constructions of nature, devils, demons, angels and aliens in many and various advertisements, just as we have encountered such ideology in magickal discourse and practice. The realm of advertising, focusing as it does so much contemporary desire, seems to focus at least some of it through an ideoscape with which the magickal practitioner is eminently familiar. (Of course, if one were to adopt the position of Campbell outlined in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987), then an overlap between magick and advertising is readily explicable: both are thoroughly infused with romanticism.)*^2

I now wish to address certain zones of alterity which also feature in magickal discourse and practice but are not essential to it. It is not possible to avoid the realms of the primitive, oriental, ancient, imaginative, surreal and madness when involving oneself with magick. There are however other zones, other Other zones, which feature prominently but not totally. That is to say, either some but not all magickal practitioners occupy them, or magickal practitioners may make rhetorical claims to occupy them while in fact not doing so at all on the level of their practice.

First, there is the realm of the natural. (I will avoid using the word natural in inverted commas throughout the entire thesis, but of course, the nature we are dealing with is a cultural construct.) In the flat in which I awoke in Chapter 1, we saw the feathers, fir cones and rocks along the passageway. It was *Nature's Own* toothpaste with which I cleaned my teeth, and Angel was, or at least would claim to have been, eating a
natural breakfast. Nature is extremely important to the magickal practitioner, and few do not regard nature as sacred in some sense, the exceptions chiefly being those for whom the stress is on a transcendent rather than immanent spirituality, a distinction which will fully cover in Chapter 5.

Rather related, at least according to conventional western thinking, is the realm of the feminine: should we read anything into the fact that it was Edie, not Freddie, who was indulging in affirmative orientalism in the excerpt from Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles* (1999:92-3) surveyed above? Perhaps; in this section I certainly need to address the possibility that magick takes place within the realm of the feminine. Within the magickal subculture, masculinity and all that it entails may be considered to be less important than femininity and all that this entails. On occasion, this would seem to be quite justified. Within Wicca for example, women are regarded as more important than men (and analogously, the Goddess is regarded as more important than the Horned God). Women are apparently more intuitive, closer to nature, and hence more magickal than their male counterparts.

There are however various problems with this. First, this observation is but a partial truth. Greenwood for example has encountered forms of magick which she regards as patriarchal and indeed reports leaving one group in which she was conducting fieldwork on these grounds (2000: 81). Second, Greenwood (2000:164-9) has argued that the status accorded to the female and the feminine within Wicca is based on hegemonic stereotypes of femininity and therefore must be regarded as somewhat dubious (at least, from an anti-essentialist-feminist standpoint). At times moreover, Greenwood (2000:169-70) intimates that such power exists on an ideological level without it being truly carried through onto a level of practice. Prince and Riches (2000:127) make exactly the same point as this latter one, though their observation is rather more general, based as it is on the ‘Glastafarians’ as a whole. Amongst them, despite valorisation of the feminine on an ideological level, in practice it is apparently “business as usual” (see also Pike 2001:206).

In my experience, gender in the magickal subculture is an area which is so short of invariances and so full of paradoxes that I am inclined to treat such data on a case-by-case basis and resist generalising from it. I noted what I would define as sexism
against women on the magickal scene, and I also noted that what I would define as sexism against men is also present. (Lest my gender make my latter observation suspect, we may note that Greenwood (2000:142-3) acknowledges that women can abuse the power that certain magickal paths afford them). That said, ‘power’ is notoriously difficult to quantify and in any case the perennial controversy as to the rights and wrongs of ‘positive discrimination’ and the pros and cons of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak 1995:214) would need to be dealt with before any form of ‘overall conclusion’ could be reached. In the last analysis, it can only be stated rather generally that the ‘sex war’ rages in magickal realms just as it does anywhere and everywhere else.

**Magick and the Mainstream**

To the impartial sceptic, occultism is not inherently more incredible or superstitious than Catholicism, Protestantism or Islam. Nor does it share the shameful history of persecution and bloodshed of these religions. Yet there is a licence in our culture to mock the religious sensibilities of the occult philosopher in a way that would be deemed a gross breach of good manners if applied to the devout Catholic or Muslim. This double standard is surely based on a social rationale rather than a rational discrimination of ethical principle.


In the light of what we have just seen, it will not come as a surprise that the relationship between the magickal subculture and the mainstream can be problematic. Historically, the conception of ‘occultism’ and ‘magic’ entailing ‘evil’ and ‘devil-worship’ is explicable with reference to Christian orthodoxy quite literally demonising certain heterodox theological stances several centuries ago (Gibbons 2001:1). Christopher Marlowe’s Faust for example is at least to Gibbons’ mind (2001:1) very possibly an attack on a real historical figure, the occult philosopher Agrippa von Nettesheim. Some occult thinkers died as martyrs, though with the approach of the Enlightenment, social opprobrium decreased to the level of satire (Gibbons 2001:2). Even now however, as far as ‘inter-religious’ strife goes, certain Christian groups seem to have the most significant objections to magickal activities. (That said, Pike 2001:104,109 has wryly and rightly noted that magickal practitioners sometimes are every bit as inclined to make an Other out of Christians as the reverse.)
So much for specifically religious hostility towards magickal practitioners; secular hostility is also high. It is a fact that religion of any kind can be considered to be dubious by many in these secular times wherein scientism has perhaps become a dominant mode of thought (though there are many who might care to argue that scientism is in itself a form of religion). However, there is more to the situation than this. There are plenty of individuals who seem to regard magic as significantly more dubious than other religious traditions, and will not hesitate to say so. Two informants of mine have been slandered by newspapers, with one sacked from a prestigious teaching job as a consequence and despite successful legal action, he never taught again. On occasion, informants of mine have been physically threatened and one family was forced to move home after a long-running campaign of harassment. When taken for an informant by members of the public (as was frequently the case during my fieldwork), I was, just like my informants, often regarded as eccentric. I managed to avoid a serious physical threat simply by not being in the wrong place at the wrong time; I was asleep a few hundred yards away, and the worst hostility which I ever encountered was only on the level of verbal abuse. Perhaps however, my informants and I should count ourselves lucky, for as far as I am aware none of us has ever been shot at, a dubious honour reserved for Pike’s “Neopagan” informants in the USA (2001:91). I would refer the reader to either Gareth J. Medway’s *The Lure of the Sinister* (2001) or the work of Jean La Fonteine (1994, 1998) for details of the sometimes tragic ramifications of what were subsequently shown to be unfounded allegations of ‘satanic child abuse’ in the UK during the 1990’s, though it seems that the ‘satanic panic’ has quietened down somewhat in recent years.

I am by no means alone in noting with some surprise and disappointment that even sociologists and anthropologists express a high level of disdain for magickal practice, and despite my efforts, relations with some of my colleagues have soured during the last five years. Greenwood (2000: 15), Brown (1997:x) and Gibbons (2001:137) have all noted the same thing in the course of their own academic interactions. I have met two individuals who teach or have taught at University College London who have chosen to keep their involvement in magickal practice covert because they believe that were they to be open about it, their careers would be adversely affected. (This, I might add, in the college which boasts on its website of being “the first university to
welcome all people - regardless of their class, race, religion or sex"). I have not heard of any 'closet' Christians, Jews, Muslims or secular humanists scuttling secretly through the hallowed halls of academe. Even as an autoethnographer, Greenwood (2000:15) reports addressing “hostile audiences” in scholarly settings, a fact by which I remain quite astonished; are we to assume that a visiting Melanesian autoethnographer would experience the same sort of reception?

At the end of the day however, one is inclined to wonder with Pike (2001:120) whether the situation could be any different, given the fact that magickal identity is so often aligned with an Other of one kind or another, and conceptually (and sometimes 'empirically') takes place in a zone or zones of Otherness. Heatherington (1998:148) writes of “heteroclitan identities”, the term ‘heteroclitan’ being borrowed from artist Francis Bacon and denoting the monstrous and freakish. Theorised thus or otherwise, magickal identity is indubitably problematic vis-à-vis the mainstream. Moreover, the fact that this may constitute part of the attraction of magickal practice is not something which either scholars (Gibbons 2001:137; Pike 2001:120) or natives are entirely unaware of. ‘Mad, bad, and dangerous to know’ then is a common perception of the magickal practitioner, and it may well be one which she or he, consciously or otherwise, plays with. It can be a dangerous game, and the magickal identity must be carefully negotiated both vis-à-vis the mainstream and also within the magickal subculture as we will see in Chapter 5.

If we were to reduce western culture to a series of structuralist binaries, a move which might not be entirely fashionable in these poststructuralist times but nevertheless has a certain amount of heuristic value, we would be able to perceive an inversion of a number of (all?) the conventional dyads. Even despite the Greenwood-Prince-Riches claim that it may be more a theoretical than practical inversion in the instance of gender, this still holds as a schematic of magickal ideology:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{emotion} & / \text{female} / \text{Orient} / \text{imagination} / \text{ancient} / \text{primitive} & \text{nature} \\
\text{thought} & / \text{male} / \text{Occident} / \text{reason} / \text{modern} / \text{modern} & \text{culture}
\end{align*}
\]
The problem with such an approach is not so much that it is wrong, as overgeneral. Westerners think in such binaries much of the time, but such binaries are not all there is to cognition, to say the least. In Chapter 5, I will offer another, tripartite structuralist model of magickal identity as viewed from within rather than outside magickal thinking, and by Part 3, we will have gone beyond any kind of structuralist analysis.

Where does magick happen?

But these [...] are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.

Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces* (1986:23)

At this point we will address the relatively simple question, 'where does magick happen?' The answers will all be related to the zones of alterity which we surveyed above. For the purposes of this section, I will divide magickal uses or choices of space into three types. First, practical choices of location, such as the bedroom Banishing ritual which I reported performing in Chapter 1. Second, we will turn our attention to more obviously symbolic spaces, that is to say, locations for magickal ritual or gatherings of magickal practitioners which are chosen primarily or wholly for their symbolic valence, sometimes at considerable practical cost of one sort or another. Third, we will turn our attention to magickal spaces which can be viewed primarily as spaces of resistance to hegemonic social relations. (Of course, as with any typology, these boundaries can blur.) Penultimately, I will outline the more theoretical rather than practice-oriented dimension of magickal construction of space and show how the world is thoroughly re-enchanted within magickal thinking.
Practical Spaces

The discrimination to which magickal practitioners are subject means that often, the over-riding concern in the mind of an individual about to perform a ritual is ‘where can I ensure I am not observed?’ One of the most common places in which to perform an impromptu or semi-impromptu magico-religious ritual is in the workplace lavatory. “Disabled cubicles are the best,” Stephen Grasso explains. “They give you more room to move around.” Ralph Blum’s *Book of the Runes* (1982:45) contains an example of a businessman’s oracular consultation in an office lavatory cubicle: “When I came out [of the men’s room], I was on my way to becoming the Chief Executive Officer”, he reports. The H.O.D. even once surreptitiously performed a ritual in the main area of the lavatory in a quiet pub.

Even when my informants are able to plan to do “magickal workings” at home rather than needing to do them suddenly in workplaces, they face various difficulties. Most simply did not have the space for a permanent magickal area in the home. Just two of my informants (Pat and Gerald Suster) had “temples”, that is to say, rooms in their homes exclusively set aside for magickal activities. Only two others (Caroline Robertson and Gareth J. Medway) had permanent alters in place. One informant, John, preferred not to have a permanent alter set up for fear of the reactions of others rather than a shortage of space. “What would the landlord think?”, he asked, exasperatedly. His precious magickal books were hidden behind innocuous-looking titles on one of his many bookshelves. He performed demonic evocation and invocation in his one bedroom flat using an ironing board as a temporary alter; other members of *The Abysmal Sorcerers*, the magickal group in question, cheekily referred to it as “the Sacred Ironing Board of Antioch”. Many small magickal groups such as this one often meet in each others’ homes, in this case with frequent pleas from John “to keep it [the noise] down” because he is anxious not to “frighten the neighbours”.

A poignant example of difficulty finding ritual space is provided by Stephen Grasso. The following is a verbatim extract from my fieldnotes for December 21, 1998, beginning immediately subsequent to a Druidic celebration of the Winter Solstice on Primrose Hill, London:
We retire to a nearby public house for the *eisteddfod* [post-ritual drinking].

I chat briefly to Daniel. He warns me about some of the other people present: “They’re Chaos magicians. It’s a dangerous energy to work with. Even if you’re just observing, I’d be careful about getting involved with them.”

Daniel heads off and I find myself talking to one Stephen Grasso. He doesn’t seem dangerous. Initially he is very shy, so shy he goes quite red when I start talking to him. However, his shyness does not equal reticence. He immediately and enthusiastically begins to tell me of his Chaos magick initiation ritual; it had only taken place two days previously, and has obviously had a profound effect on him. He explains how, “‘cos me flatmates aren’t into magick, an’ they think I’m weird enough as it is,” he had hired a cheap hotel room in which to perform his ritual. There were but two participants, himself and a woman, Anna, whom he had ‘met’ through an internet Chaos magickal group who had flown from Chile to London especially for this ceremony. The television served as the alter, its aerial lead unplugged, dancing static thus symbolising magickal energy as well as providing eerie halflighting. The Chilean priestess had initiated Stephen in a predominantly sexual rite.

Larger gatherings which are usually held on or around the eight seasonal festivals take place in relatively large rooms in hired halls, art centres and student unions. At the time of writing, Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, Holborn is one of Central London’s most popular venues. (The University of London Union, colloquially known as “U.L.U.”, wherein I had that brief drink in Chapter 1, used to be a popular venue for magickal gatherings. However, my informants found it impossible to stick to the tight scheduling imposed by the management, insisting on sticking to their belief that magick should not be rushed, and should take ‘as long as it takes’.) With the exception of Solstice gatherings at Stonehenge which we will examine below, the largest magickally-oriented events would be the *Pagan Federation Conference* or *Witchfest* held at Croydon’s Fairfield Hall, one-day events generally attracting over a thousand people, and the *Mind, Body and Spirit* exhibition which, held in various venues over several days, has attracted up to eighty-eight thousand people (see Hamilton 2000).

The use of hired venues does not guarantee total privacy, and sometimes this can be problematic. During winter months, the *H.O.D.* performed rituals in hired rooms in Charlton House in Charlton, South London, an imposing Jacobean building said to be haunted by a plethora of ghosts. On two occasions people accidentally walked into the rooms in which we were performing a ritual. One imagines that stumbling into a candlelit room occupied by six individuals in hooded black robes chanting “in barbarous tongue” will have proved something of a shock for an individual in search of a meeting of his fellow philatelists. On another occasion, Ben played a central part
in a ritual included in requiem for a well-known and much-loved Thelemite, Gerald Suster. The ritual comprised a version of Aleister Crowley’s Gnostic Mass, and was performed by Thelemites and members of a ‘Thelemic Wiccan’ coven. It was held in the upstairs room of the Princess Louise public house in Holborn in place of the usual Talking Stick talk. At one point, Ben noisily invoked the ancient Greek god Pan. This and subsequent chanting from the participating audience attracted curious drinkers from downstairs and myself and an informant had no choice but to stand outside the room and politely-but-firmly turn spectators away.

Pat once declared that should she ever win the lottery, she would create a “Pagan temple somewhere really funky, like in an old cinema or something”. At the time of writing, her wish is yet to be fulfilled. Relatively recently, a Goddess Temple has been established in Glastonbury. Described (quite plausibly) as “probably Europe’s first Goddess Temple for over a thousand years”, it is perhaps the closest thing to a magickal ‘church’ to be found in the UK. There is no such building available in London; St James’ Church, Piccadilly houses the well-known Alternatives seminars and workshops, but it is nevertheless still a Christian Church, and such events are held without the full approval of the Parish Council.

No ethnography of the London “magickal scene” would be complete without reference to its one annual moment of unusually-high visibility. The Beltane Bash, held at Conway Hall as close to May 1st as is possible and practical, begins with what is sometimes known as the “Pagan Pride Parade”. I will employ predominantly visual rather than textual representation, allowing the colourful exuberance of the participants to speak for itself.
Fig. 4.1: Processing along Montague Street (2002).
Fig 4.2: The giants are ‘parked’ in Russell Square (2002).
Fig. 4.3: Further 'parking' of giants (2002).
Fig. 4.4: Court jester dancing through Russell Square water fountain (2002).
Fig. 4.5: Spiral dance (2002).

Fig. 4.6: Processing down Southampton Row (2003).
There are other spaces which may be employed for rituals and/or gatherings. Many on the 'club scene' and 'free-party' scene regard parties in clubs and squatted venues as
thoroughly magickal events. (One native rationale behind this is that drum beats and
dancing “raise energy”.)

Fig. 4.9: Flyer for Pendragon, held at Mass, St Matthew’s Church, Brixton (as mentioned in Chapter 1.) The organisers of Pendragon were well-known to my Brixton flatmates.
The following is a flyer for a similar party, but held in an squatted rather than 'official' venue near London Bridge:

Fig. 4.10: Flyer for the Nagual Tribal Gathering. The symbol of the triangle with the bar through it can be traced back to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, while the term "nagual" obviously shows a Central American, possibly Castenadan influence. There was an overlap between the individuals involved in the organisation of this and the I.O.D.
Sometimes parties and club nights can include formal rituals, sometimes not, depending largely on the mood of the participants. (The reader will recall that one Pendragon dance-floor ritual was mentioned in Chapter 3.) Another, slightly different musical-magickal space was fleetingly established by Steve Wilson with his Club Tropagana, which met in a ‘spooky’ theme pub called the Bell, Book and Candle near St Paul’s Cathedral. Club Tropagana featured a ritual, and then magickal music (Steve and friends D.J.’ing), Steve being more influenced by rock and punk music than dance music. Sadly, at the time of writing the club is in need of a new venue; there were generally not quite enough attendees to cover costs. Finally worth noting here is that in February 2000, a ‘one-off’ event entitled Tygers of Wrath, billed as “an evening celebration of [William] Blake’s legacy”, was held at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in the South Bank Centre, and saw the writers/magickal practitioners Iain Sinclair and Allen Moore sharing the stage with an illustrious aggregate of more mainstream performers, including Billy Bragg, Jah Wobble, Glen Matlock of Sex Pistols fame, and also actor Ewan McGregor whose numerous film roles have included, appropriately enough, Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace. During my time in the field, that was as ‘mainstream’ as an evening with my informants ever got, and yet this is perhaps not surprising when one considers the influence of magick on popular music. This list is by no means exhaustive, but we should note that some of the better-known figures or groups to have been influenced by magickal thinking include The Beatles, Jim Morrison, Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page, David Bowie and Madonna.

Moving from music to visual art, it is also worth noting that galleries can occasionally feature as loci of magickal experience. William Burroughs (1992:34-5) reported that “I see paining as evocative magic”, and magickal practitioner and author Jack Gale has explained this phenomenon in terms of “energy” inherent in and around magickal artwork. An recent exhibition of the work of William Blake at the Tate Britain gallery attracted a number of my informants. The 491 Gallery in Leytonstone, originally a squatted venue with considerably more avant-garde leanings has also provided a venue for some magickal rituals. However, this ceased to be the case after a Samhain 2002 event featuring the all-female band Rockbitch, who performed a ritual based around a male magician/performer being sodomised with a broomstick. Thereafter, rituals (all of which have thus far been of a non-sexual nature) have been held in the
adjacent, separate venue called the *Vertigo Cinema*, the ‘491 Collective’ being understandably concerned about loss of their Arts Council funding.

Before we move from the matter of magick and sexuality, we will finally note that a handful of magickal rituals have been performed in sex clubs and fetish clubs. A magickal ritual (its intention “to promote sexual freedom and tolerance”) featuring some of my informants formed part of the entertainment at the 1999 *Erotic Awards*, and *Rockbitch* performed another one of their notorious rituals (this time comprised of lesbian sex) at the *Erotic Awards* in 2001. The fetish club *Torture Garden* once featured as part of its cabaret a Black Mass. Though sometime before my fieldwork begun, some of my informants were involved therein and the event is still talked about. The aforementioned ritual to “to promote sexual freedom and tolerance” was also performed at fetish clubs, and *Radical Desire: The Cutting Edge of Western Sexual Experience* (2001) by Housk Randall and Mark Ramsden (the latter writer well-known on the “magickal scene”), while non-academic, includes a chapter on that ritual and similar ones. Rarely however are public magickal rituals so sexually explicit, and such exhibitionistic rites are part of a magickal tradition known as the *Left Hand Path*, a controversial type of magickal practice and identity which will be fully-explored in Chapter 5.

We will now move onto the matter of where magick happens when its practitioners have sufficient choice about the location to enable a symbolically-meaningful space to be employed for their “working”.

126
Spaces of Symbolism

For those who reject the norms and beliefs of society, such places facilitate the ordering of a new identity or identities. In this geography of the elsewhere, margins become centres, centres become margins, and the meaning of centres and margins becomes blurred.


The following is an excerpt of dialogue between talkshow host Robert Kilroy-Silk and Caroline Robertson, which was part of an episode of the *Kilroy* television talkshow, entitled, *What Witches Really Do*, screened on June 21st 2000.

Kilroy: Well, the Summer Solstice is approaching, as you know, and for *witches*, this is one of the most important times of the year. Now okay, what have you got in your mind? What’s your image of the witch? What do you think they’ll be doing? Flying across the sky... on broomsticks, with pointy hats, casting wicked spells everywhere? Or d’you see them in those kind of white, flowing robes, or running naked [laughter] around the forest glen, offering sacrifices? Well that’s the image [sic] that we have, isn’t it, of witches? But is that what it’s really all about? Is it, Caroline?

Caroline Robertson: It is and it isn’t...

Kilroy: Oh, what, you run naked round the glen then?

Caroline Robertson: Well... yes, we do, we do...

Kilroy: You do?!

Caroline Robertson: A great part of the rest of what you said wasn’t quite right.

Kilroy: Oh, you’re not on a broomstick?

Caroline Robertson: We’re not on a broomstick, there are no sacrifices going on, um... Nat-, Wicca, Witchcraft, is a nature tradition, so what place, what better place to do it than in the woods?

Kilroy: Wooooh, what do you do in the woods?

[laughter from audience]

Caroline Robertson: You, you have a celebration, the ancient Druids never used to have temples, they never used to have churches, they, they would go into an oak grove, to be at one with their divine, and, you know, what, what better place than in the bosom of Nature Herself?

As Caroline’s comments above suggest, a significant amount of magick takes place in ‘green’, ‘natural’ space. If the practitioner has a garden, then this is an obvious location for ritual: Pat’s Celtic Mysticism group and the *Temple of the Midnight*
Bimboes both on occasion performed rituals in the gardens of Pat’s and Caroline Robertson’s homes respectively. (These gardens were, I should stress, fairly private ones.) Some wealthier individuals involved in magickal practice have far larger stretches of private land on which they and perhaps others may practice undisturbed. Cynics delight in the fact that sometimes bad weather prevents outdoor magickal practice, and likewise eco-activists and travellers, hardened to the elements, scoff at their “fairweather friends” who seem to hold nature sacred “only when it’s nice out”. However, I have also attended outdoor rituals in pouring rain. Sometimes participants have resigned themselves to getting soaked, while at other times I have seen magickal practitioners fully “robbed-up” yet with garish waterproofs over their robes, unselfconsciously holding umbrellas over themselves or one another.

The vast majority of those involved in magickal practice of course do not own their own land, and many residents of London do not have gardens. Nevertheless, the need to “work” in a ‘natural’ space is felt acutely by a significant proportion of magickal practitioners, and so for many, public ‘green space’ it has to be. (I say “a significant proportion of magickal practitioners” need to “work” in ‘natural’ space; precisely which proportion does so will be addressed in Chapter 5 when we examine different types of magickal identity.) When public spaces are covertly employed by magickal practitioners, undesirable attention is sometimes problematic, and of course, threatens to remove such magickal practice from the realms of the private. Wicks or witches, who (at least ideally) practice magick skyclad, i.e. naked, have especially to ensure that they are not observed lest they find themselves charged with what U.K. law terms ‘indecent exposure’.

A favourite incident of many magickal practitioners took place one Samhain, when (as usual), the poet John Constable (author of The Southwark Mysteries) accompanied a group to the site of the Crossbones Graveyard on Redcross Way, Southwark. It was here, on Halloween or Samhain 1996, that John’s shamanic alter-ago, John Crow, had been spontaneously possessed by a spirit claiming to be that of a medieval prostitute. For some years now, the site has been occupied by Transport For London, who are extending the Jubilee Line. And so, late on the eve of October 31st 1999, a group of approximately thirty individuals linked to a magickal collective known as the Green Angels headed along Redcross Way, stopped outside the construction site and
performed a ritual. It is not very surprising that this attracted the attention of the police. A single unit pulled to a halt on the intersection of Redcross Way and Union Street, eyeing the party suspiciously. However, as usual, several members of the group had hard-hats and fluorescent, high-visibility vests associated with construction workers. Officiously striding to the front of the group, they waved cheerily at the police. The police waved back, and drove off along Union Street, presumably thinking that whatever was happening was so doing under the auspices of Transport for London or one of its subcontractors, and the ritual continued unhindered.\(^6\)

Many of my informants have used the British Museum for inelaborate rituals. The magickal significance of all things ancient, primitive and oriental which we noted in Chapter 4 readily explains this phenomenon, and it is one with a history within magickal practice: the first instance thereof which I have been able to trace occurred in the Boulak Museum in Cairo, in 1904. Symonds (1973:81, author's italics) supplies the following version of events wherein Prince Chioa Khan or Perdurabo refer to Aleister Crowley, and Rose or Princess Chioa Khan denote his then wife, Rose Crowley:

Rose was in a strange state of mind, like someone dazed. She was either drunk or hysterical from pregnancy, he [Crowley] said. She kept repeating dreamily, 'They are waiting for you'. On 18 March, she came out with the astounding statement that 'He who was waiting was Horus', and that Aleister had offended him, and ought to beg his pardon.

'Who is Horus?' asked Crowley. Rose knew nothing of Egyptology. On her lips the name of Horus was most perplexing. For an answer she took him into the museum nearby, a museum which, Crowley points out, they had not previously visited. They passed by several statues of Horus and went upstairs. In the distance was a glass case, too far off for its contents to be recognised.

'There,' cried Rose, 'there He is!'

Perdurabo advanced to the case. There was the image of Horus in the form of Ra-Hoor-Khuit painted upon a wooden stele of the 26th dynasty.

Suddenly Crowley fell back in amazement: the exhibit bore the number 666.

Another member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the poet W.B.Yeats, also integrated the ancient artefacts held in museums into his magickal life. Sometime(s) between 1884 and 1886 poet-mage and his friend Charles Johnston reportedly visited a Dublin museum, attempting to feel a mysterious energy in its Reichenbachian formulation of 'Odic force' exuding from ancient artefacts (see
R.F. Foster 1997:46); we will fully explore the notion of energy in detail in Chapter 7. By the year 2001, if a frontpage headline in The Independent newspaper is to be believed, “Mummy worship” was “sweeping Britain” (11.06.2001), though given that it is based on a single anecdote and seems to have been composed by a somewhat over-excited individual, one feels such journalistic exuberance should be tempered with scholarly caution.

**Spaces of Resistance**

If one were to allow ‘resistance’ to include symbolic actions, then there is no reason why the above uses of space should not be considered as acts of resistance to modernity, at least to some degree. However, in this section I wish to look at some more ‘concrete’ examples of resistance, instances whereby magickal practitioners find themselves in overt opposition to the powers-that-be as they generally do when magickal gatherings and rituals which dovetail with anticapitalist demonstrations. It is here that we see that magick is not necessarily an opiate of the people. The following narrative has been taken directly from my fieldnotes.

Parliament Square, London. Morning of Beltane, 2000. I am with two informants, Tim and Collette. Thousands of people have gathered here. It is hot, crowded, and nothing seems to be happening. Nor is anyone sure what might be about to happen; stickers briefly glimpsed from escalators in London’s subway system had directed Tim and Collette (and hence myself) to the Reclaim the Streets (R.T.S.) website. All we knew for certain at this point was that the “the ancient fire and fertility festival that signals transformation and rebirth” was to be celebrated and that we should have brought along seeds and tools for some “guerrilla gardening”.

Almost an hour past the supposed start time, the arrival of the Critical Mass cyclists seems to mark a beginning to the day’s events. Immediately behind them a carnivalesque procession, all grotesque and surreal in the spring sunlight, spins and dances its way round the square to the drum beats of a samba band.

The quantity and quality of activity is stepped up. Masked activists appear from nowhere and stretch tape from lamppost to lamppost across a number of the roads and pavements round the square. Tourists scurry away. Activists with mountaineering equipment scale lampposts and stretch huge banners from one to another; the one nearest declares: “Resistance is Fertile”.

In the square itself, people dig into the grass and flowerbeds and plant seeds. Chunks of dug-up turf are placed over the pavements, in one case to form the slogan, “Beneath the Pavement, the Garden.”

So far the Metropolitan Police decline to stop any of this activity. Their strategy may overtly be one of tolerance but it does give the activists sufficient leeway to incriminate themselves; members of S.O.3, the Metropolitan Police Force’s surveillance unit, stride around the square taking photographs.
People move into the two streets around the square which remain open to traffic, physically preventing vehicles from proceeding.

“Might as well have something to read while you wait sir, it looks like you’ll be here a while,” an activist chirps as he offers a motorist a copy of an alternative newspaper. It is a parodic version of the Metro, called the Maybe. The front page headline declares: “Terrorists plan to Plant Seeds”.

A few begin to let down the tyres of the stationary motor vehicles. A pregnant woman in one of the cars becomes extremely distressed. Exception is made and the vehicle is allowed to proceed.

More chunks of dug-up turf are placed on the now ‘reclaimed’ streets.

An activist dressed in a monk’s habit climbs up onto a police vehicle, triumphantly empties a bag of manure onto its roof, and delivers a parodic blessing unto the cheering crowd.

And still the police do not intervene.

My informants and I wonder about the square: people in fancy dress, people in green, yet more people wound round with leaves and one or two people wearing nothing at all. We pause to watch colourful figures dancing round an equally colourful maypole. I note the presence of television comedians Rob Newman and Mark Thomas. Children play in the mud created by the guerrilla gardening.

We spot a fellow in a green robe adorned with a golden pentacle. “I see the Pagans are out in force then,” I remark. “Oh, I don’t define myself as a Pagan,” the man replies. “Paganism’s the first and only religion not to define itself as anything. This is just a nice way to celebrate Beltane really.”

*  

By late afternoon the statue of Winston Churchill has been adorned with yellow balloons and a large paper daffodil, red paint dribbles from the corner of his mouth and a piece of turf forms a bright green mohican on his head. Along Whitehall, more war memorials have been desecrated with spray paint and urine and the back of Ten Downing Street has been pelted with bottles. McDonald’s has been vandalised and watching journalists have been attacked, one thrown off the top of the bus shelter from which he had been filming. The regular police have been forced to retreat, one of their number badly injured by a thrown brick.

I am pinned in Trafalgar Square by riot police along with approximately two thousand others. The crowd has been split in two, the other portion confined in Parliament Square. I have been separated from my informants when we scattered in the face of a baton charge. I’ve been here for several hours and I am exhausted, dehydrated and scared.

The riot police advance steadily, pushing us into less and less space until it is standing room only. The claustrophobia is intense and I am fighting the urge to panic. There is an attempt at a breakout but the police line holds firm.

There are of course no toilets. With no room to move, people can’t help wetting themselves where they stand, and the Square is awash with urine.

Wailing at the wall of police is a thirtysomething woman, screaming and begging to be let out. A man tries to calm her, but she remains hysterical. He suggests to the nearest officer in a calm and ‘polite middle-class’ voice that the woman should be allowed to leave. The officer stares into space.

“Look, I’m a G.P.,” the man continues. “In my opinion this woman needs medical attention. ... Look, why can’t you let her through to the medics?”

An adjacent officer: “You wanted to be ‘ere. Now you’re bein’ kept ‘ere.”

“Why are we being kept here?”, asks the G.P.
"Because we haven't done what we're gonna do to you yet," replies the more verbal of the policemen.

"What are you going to do to us?", enquires the G.P.

"We're gonna piss on you."

* By around six p.m. the police finally begin to allow people to file out of the Square. Given that they are letting six out at a time at approximately two-minute intervals, it is still another half hour before I am finally walking a gauntlet of officers picking out suspects for filming, searches and arrest. I stare straight ahead and walk on.

As I head down the Strand, I bump into Tim, an old informant whom I haven't seen for almost a year.

"Happy Beltane, Bill!", he grins.

We head straight for the nearest pub.

In countercultural circles, Beltane or Mayday 2000 is often now referred to as The Battle of the Big Mac, a clear echo of the phrase 'Battle of the Beanfield'. On Beltane 2001, another group of my informants, The Illuminates of Dionysus, decided to invoke the Greek deity Eros and employ this energy against the forces of capitalism, to (in the e-mailed words of Bruce):

[Protest against Global Capitalism in a 'positive' and creative way, minimising negative (though well deserved) attacks on it, and the depressing focus on the real suffering it causes, and maximising the affirmation of the life that Capitalism supresses, temporally releasing it into the light of day. The free participatory life of fulfillment, pleasure, creativity and love (in all its forms). Symbolised in this case by Eros. An attempt to release this mode of consciousness, found inside all of us. A brief negation of the negativity, repression, alienation and immiseration produced by Capitalist society, and the disciplinary structures required to maintain it. A signpost to a bigger affirmation in the near future. The euphoric liberation.

After the events of the previous Beltane and much media scaremongering, preparations were tense, and several members of the group refused to take part. At approximately 12.45 on May Day/Beltane I arrive at the statue of Eros which had been boarded up for fear of vandalism. From my fieldnotes:

I immediately bump into Peter, who tells me of a dawn Beltane ritual he has attended on Parliament Hill. The leaders of the Companions of Horus were present, as were several others "none of whom you'll know, I don't think, because I'd never seen them before anyway." Michael Bingas of the Temple Of The Midnight Bimboes arrives, along with Anja and Ruth, two other Bimboes. They quickly slip away to the Horses of Helios from which the procession will start. By half past one, here must be some two-hundred people present.
Eventually, the ritual participants process up to the statue of Eros to the beat of a single drum. A banner declaring “Eros Against Global Capitalism” is attached to the boarding around the statue. The group is swarmed by media photographers. S.O.3 photographers are also busy, but the police do nothing to stop the activity.

Busily taking pictures myself, I was too far away from the centre of events to hear precisely how this unusual invocation proceeded, so I will momentarily quote from Bruce’s write up of the event:

A magical invocation of Eros was performed [...] with the four faces of the Orphic version of this ‘subversive’ archetype (of love, desire, creativity and chaos) invoked in the four directions and their psychogeographic locations. The Lion Eros in the West of St James (place of baptism of anarchist poet William Blake) was passionately evoked, along with a megaphone rendition of Blake’s The Garden of Love:

I laid me down upon a bank,
Where Love lay sleeping;
I heard among the rushes dank
Weeping, weeping.

Then I went to the heath and the wild,
To the thistles and thorns of the waste;
And they told me how they were beguiled,
Driven out, and compelled to the chaste.

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen;
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut
And “Thou shalt not,” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

Next the Ram Eros in the North (towards Oxford Circus) was evoked with celebrations of Chaos and Night, from which Eros was born, with Rhea drumming on the threshold; to the East and Soho the Bull Eros was evoked as the horned Dionysos [sic], and the wild, bohemian nature of the district was contrasted with its cynical commercialisation of sex. Soho as the sex capital of London also having obvious associations with sex workers, one of the most exploited and valuable sections of the ‘proletariat’. A couple made love amongst the crowd as the evocation progressed to the South and the Serpentine Eros, evoked with a collective hisssss, which was linked to the river Tyburn that once flowed freely through the area south into the Thames, but symbolic of our age is now a sewer buried under the tarmac.
After a denunciation of capitalism, the ritual consisted of dancing and drumming. Poet-shaman John Constable arrived and delivered his *Ode to the Illuminates of Dionysus* which is worth quoting in full:

```
Let's go Pan
Let's go pagan
Let's wake up Her Majesty with Michael Fagan
Let's reinvent the art of the urban shaman
Throw a wild party in the wrecked heart of Babylon

Let's make a magic potion
Let's brew it in a cauldron
Reawake the snake
Make poetry in motion
Let's go night tripping skinny dipping in the ocean

Let's go pink
Let's go punk
Let's smile for the camera with a mouth full of spunk
Let's shadow-box with angels until we punch-drunk

Let's get feathered
Let's get furred
Let's shake a hoof with the horny goat-herd
Let's raise the roof and then let fly the bird

Let's go Pan
Let's go primal
Let's do the Old God Man Shamanic Revival
Catch as catch can and scratch-scratch it on vinyl

Let's go Trickster
Let's go Tantra
Let's bang a gong and sing a Bagavati Mantra
Paint our bodies red and blue create a living Yantra

Let's advance
Let's retreat
Let's trance dance to a tribal break beat

(ad infinitum)

Let's Do It All Night
Let's stir up and shake up
Let's give ourselves a fright when we take off our make-up
Love-bite the Sleepers until they finally

Wake up!
```

Though not all of the crowd would have been able to hear what was being said, and may even if they had been able to not have fully understood what was happening, the atmosphere was in general positive, even despite the incessant drizzle. Eventually,
people disperse, only for many to find themselves cordoned by riot police in Oxford Circus.

Finally in this section, I must briefly mention that phenomenon of magickal graffiti. It is not unusual for some magickal groups (often those with younger members) to spraypaint or pen magickal symbols in public spaces. The related practice of ‘stickering’ also features: the H.O.D. had a batch of stickers made up and peppered London with them in a bid to publicise its website. Recently, the following symbol could be observed all over London, though not one of my informants was sure exactly what it meant or who might be doing it:

Fig. 4.11: Magickal symbol of unknown meaning and origin, Little Russell Street. Though none of my informants could tell me what it meant, it is (to their minds and mine) a variation on the eye in the triangle symbol found relatively commonly in magick.
There is nothing especially new about marginal spaces being imbued with significance by marginal groups (such a notion can be found in sociological literature as far back as that produced by the Chicago School). Hetherington (1997:107) writes:

[S]uch places have a social centrality such that they act like shrines for those who live outside of the conventions of a society - whether they be Chicago gang members, surrealists or those, like travellers, who have chosen an expressive and alternative identity - because they come to symbolise another set of values and beliefs around which groups can order their identities and the way they want to be identified [...].

Later Heatherington (1997:120) continues:

Marginal places, symbolically outside of modern society, are the elsewhere in which these meanings are sought. The symbolic meanings attached to these spaces, often associated with rejected or non-modern, non-western knowledge, allow for the metonymical transferral of meaning from place to [...] identity. Because of the anti-instrumental rationality of these groups, the places chosen are likely to have some sacred, ambivalent, forgotten or mysterious meaning attached to them. Such places will have a social centrality for the people involved.

There are various other theorists on whose work scholars have drawn in order to explain such uses of space. Hetherington (1997:111-16) and Pike (2001:19-27) have used the notion of liminality in this regard. Hetherington has also drawn attention to Lefebvre’s (1991:33) concept of “representational spaces”, spaces in which occurs resistance to hegemonically-constructed and hegemonically-represented space, and thus emerge “complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life [...]”. Also, Hetherington (1997:131-2), Green (n.d.) and Ivakhiv (2001) have used readings of Foucault’s (1986:24) essay on ‘heterotopia’ in this context. “Heterotopia”, Hetherington (1997:132) infers, “are sites in which all things displaced, marginal, rejected or ambivalent are represented”. There is no doubt in my mind that this a most useful line of approach; here I have been concerned to add to such analyses by showing how the conceptual space and the ‘empirical site’ are integrally related.
The Re-enchantment of the World

Cities have their own way of talking to you; catch sight of the reflection of a neon sign and it'll spell out a magic word that summons strange dreams. Have you never seen the word IXAT glowing in the night? That's one of the holy names. Or make tape recordings of traffic noise and listen to them at night. You'll hear the voices of the city coming through, telling you things, showing you pictures. Sometimes they'll show you where they came from. In waking dreams I've seen cemetery planets circling abandoned stars. Like mausoleums, silent and dead, every building a headstone. That's what cities do... But those of us who know the secret learn ways to unlock the power in cities. We make a pact with them and they give us gifts in return. [...] City's full of magic, neither bad nor good, just there to be used by the people who know. Cities live and breathe magic. Did you know that if you get a map and join up the sites of all the McDonald's restaurants in London, it makes a sigil of the Dark Emperor Mammon?

Mad Tom in Morrison, G., The Invisibles (1996:83-89)

London is a megalnecropolis, vibrant with paramentals on the verge of vision and hearing, each towerblock a surreal cenotaph that would bury Dali, and I one of the living dead aware of everything with cold delight.

Misquoted, unsourced, by Dan in an e-mail. This line was originally penned about San Francisco, in a story entitled Our Lady of Darkness by Fritz Leiber (1991:245).

Few would dispute that to a significant degree, the realm of the 'natural' is seen as being (re)enchanted in magickal thinking and being (e.g. Harvey 1997; Pearson, Roberts and Samuel 1998), and it is not my intention here to spend long on this aspect of magick. What has yet to be explored in depth (ethnographically or otherwise) is the re-enchantment of the urban realm, very possibly because relatively few ethnographies have focussed on the London magickal "scene". To the magickally-minded, little of London is not imbued with magickal meaning. I will therefore make some observations as to the precise nature of what I will term here 'magickal psychogeography'. Initially however, I will allow one of my informants, artist and writer Grant Morrison, to speak, through the voices of two characters in his graphic novel The Invisibles. Mad Tom is at this point explaining to an initially nonplussed and later downright terrified Dane that there is more to London than meets the eyes of the magically ignorant:
Tom: Two London’s there are; there’s the one you can see all around and there’s the other city under the skin of this. The hidden city, sunless and silent. If you really want to learn, I’ll take you there. I’ll show you things to make your hair stand up and dance.

You have to want, that’s all. […]

Dane: Now where are we going?

Tom: Nowhere in particular. The Paris Situationists used to call this sort of thing a derive [sic] - drifting aimlessly through the city, making it new and strange. The street of little girls, sun street, the ocean bar and the square of the appalling mobile. People look at us and see the poor and the mad, but they’re looking at us through the bars of their cages. There’s a place in your head, boy. Learn to live in it always.

Dane: I’ve just realised Big Ben’s the wrong way round. What the fuck’s going on? I want to get back to normal.

Tom: There’s no going back. We’ve unpicked the thread of the world.

[Points to a Blakean mythological figure looming out of the Thames.]

Look, there! “Urizen, deadly black, in chains bound”.

Dane: But what about the real world?

Tom: You don’t think this world is any less real than the one you left do you? Everything that ever happened to you is real, even your dreams. Them, most of all. There are many worlds, many cities, and all of them are just shockwaves spreading out from one single moment of clarity and understanding. Ripples.

[Looks towards the Canary Wharf tower]

... Now did you ever wonder why they put a pyramid on top of Canary Wharf there eh? It was built as a power-accumulator. It stands on the major southern dragon line. Goes right through Buckingham Palace.

Dane: Give it a rest will you? I feel totally fucked and I can’t understand a word you’re saying.

Dane may require some further convincing, but the majority of magickal practitioners do not. Stephen Grasso’s essay entitled Rough Guide to Occult London begins thus:

It’s easy to visit London and be completely oblivious to its occult heritage. The vast majority of Londoners, even those born and bred in the city, know precious little about the ancient sacred sites that can be found sandwiched between the modern office blocks and grandiose Victorian architecture of the modern city.

Even those pagans and magicians who live and work within the city often prefer to spend their weekends travelling out to popular earth mysteries sites like Stonehenge and Avebury, not once stopping to consider the powerful and neglected occult heritage of the capital in which they live. London is a magickal city. Since Roman times it’s been a nexus point for high weirdness, the pages of occult history have been written within its walls, and everyone from Dr John Dee to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, from Austin Osman Spare to the new breed of upcoming urban shamans, have walked its stage and made their mark on its landscape.

There are many works of fiction that portray a secret magical London that somehow co-exists alongside the waking city. The poetry of William Blake is a good example of this tradition, as are the
ghost stories of Arthur Machen. More modern permutations of the myth can be recognised in Grant Morrison’s [The] Invisibles comics and Neil Gaiman’s Neverwhere novel and television show.

They all speak of London’s mysterious twin, a shadow city of strangeness and magick that, from time to time, bleeds over into the dreary daytime world of office workers, sandwich shops and stressed commuters.

All of these stories are true, there is indeed a secret London that can be discovered if you know where and how to look for it. All it takes is a rough knowledge of the land and a certain shamanic way of seeing. In this short series of articles I hope to give you all the tools you will need to go walkabout in London’s urban dreamtime.

We need to go into more detail however. To help keep things simple, I’ll focus on just one text which is appropriately entitled City Magick by Christopher Penczak (the author acknowledges his debt to Grant Morrison and is apparently happy to be defined as a “witch” (2001:back cover) and also “new age” (2001:xv). As we saw above, the publisher’s cover summary focuses on the claim that nature is not the only enchanted environment in which to operate. Here then, we see a ‘logical extension’ of the magickal worldview from rural to urban space, and as an innovation in magickal discourse and practice, it is a fairly recent one.

Penczak (2000:45) asks:

What do you do [...] when [...] glass and steel surround you, leaving you far from an open field or forest? The answer is obvious. You don’t have to go to your gods. They are always with you, hiding in the building, the machines, the vermin. The spirit world hides in plain sight. It adapts. Its spirits are living and breathing in everything around you. They have always been there, waiting for you to find them again.

Penczak begins his teaching by suggesting that the urban magickal practitioner finds a totem animal which, as one might expect, will be an urban animal. Moreover, there is more to city magick than ‘living creatures’; according to Penczak (2001:62):

[S]cavenger animal spirits are not the only ones to be found. Everything has a subtle energy force animating it. Everything has a form of spirit. [...] Strong mechanical spirits live in the city, taking the form of trains, subways, cars, planes, and streetlights. Go to them, if you are drawn, or let them come to you, like any other spirit.

Then trains, aeroplanes, streetlights, cars and subways are detailed; of subways (2001:63-4), we are told:

Subways are the great electric serpents running through the city. They are akin to underworld god, like the great king worm burrowing under us. They already work with us, taking us to destinations all over
the city, but their subtle power is not often recognised. On subway cars, I often feel my psychic perceptions elevated. I am not sure if it's the electrical energy from the third rail, or the close proximity of people inside my energy field, my aura. I only know that I become more open to receive information. ... Chakras on other people appear, and I can sometimes see if there is sickness in the body, indicated by abnormally dark or light spots of energy on the body. Strong images may appear near or above the heads - little aura movies, as I call them. Random thoughts may come my way, and I am sure they are not mine. I try not to focus on anything in particular, not to invade anyone's privacy, but I remain open to any information that may warn me of harm. Spirit guides also talk to me a lot in the subway car. I am not certain if it is because I have some quiet free time, or because of the nature of the transit system.

Given the fact that transport of one form or another is a significant part of urban life, cars also feature strongly in urban magickal practice. Penczak (2001:64-5) suggests that:

If your car has trouble starting in the morning, do not simply visualise it working. Help heal the car spirit. It may tell you what's going wrong and give you insight into its care and maintenance for the future.

One of the most common forms of city magick, predictably, is magick to ensure that one finds a parking space (see also Hine 1995:123). Magickal protection of cars is also common, and it must be said that during the time I lived with Angel, she parked her car outside the Brixton flat and never experienced any car crime, despite the fact that the breaking into and even occasional torching of cars was something of a neighbourhood commonplace. Ben the Chaoist also placed a magickal protection on his boyfriend's car one night and although the adjacent parked cars were broken into, his boyfriend's remained untouched.

Penczak then moves onto “Electric Gods” (2001:68). These are variously referred to (as “Devas”, “energies”, “spirits” (yet conceptually if not linguistically distinct from the animal and mechanical “spirits” we saw above), and “archetypes” (from Jungian analytical psychology). Like their labelling, their conceptualisation is self-consciously vague (2001:68): “While there may be one spirit overseeing the development of the city, a whole new pantheon of gods may be lurking in the cities of North America alone. Some may be gods from other times, taking on new guises for modern practitioners. Others may be renegade spirits growing in the power of our collective unconscious.” Uncertainty and multiplicity then seem to be watchwords here. Penczak (2001:70-4) details some “possibilities from my own experience”, including the city
archetype is the “patron spirit [...] deva or vortex of the city personified”; a “building
archetype” which oversees homes, apartments and office blocks, a “construction
archetype” which is somewhat at odds with “nature deities”, “transportation
archetypes” (which seem similar to the mechanical spirits we saw above), the
“electricity archetype” (“[t]he ancient gods of lightening may now be wrapped in
copper wire and conductors, mastering the electrons running through our house”), the
“television archetype” (reminiscent of trickster gods, and not to be trusted).

Dérives or “Sidewalking”

Later, we are introduced to the practice of “sidewalking” (2001:80), Penczak’s name
for the dérive. One simply walks through the city on an empirical level but on an
ideational level, the journey undertaken is a thoroughly magickal one. The treck starts
with a protection or banishing (“[a]lways be careful in the jungle”) and one’s totem
animal is called upon to guide one. The route is not precisely planned; “trust” and
intuition will play a significant part, though one is recommended not to get lost, and
to carry a map and cab fare. One is to wear special clothing, though not generally full
magickal robes. A slightly altered state of consciousness is sought: the state of mind
on enters is a child-like one, “like playing pretend”, and “a light trance state”.

You will see people and places in ways you have never imagined [...] be seeing things that cross into
the middle world. [...] Buildings will speak out to you. Each home has a spirit. [...] By walking by an
object, you breathe its energy. You read the vibrations of the objects around you. City gods are
speaking through the statues and sculptures. Be prepared for anything. [...] Look for the lines of power
that cover the earth. These earth grid lines, ley lines, or dragon lines (which may or may not all denote
the same thing) flow in and around the cities. The vortex upon which the city is built is probably
connecting to a lot of energy lines. You can feel them in your hands as you walk or in your gut or solar
plexus if you pass through them. Energy lines feel warm, tingly, hot or cold. As you do several of these
sidewalking trips, see if you can start to map out the lines of power. Mark them on a special magical
map of your city. Mark special places that feel particularly powerful to you magically. [...] [N]ote
places that lack power or feel malevolent to you. [...] This magical map will come in handy for later
spell work. [...] Most energy lines go right through buildings, while other lines are disrupted by the concrete and steel.
In some cases, steel beams can act as lightening rods for magickal energy, grounding it into the earth.
The city street grid may flow with some of the natural lines, since old roads often follow natural paths
of power. Later, these paths are paved over, becoming the random lines in what is otherwise an ordered
grid. Physical power lines from electric and telephone companies also disrupt the grid. They have their
own brand of not-so-subtle-power, making a second grid across the city. I think energy-line disruption
is one of the reasons why cities have grown unhealthy for many [...]. The next time you charge your
protective shield, ask it specifically to protect you from electromagnetic and energy pollution. This
harmful energy comes from power lines, television screens, computers and most other electrical devices.

[...] Other hot spots include haunted areas and time loops. In some areas, you may feel a presence, especially if there is a strong historic element to a tragedy or death. [...] Astral sight reveals the spirits of those who have walked Earth, or other beings not in a human shape. Some hauntings are not even occupied by independent spirits. They are like time loops, in which an event was so strong that it was recorded into the energy patterns of the area. Every so often, like a bad record, the event gets played again. [...] 

Animal totems can appear to you in the physical or astral realm, with other messages and warnings. Certain messages or signs jump out at you as important. They may come in the form of street signs and billboards, where some words stick out as more important than the others. [...] 

Spirit guides, or the guides and higher selves of other people out walking with you get your attention when you are in this state. When you are in a trance [...] you are ‘open’ to these things and must be careful. [...] Remember, the difference between shamanism and schizophrenia is control.

Upon returning home, and to a normal state of consciousness, the experience is to be written up in one’s magickal journal.

The writer and magickal practitioner Alan Moore provides (through the eyes of Arthur Machen) some details as to what this way of experiences the city feels like. Moore (2001:26ff), describes writer Arthur Machen’s experience of:

[...] a twilight ambience he calls Baghdad, where fables walk the London streets and dreams loom forward suddenly, out from the violet shadows. Baghdad. Arabian nightmares smoulder at the corners of Red Lion Square. Exotic tableaux, fabulous grotesques in every court or close along the Gray’s Inn Road. [...] The lanes and alleyways become another place, transformed by the loadstone silver of imagination. Shabby promenades made new, made souks and minarets in the mind’s moonlight. [...] The gated yards of Holborn shiver with phantasmagoria and every gas-lamp has its blue and hissing genie. [...] There are Roc’s eggs hatching in the rainspouts. [...] Everyone knows this Moontown that has ever dreamed or wondered. In our reveries we windowshop at its emporiums and in our fevers ride wild, steaming horses down its avenues.

Later (2001:39-40) we hear how:

Machen reels, bewildered, in the archetype and glory, in the roaring avenues. The peeling letters of the shopfronts are shapes borrowed from some angel lexicon, and every vendor’s unintelligible cry is made the prayer call to a new, impending Palestine, its eyes and gables fluttering with Pentecost. [...] Undressed of earthly circumstance, London is Nineveh, Byzantium, is Blake’s Jerusalem and Joyce’s Dublin.

Moore’s ‘poetic’ prose captures the almost visionary quality inherent in the magickal experience of London.
To move towards a summing-up, what we have here in the magickal *dérive* is a broader, more open-ended way of using space than simply going to a spot which is in some way conceived of as ‘natural’ such as woodlands, or associated with the ancient and primitive like the British Museum. The practice of the *dérive* has an inherent creativity, and an experimental nature which makes it, by definition, unpredictable.

To close this section, a few remarks about the history of the *dérive* may be of interest. Mad Tom associated the practice with the Situationists, but in fact, it goes back further. A pre-Situationist essay (often drawn upon by the Situationists) by Ivan Chtcheglov entitled *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (1981) begins:

Sire, I am from the other country.

We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun

A paganism is therefore evident in it from its very start. Hetherington (1997:65) has however traced the practice back further, to the Surrealists (1997:65), for whom “[w]ithin the city, the imaginary would always be waiting to be uncovered (see Breton 1961, Benjamin 1973, 1979, Aragon 1987)”. The fact that we now have an historical as well as merely conceptual link between magick and surrealism should come as no surprise after we noted the link between the two above. Moreover, Hetherington (1997:65) has suggested, “[o]ne could go back to others who lived and wrote […] in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: to Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Retif de la Breton or Blanqui […].” The theoretical point which I wish to underscore here is that with the practice of the *dérive*, we have not so much pre-established heterotopias, as an ongoing ‘hetertopification’, a deliberate, creative recoding of hegemonic spaces to accord with the magickal worldview.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have surveyed how magick always involves an excursion into various margins, heterotopia or realms of the Other. In terms of ‘empirical spaces’, magickal practice can range from something as subtle as a bedroom banishing ritual such as the one I reported performing in Chapter 1, to something as overt and vast as 30,000 individuals attending a Summer Solstice gathering at Stonehenge in 2003.
Spaces for magick are chosen on practical grounds, the need for privacy being fairly fundamental much of the time, but magickal spaces are also chosen for their symbolic value, ‘green’, ‘natural’ spaces in or out of London being popular, and spaces such as Stonehenge or the British Museum reflect the affirmative primitivism and also in the latter case, affirmative orientalism which pervade magickal thinking. At its most broad, magickal use of space may involve an open-ended dérive through any part of the city.⁷

Notes

1. See: http://www.trussel.com/books/pseud_e.htm#Crowley_Edward_Alexander

2. See: http://www.goddesstemple.co.uk


4. Kemp 2001 argues that the church in fact constitutes an important “Christaquarian” centre, i.e., is an important location for “New Age Christians”. His thesis is worthy of some consideration, for so many studies of magick, the ‘New Age’ and Alternative Spirituality tend to emphasise tension between they and Christianity rather than overlaps between the two.

5. It is interesting to note how, despite identifying as a “witch”, Robertson refers not to witches, but to “the ancient Druids” for historical basis to her practice; such is the slipperiness of magickal labels.

6. See: http://bak.spe.org/mysteries/

7. The astute reader may be wondering why no reference has been made to the basement of the abandoned hospital which the H.O.D. employed for the magickal ritual noted in Chapter 1. The reason for this is that such a ritual location is better explained in Chapter 5, when we compare and contrast different types of magickal identity.
Spatiality Within Magick: Searching High and Low

Identity is about both similarity and difference. It is about how subjects see themselves in representation, and about how they construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others. Identity is about both correspondence and dissimilarity. Principally, identity is articulated through the relationship between belonging, recognition or identification and difference.


Anon.: I don’t think we can call what you study a religion.
G.Harvey: I think it is.
Anon.: Okay, in what way is it a religion?
G.Harvey: Well for one thing, we all hate each other.

G.Harvey, flippantly arguing with a colleague.

The space of our primary perception, the space of our dreams and that of our passions hold within themselves qualities that seem intrinsic: there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, of summits, or on the contrary a space from below of mud [...].

Foucault, M., *Of Other Spaces* (1986:26)

Dark and Light dominates the crossroads. Travellers are forced to make a choice between lefthand and righthand paths.


Introduction

Just as a “spatial syntax”, to use de Certeau’s (1984:115) phrase, structures the being of the magickal practitioner in relation to the mainstream, it will be shown that a spatial syntax structures her or him in relation to other (or indeed, Other) magickal practitioners, and readily accounts for tense social relations within magick, for as Graham Harvey’s ‘true words said in jest’ cited above readily illustrate, those involved in magickal practice or related phenomena are not unproblematically bound
together in an harmonious solidarity. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, nothing strikes me as more naïve, or at least partial, as Turner-inspired communitas theorising while Druids punch each other during rituals and accusations of ‘baby-eating black magician’ fly thick and fast through the smokey atmosphere of the Princess Louise public house. In this chapter, I will show how within the realm of magick, there are three general symbolic realms into which a magickal practitioner will place her or himself, and/or be placed by other magickal practitioners. Relations between occupants of these symbolic realms are not harmonious.

**Orpheans and Dionysians**

I will start this chapter with what might seem an eccentric digression into the realms of ancient Greek religion. Structuralist scholars Detienne and Vernant (1989:7-8) have argued in relation to socio-religious deviancy in Ancient Greece that there were two roads to rejecting the norm, a “high road”, and a “low road”. According to these scholars, the ideology of the polis or city-state was symbolically accepted by the majority of citizens in the sacrificial consumption of cooked meat. Pythagoreans and Orpheans however, in various different ways (from vegetarianism to restricted carnivorism), refused to consume cooked sacrificial meat and thus inevitably occupied a symbolic space beyond that of the ‘normal’. More precisely, Orpheans symbolically placed themselves *above* and beyond the normal; as Detienne and Vernant (1989:7) explain, “Orpheus chooses to escape by the high road, on the side of the gods [...]” Dionysians, on the other hand, supposedly consumed meat raw outside the realm of the polis, and thus reverting to a state of ‘animality’ through their omophagia, they too rejected the culinary norm and hence the political hegemony, in this case via a downward route, occupying a *lower* space and in the words of Detienne and Vernant (1989:8, authors’ italics), “escape the politico-religious condition [...] via the low road, on the side of bestiality.”

The question which must now be addressed of course is, ‘what does this have to do with postmodern magick?’ I will argue here that the postmodern magickal subculture is, if a little more complex, similar to Detienne and Vernant’s reconstruction of the Ancient Greek situation in that a spatial symbolic describes/prescribes what one
encounters in the field, for the symbolic directionalities of ‘up’ and ‘down’ are fundamental to magickal thinking. (Of course, one might care to argue that some spatialised cognition is universal and that notions of ‘up’ and ‘down’ are found in all cultures, especially in cosmologies. This may be the case, though I will be at pains to show in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 that some of the spatial metaphors with which magickal practitioners think are far from universal ones, but relate specifically to a postmodern condition characterised by high levels of uncertainty.)

The High Path Towards the Light

Initially, attention will be focussed on the ‘high’ path. We have actually already seen plenty of data pertaining to this path in previous chapters, but here I will delineate it explicitly. We may recall Angel, focussing on that vegetarian breakfast with the near hypnotic attention of the quasi-anorexic. “More rabbit-food?” I had teased her. “It’s high energy food,” Angel had replied, with mock supercility (again, many a true word...), and she bemoaned my clogging arteries and energies operating at a “base” level. The “high energy”, set up in opposition to the ‘low’ or “base” energy clearly express the symbolic opposition betwixt ‘high’ and ‘low’ which is an integral part of magickal thinking. Minus the mention of energy, the text on the toilet wall spoke of amethyst “bringing the lower natures to a higher consciousness”, again alluding to just such symbolism. As regards Chapter 2, what we should now be aware of is that the native, emic use of the term “New Age” denotes a symbolic orientation towards the ‘high’. Thus the fact that some magick is “New Age”, and that “New Age” ideas can be of relevance to the practitioner of magick as we saw in Chapter 2.

We also find a ‘colour-coding’ here in that the ‘low’ equates with the ‘dark’, and the ‘high’ equates with ‘light’ (or sometimes ‘white light’). Two Clear Paths by Michael Berg argues:

In order to maintain a constant upward direction in our spiritual development it is important to remember clearly that there are only two paths, one of Light and one of Darkness. And, that we are on either one of the two, there is no middle ground. In addition it is important to be clear what each path contains, and the connection between our actions and these paths.
The path of Darkness holds within it all negativity, sadness pain and eventually death. The path of Light holds within it all that is good, joy, freedom and life. The Kabbalists [sic, i.e. Cabalists] also clarify the two groups of actions that connect us to each path. Actions that are from our Desire to receive for the self-alone connect us to the path of Darkness. Actions that are for our desire to share connect us to the path of Light.

We may also in this regard recall here that text on the wall behind Angel’s head, which argued:

The principle of violence is the principle of Darkness, the principle of nonviolence is a principle of Light. Whereas to live in accordance with the principle of violence is to be either an animal or a devil or a combination of the two [sic], to live in accordance with the principle of nonviolence is to be a human being in the full sense of the term, or even an angel.

Angel’s political activism was very much in accordance with the principle of nonviolence. We may also assume that her choice of name (for Angel was not the name bestowed upon her by her parents) is significant in this regard. We may recall that Angel’s admirer described her as a source of light in the flat, and a tension between the empirical light levels in the flat and the symbolic need for light was, as she indicated, a source of some distress to her, so much so that she once purchased a special (spiral-shaped) lightbulb for her room, to increase the amount of light therein.

Of course, those who can afford not to live in council accommodation in deprived areas may be more readily able to adjust their living space to meet their symbolic needs. The following is an extract from an article which appeared in the February 2003 edition of Spirit and Destiny, that magazine For Women Who Want the Best Possible Future noted in Chapter 1.

**Heaven Above**

As her life runs at a frantic pace, Donna Wilson needs a relaxing sanctuary at the end of a day. But with her home full of kids and clutter, she finds the only way is up.

**Donna’s hectic modern lifestyle**

Like so many of us, Donna Wilson, 32, packs a lot into her daily routine. After a demanding day as a TV researcher, and an hour’s hellish train journey back to her home in North West London, she has a long way to go before sitting down to relax.
Lofty ambitions

Waiting indoors are her three children, Sam eleven, Jodie, four, and Mickey, two. “Of course they’re desperate for my attention, and I spend the next two hours playing cars or Lego,” she says. “But after putting the two little ones to bed, I need a bit of peace and calm. I’d love to write a novel, but I never got the space to unwind, let alone be creative!”

With a little inspiration, Donna found a solution in the loft. “The floor up there was already boarded out, and there was a window too, but we just had it crammed with junk. Suddenly it occurred to me that we could create my very own little sanctuary,” says Donna.

Donna decided on an East-meets-West theme for the room: the minimalism and straight edges favoured by modernist Western designers and architects combined with feng shui principles and touches of exoticism from the East. Firstly she cleared out the junk, sanded and varnished the floorboards and painted the walls a calming shade of white.

The room is now simple and uncluttered, and arranged to the principles of feng shui. Donna’s desk faces the room but is screened off behind a bamboo screen, so that vibrations from her laptop cannot disrupt the flow of calming qi, or energy, around the room. Plants and natural light from candles, and the use of big, soft cushions, also create a calming feel around the work space.

Natural textures and shades, such as the hessian floor matting and the pebble water feature, give the room an earthly feel. The use of bamboo, rattan and cane furnishings, plus a few orientally-influenced throws and artefacts, lend an exotic flavour with Indian and African touches. Carefully-chosen candles and pictures add the finishing touches, creating a strong feel of intimacy and the stamp of Donna’s personality on the room.

Spirit in the sky

Now Donna is thrilled with the result. “Everyone’s happy. The kids can watch their noisy TV and I escape into my little haven and just chill out to recharge my batteries. I’m sure it’s actually made me a calmer, nicer person. And who knows, now I’ve got the space to focus I might actually get around to writing my novel!”

Of course, the room had to have an “East-meets-West theme”, but affirmative orientalism has been covered in Chapter 4; it is the metaphorical and empirical spatiality or directionality which concern us now. The fact that for Donna, “the only way is up”, that her ambitions were “Lofty”, and that the phrase “spirit in the sky” appear in the main text, and that the article is titled “Heaven Above” give us an unambiguous sense of an ‘upward’ directionality. Moreover, the room’s decor is white, predominantly. The affective correlative to this is also what we would expect: Donna is now “calmer [and] nicer”, she claims. There is no talk of expressing anger, hostility, or any ‘negative’ emotions. Nor is there any mention of ‘lower’ and ‘darker’ regions, though the description of Donna’s commute as “hellish” perhaps hints at an infernal locale which is thoroughly transcended when Donna is safe within her loft(y) sanctuary.
We will return to this article below, but for now, we have seen enough spatio-directional metaphors of height and light. What of the converse? Do we ever find symbols of depth, and relatedly dark, in magick? Indeed we do.

The Low Road Down into Darkness

Oh dark dark dark. They all go into the dark [...] 
T.S. Eliot, East Coker.

There have been profound influences (yes, from the depths indeed!) exerted upon my emotional growth and upon the ultimate direction of my loyalties [...] 
F. Leiber, The Terror From the Depths (1996:216)

Anon: Leave her alone. Seriously, don’t mess with me, I’ve got friends in low places.

A verbal threat I received from a somewhat inebriated male mage who mistakenly believed me to be making advances towards a female of his acquaintance at one of Pat’s parties.

“They all go into the dark”? T.S.Eliot was not writing about magickal practitioners, and by no means all of them do go into the dark, but some most definitely do, and given that ‘dark’ is commonly also ‘down’, they almost always go down into the dark. The symbolic nexus with which we deal in this instance will be ‘depth’, ‘dark’, the ‘subhuman’, and ‘demonic’. We may recall from the poster on the kitchen wall in the Brixton flat that:

The principle of violence is the principle of Darkness [...] and to live in accordance with the principle of violence is to be either an animal or a devil or a combination of the two [sic.] [...].

When the H.O.D. conducted rituals in its early days, the Great Old Ones of the Lovecraftian mythos were summoned “with words and gestures from below normal human consciousness”; this is simply the H.O.D.’s phrasing for what the scholar will
more readily term glossolalia or xenoglossolalia. “I will plunge into the depths!”
bellowed Alex, spontaneously, during one H.O.D. ritual.

When one speaks to those more concerned with the light about those who are
congered with the dark, the responses are interesting. For example, when I asked
Sarah, the “New Age Lady”, about John’s work with the Goetic entities (i.e. demons),
and his common claim that “we all have a dark side, and we must traverse the low
road if we are to truly learn about ourselves and the universe”, she replied:

Bill, to use a physical analogy ... we do all have a dark aspect to us, a lower aspect of self and being.
But then, we’ve all got shit in us. That doesn’t mean I want to smear shit all over me and my flat and
my friends, ‘cos shit has its place and its unhygienic when it doesn’t stay there. I have worked with
Goetic entities but that was years ago. I kept having nightmares that these... things were chasing me
and so I knocked all that on the head pretty quickly. It’s dangerous thing to so, simple as that.

The reason that the H.O.D. delighted in using the basement of an abandoned hospital,
of course, is that it nicely symbolised their deep, dark location within magickal
symbology. There is also a pervasive belief that rituals are performed by magickal
practitioners of the H.O.D.’s ilk in tube stations, often the closed or abandoned tube
stations of which London has many. I have been unable to ascertain whether this is
true in an empirical sense, though never did I meet anyone who claimed to have
participated in such a ritual. For our purposes, I suggest that what matters is that such
a belief prevails; it clearly resonates with the natives’ understanding of spatio-
directional symbolism, regardless of whether or not magickal practitioners take the
risk and trouble to accessing abandoned subway stations and tunnels. An appropriate
illustration for this point is comprised by an excerpt from a graphic short story by
Stephen Grasso. Titled Going Underground, the story features Iain Sinclair trapped
on the Circle Line after an underground ritual ‘misfired’.
I've been trapped down here since '81. Hello Mr. La Croix, come to get your old teacher out of detention?

Azazoth summoning went wrong. Very wrong.

I came downstairs to use a ghost station for temple space. Wanted to run some primeval chaos into the city's masonic circuits.

But it went bad.

I can't get off the tube. This is how I have to live now. Mugging, rooting in garbage, surviving.

I had to get behind the closest magical barrier to hand.

A circle is a circle, even when it's a line.
We should finally recall in this context the belief encountered in Chapter 1 that dubious magicks go on in the cellars beneath Lambeth Town Hall. Thus it is that sometimes we can see a direct analogy between the symbolic location of a magickal practitioner in the ‘high-light’ vs. ‘low-dark’ spectrum in terms of the material spaces occupied thereby which we surveyed in the previous chapter. The fact we do not see this more often is obviously because refurbishing one’s loft and entering abandoned buildings or subways is often prevented by those perennial practical limitations, time and money.

Finally, a very brief digression is necessary here in that occasionally, the opposition between high/light and low/dark can be structured in terms of the opposition between right and left. As the reader might well predict, the high/light corresponds to the right, and the low/dark corresponds to the left. Iain Sinclair (1997:126) for example describes a dérive as

[...] a fantastic criss-crossing journey between the needle points of London’s energy mantle; a journey which becomes [...] a brief history of the arcane, the chthonic, the illegitimate. A lecture tour of the lefthand path.

Although the association of left with that which is somehow dubious is a common idea which some have claimed is universal to human culture, it seems that as a religious or spiritual label, it is a Hindu or more specifically, Tantric importation courtesy of Theosophist Madame Blavatsky during the Occult Revival.

Our work is not yet done, however, for there is another realm, equally densely populated by magickal practitioners, which falls between the two we have already surveyed. It is when we turn attention to this that we see that a more complex version of structuralism is necessary than one which merely allows for a binary ‘high’ versus ‘low’ opposition, for the ‘middle-realm’ is an important symbolic location in itself.
Starhawk’s “Darklight Philosophy”

Wiccan academic Jo Pearson (1998:45), in an article arguing against Heelas (1996) that Wicca or witchcraft should not be treated as part of the New Age, has included a datum which is sufficiently witty and illustrative of my point here that I will include it in full. In a parody of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, a Wiccan priestess demands to know:

New Age or not New Age? That is the question
Whether tis nobler in the mind to join
With fluffy bunnies, crystals and the like
Or to take arms against the sea of fads
And by opposing end them?
To die, perchance to have a near-death experience
And write a book about it
To sleep, perchance to dream and through regression
Find that fantastical past life in which
The ego can rejoice
For who would bear the whips and scorns of Pagan Gods in whom
Both light and dark are met
And so make moves to be more whole?
The Witch, the Druid, the Magus are but mad enough to walk
The realms of night where light New Agers
Fear to tread!

So, here we are quite obviously presented with an argument that the “New Agers”, at least according to Pearson’s definition thereof, are located (problematically) in a realm of light, whereas in the “Pagan Gods [...] both light and dark are met”. This mingling or balancing of light and dark as “darklight” is a very common motif and stems from Starhawk’s *Dreaming the Dark* (1988). Though I could provide many, the most notable example of balancing the light and the dark from my own fieldwork occurred when I accompanied Pat, King Arthur Pendragon, Gareth J. Medway, John and various others (not to mention two TV crews), to Cornwall for the 1999 eclipse; the empirical nature of the event lent itself rather splendidly to a ritual whereby dark and light were reconciled within its participants. Wicca and witchcraft, Druidry, the Northern Tradition, and much neoshamanism can therefore be said to occupy a space ‘below’ that of the ‘high’ and ‘light’, yet ‘above’ the subset of the magickal subculture which is focussed more exclusively, often quite exclusively, on the ‘low’ and ‘dark’.
A brief digression seems appropriate regarding the “fluffy bunnies” to which the Wiccan priestess quoted above referred; the reader may recall we encountered it in Chapter 2 with regard to “new agey crap”. This allegation of “fluffiness” refers to a perception that the “New Age” (in the emic sense) denies the reality of suffering in the world (e.g. York 1996: 167). One Abaddon 23, a Chaost, writes:

Most of the popular mockery that the NAers [sic] have been subject to is the caricature that they’re basically “pollyannish”, that they have a skewed, unrealistic perception of the gritty “real world”. But I find this image fairly accurate. They don’t really want to acknowledge the ugliness and brutality of the world they find themselves in. And their strategies, their pastel-gilded “everything is love” attitude towards every scenario, every situation, seems naive at best. In a world where rightist death squads kill school teachers in the middle of the night, where transnational corporations irradiate our water table for the sake of fiscal expediency, where one out of every five children are officially malnourished and one out of every three women have been raped at least once before their eighteenth birthday, the general attitude and strategies of the NA community seem woefully ineffectual and outright ludicrous.*

While there is some truth in this, not all who are associated with the “New Age” are naïve; Charlie and Angel were both sufficiently experienced political activists as to be under no illusions as to what the world is really like.

As for the ‘colour-coding’ of those who occupy a symbolic middle-realm, the reader might be expecting those between the ‘light’ and the ‘dark’ to be drawn to ‘grey’ as a colour symbol or their symbolic location, but it is in fact green to which they most relate. The ‘logic’ to this is that it is those in this middle ground who predominantly look towards ‘nature’ as a symbolic and sometimes empirical centre of their practice. As Hanagraaff (1998:2) has shown, ‘nature’ can simply be too “‘red in tooth and claw’” for those oriented towards the light and the transcendence of earth(ly) existence. Those oriented towards the dark can often find the version of ‘nature’ which those on the middle-ground relate to as “soppy”, “flowery”, “naïve” and “fluffy”, to cite just a few of their frequent maledictions, and one or two members of the H.O.D. had no time for environmentalism, being fond of a bumper-sticker which reads, “Earth First. We’ll mess up all the other planets later.”
Indexical Locations

In emic terms, *everyone* on the magickal scene has a location somewhere within these symbolic spaces and hence a generalisable, abstractable, ‘overall’ spatio-symbolic location. This spatial location labels them and hence defines their relation to other practitioners of magick to a highly significant extent. Those oriented towards the light fear and despise those oriented towards the green and the dark, those oriented towards the green or “darklight” mock those oriented to the light while fearing those oriented towards the dark, and those oriented towards the dark mock both the former types. Of course, one’s location will be *relative* to the locations of these other practitioners of magick, this fact being wonderfully summed up by one magician who told me of another that “his last girlfriend dumped him ‘cause his magick was too white, and the one before that dumped him ‘cause his magick was too dark!” We may refer to Gell’s (1985) concept of the “indexical” (as opposed to “non-indexical”) location, the location which is relative to where one is oneself as opposed to absolute and objective. An example of the former is a proposition such as “King’s Cross is that way”, the latter is a proposition such as “King’s cross is north of Waterloo”. The situation we have therefore is that what is excessively black magick to some may actually be excessively white to another, dependent upon where stands she or he who is doing the judging.

It is with this basic spatial pattern in mind that we may continue to examine different yet complimentary or analogous features of magickal practice, including dress, morality and lifestyle. First however, the reader will be introduced to the ‘from field’ associated with cyberidentitites.

**So, Where Are You From?**

An intriguing body of data is to be found on internet bulletin boards. Each individual user registers a name (usually not their real one) and also has the option of filling in a “from:” field. Given that many are as unwilling to state their location as they are use their real name, and that magickal practitioners seem to have a well-developed sense of humour, the practice of filling in humorous and/or spatial symbolic locations in
one’s ‘from’ field has become the norm in some instances. Thus amongst those who claim to come “from: the edge of propriety and good taste”, “Mom” and “the end of the yellow brick road”, we encounter a number of locations which nicely illustrate the symbology in question. The following are all locations drawn from one chaos magick bulletin board, and it is obvious that they all form a pattern. Various magico-cyberidentities claimed to be “from:”

in the basement, under the stairs
the sewers under Philadelphia can’t be as psychologically intense as this hell
under the floorboards
the bowels
the darkest pits
dunno, it’s too dark to tell...
where angels fear to tread
the dark side of the moon
the well of night
the cupboard under the stars
the nethermost vaults
the pit of uttermost despair
the lower echelons of the nighted abyss, at the hour of ever-so-strange rumblings when the green light flickers thrice

Other more light-oriented websites included the following ‘higher and lighter’ locations:

a great height
high and lighty
my web in the clouds
higher than the sun
the White Light
sore but soaring
the lighthouse at the end of the world

We may recall that in Star Wars mythos, one of the Jedi heroes on the Light Side of the Force is Luke Skywalker, and various evil Dark Side characters have names which begin with Darth (which sounds reminiscent of ‘dark’ as well as of the Cabalistic realm Daath). Some magickal practitioners readily refer to those on the “dark side”.

More ‘middling’ or ‘green’ entries in from fields I encountered were:

South of Heaven, North of Hell
deep dark shallow light
Lighter side of darkest Africa
the green green grass of home
the Greenfield
a green hill far away
Dress

Now is the time to make some remarks about dress. It would be wonderfully convenient for this exposition if Angel had always dressed in white to symbolise light, if the Wiccans, witches, Druids and neoshamans habitually wore green, and Dark Side practitioners wore nothing but black. Such however is only the case sometimes. While some magickal practitioners who orient themselves in the realms of the light wear white, most do not, Angel generally did not, and there are obvious practical reasons for this. Moreover, Druids can wear white, and as we will see, even members of the H.O.D. have been known to wear white on occasion.

However, Angel did almost always dress in a distinctive manner. Loose, highly colourful and ‘ethnic’ (i.e. Oriental) clothing comprised her sartorial style. I am not the only ethnographer to have noted that those who are concerned with the Light dress in such a distinctive fashion: S.J. Sutcliffe (p.c.) has noted a similar pattern of dress in the Findhorn community, and Hetherington (1989:73) came across it during his fieldwork, terming such a style of dress the “the ‘authentic’ body”. Though I am not certain whether Angel dressed sufficiently distinctively to look ‘odd’ in the eyes of Jo Public, some members of the magickal subculture certainly did. On one occasion when Sarah “the New Age lady” and I boarded a tube train, a young woman turned to her partner and smirked when she saw the way Sarah was dressed.

Just as those concerned with light can dress distinctively, so can those oriented towards the dark. Often, members of the H.O.D. wore black. At one particular H.O.D. meeting, I recall comments being made on the fact that everyone was wearing black with the exception of Stephen Grasso (it is worth restating that Stephen eventually moved away from L.H.P. magick and focussed on neoshamanism when he had departed the H.O.D.). On another occasion, Alex was teased because he arrived wearing white. We may also recall from Chapter 1 the barmaid dressed all in black, with black-painted nails, who added the pentagram symbol to the head of my pint of Guinness. Greenwood (2000:3,51) has noted the frequency of black clothing twice in her ethnography of the London magickal scene, even referring to two members of a
group as "the black leather couple" (2000:52). (We should note that Hetherington 1987:73 has also described a "grotesque body", which is reminiscent of though not identical to the sartorial style of the Dark Siders.)

So much for the light and the dark. Those in between who are located in the middle-realms of the "darklight", or 'green' and are predominantly 'nature'-focussed in their magick tend to display a mixture of the colourful Oriental style favoured by the 'white lighters', and the blacks favoured by those who identify more with the dark. Only rarely will they dress predominantly in green; the Pagan Pride Parade pictured in Chapter 4 is a prime example thereof, and in Chapter 4 we noted a number of green-clad demonstrators present in Parliament Square on Mayday 2000.

In conclusion here, dress, while a provider of clues to the symbolic location of the magickal practitioner vis-à-vis her or his fellow practitioner, is not an absolute guide. Moreover, not every member of the magickal subculture dresses distinctively at all. In settings where there was a roughly equal number of natives and non-natives, I was sometimes able to guess who was a magickal practitioner and who was not, but by no means always. Jewellery is perhaps a slightly more reliable guide, the pentagram being common about the necks or fingers of Wiccans and an eight-pointed star common amongst Chaoists, but even so, the point remains that neither dress nor jewellery in themselves indicate a specific type of magickal orientation relative to the general tripartite structuration I am elaborating here. Indeed, neither dress nor jewellery necessarily indicate any involvement with magick whatsoever; there is no reason to suppose that there are people who look as though they are practitioners of magick who are merely dressing in a way that pleases them or others, and 'closeted' practitioners may never look anything other than average.

**Other Beings**

At this point in this chapter, it will I suspect not come as any surprise to the reader that the symbolic locations in question have different 'entities' associated with them. (I use the term 'entities' here on account of its convenient breadth; natives refer to otherworldly beings by many different referents as we saw in Penczak's work in
Chapter 4, and ultimately, all are seen as being accumulations of “energy”, a notion which will be explored fully in Chapter 7. I will also refrain from digressing onto the ongoing native debate as to whether the entity is part of the self (for as we may recall from Chapter 2, some native claims are to the effect that everything is ultimately part of the self), or whether entities are part of the self in that they are Jungian Archetypes, or whether they are seen as other, separate beings entirely; this debate has been reported by Greenwood (2000:115n.5) and treated more deeply by Segal (2000).

We might expect (the name of my flatmate who we met in Chapter 1 is a clue here), those who are oriented towards the light relate predominantly or primarily to angelic entities, for “to live in accordance with the principle of nonviolence is”, perhaps, “to be [...] an angel” as the poster on the kitchen wall claimed. Those who occupy the green ‘middle-ground’ will relate more to nature spirits, elves, faeries, and the Horned God and the Goddess of the Wiccans and witches. Finally, those who wallow in the depths will relate more often to demons or monstrous entities such as H.P. Lovecraft’s Great Old Ones, a pantheon (or antipantheon) headed by Azathoth, the “blind, idiot God”.

Morality

The morality of those magickal practitioners who are located towards the ‘lower depths’ is less oriented around concepts of ‘love’, ‘forgiveness’ and ‘altruism’ than those who talk of, and think in terms of, light and height. Morality in magick has in fact been the subject of work by Greenwood (1996; 2000:ch7), who seems to have noted just this without actually being able to see the spatial symbolism which structures the ‘system’. She contrasts feminist witches who believe it is acceptable to curse rapists with those whose morality is more forgiving (Greenwood 2000:201). Such observations accord with my own fieldwork. On the one (right?) hand I recall Sarah (the “New Age Lady” in Ben’s phrase) stating that although one might not always be able to forgive a wrongdoer for what they had done to one, one “can always forgive them for why they did it”. This is an intriguing suggestion which, on a purely personal level, has always stuck in my mind. On the other (left?) hand, I recall Francis telling me that his partner Sam would always unhesitatingly curse anyone whom she
took a dislike to, on the grounds that “if you don’t like someone, you’re sending bad energy in their direction anyway, so why not do it properly and hex them?”

As Greenwood (2000:ch.7) has noted, the “Wiccan rede”, the single moral injunction of the witches and Wiccans is ‘If it harm none, do as you will’. This is of course vague enough to be problematic in practice. The Thelemites have Aleister Crowley’s “Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law. Love Is The Law, Love Under Will”; this is of course potentially even more problematic in practice. However, the Chaoists, going further as ever, have the supposed last words of Hassan I Sabbah, “Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted”. From what I could tell, those who revelled in the dark depths were not generally as morally nihilistic as they might have liked people to think they were, no more than those who stressed the high and light entirely free from hypocrisy. Despite some initial reservations about Thelemites and Chaoists (some of which, I must confess, were inspired by Lurhmann’s 1989: 97 foolish remarks), it quickly became apparent during my fieldwork that social and spiritual libertarianism, rather than anything genuinely unpleasant or immoral, was in practice the concern of the ‘Dark Siders’ (just as R.Sutcliffe 1996:123 has previously noted), and the worst which I ever encountered was an ‘eye for an eye’ morality which while it could well leave us all blind and toothless, is of course hardly unique to magickal practitioners.

**Lifestyle: Diets, Drugs and Sexualities**

‘Lifestyle’ tends to be very different in the ‘dark depths’ and ‘light heights’. First, diet. We have seen that Angel was a strict vegetarian. Not only that, but I have suggested that she was may have had a slight eating-disorder. Regarding the fact that Angel struck me as having a slight (and not health-threatening) problem with food, I am anxious that my observation should not form the basis of over-generalisation. It is perfectly possible to be a practitioner of magick focussed on the ‘high’ and ‘light’ and not be anorexic, and this is usually the case. Conversely, eating disorders can correlate with various other magico-religious practices; we only need recall the Christian novelist Nikolai Gogol who starved himself to death. In general, those magickal practitioners who focussed on the ‘high’ and ‘light’ tended towards a vegetarianism
which would not be frowned upon by the average doctor or public health official. (The case of the Breatharian fatalities is also one which, media sensationalism aside, should not be taken as representative of the magick, or indeed the ‘New Age’. Only one of my informants regarded Jasmuheen as anything other than a charlatan, and he was himself gently sceptical of her claims.) In the last analysis, what we see here is the double meaning of ‘light’ (a pun we saw enthusiastically exploited by advertisers of ‘slimming’ foods such as the Philadelphia Light cream cheese noted in Chapter 1) can entail that a tiny minority of people, especially women, can combine an orientation towards the light with a desire to weigh rather less than would be medically advisable.

Very few in the ‘dark depths’ are vegetarians. Most towards the lower and darker end of the scale ate meat as part of their regular diet. Given that I have taken an ancient Greek state of affairs as a starting-point in this chapter, it is worth considering whether we have the consumption of raw meat in the postmodern magickal subculture as was the case with ancient Greek Dionysians. The H.O.D. once performed a professional ritual as part of a evening devoted to Chaos magick at a London paranormal discussion group. The ritual involved freeform, spontaneous invocation of the Great Old Ones to a live soundtrack provided by the band Now. During the performance Dan, apropos of nothing, took a pint glass from the bar and hurled it onto the floor. The climax of the rite consisted of audience members being asked to sign the Book of Azathoth, the “blind, idiot God”. The book was to be signed in the audience members’ own blood, which they readily procured by slashing themselves with shards of the broken glass. The final member of the audience willing to sign the book was informed that the H.O.D. had a special plan for him, at which point he was grabbed and knocked down onto the glass-scattered floor. Ignoring his screams, the H.O.D. proceeded to tear out his heart and eat it.

Needless to say, the ‘audience member’ was in fact a member of the H.O.D. and the heart a bull’s heart in a bag of fake blood, and it seems highly unlikely that the audience didn’t guess something to this effect. Nevertheless, the overall effect was shocking and unpleasant, as the H.O.D. had intended. Indeed, the members of the group shocked themselves. The individual whose heart was apparently ripped out did after all find himself flung down onto a floor covered in broken glass, and admitted
that "half of me screaming was perfectly genuine... I thought they'd gone psycho on me." Another group member recalled how disgusted he had been when he had eaten, or tried to eat, the raw heart. Such an incident of deliberately refusing to transform the raw into the cooked however was an isolated one. The closest thing to the regular consumption of such matter would be that if performed correctly, Aleister Crowley's Gnostic Mass involves the eating as a sacrament cookies made of (as well as the usual ingredients), semen and menstrual blood.

At the mention of Crowley, it seems only appropriate that attention is now turned to drugs. Secret Chiefs is notorious amongst non-smokers for its smoky atmosphere. Sarah, the "New Age lady" found it especially unpleasant. As a general rule, those who veer towards the 'light' end of the 'dark vs. light, depth vs. height' spectrum frown on smoking. Angel certainly did (though she occasionally smoked cannabis). It was not uncommon for one of my more 'high' and 'light' oriented informants to nag me for smoking. Drinking was a little less controversial, but also raised eyebrows occasionally ("this lot are a bunch of bloody alcoholics", I was once told by a fairly abstemious, light-oriented informant).

At the 'lower and darker' end of the spectrum, drinking and smoking are not discouraged. Indeed, Aleister Crowley's Book of the Law specifically encourages it, stating (2.22):

I am the Snake that giveth Knowledge and Delight and bright glory, and stir the hearts of men with drunkenness. To worship me take wine and strange drugs whereof I will tell my prophet, and be drunk thereof! They shall not harm ye at all.

So long as one noted the effects of any substance taken in one's magickal diary, one Thelemite informed me, then all was well; the 'sin' there was failure to record, not failure to abstain. Harder drugs are also present in the lower and darker space. I had never encountered heroin or 'crack' cocaine use before I undertook my fieldwork. That noted, as with my observation of anorexia, this fact should not form the basis of a rash generalisation: I speak of but two individuals, one who identified as a Thelemite, the other being Ben the Chaosist.
Finally, sex. I have already mentioned the controversial ritual by band Rockbitch which featured a man being sodomised, and I attended other rituals performed by Rockbitch which featured lesbian activity. Rockbitch are an extremely L.H.P. group. Though few involved in magick are celibate, R.H.P. practitioners tend to frown on any sex which is not ‘normal’, by which they mean pene-vag intercourse. Homoeroticism, anal sex, and fetishism are all likely to be identified as acts of dark magick or, in the words of Gareth Knight (1975:23), “homosexuality, like drugs, is a technique of the Left Hand Path”. “I want that on a ‘t’-shirt,” remarked a delighted L.H.P. practitioner when it was quoted to him.

It is in terms of lifestyle that we see most clearly the truth of York’s (1995:168) assertion that (using the native meaning of the term), the “New Age” entails a transcendent spirituality, an otherworldly orientation, “part of the Swedenborgian/New Thought and Eastern monistic heritages of the New Age”, whereas those who are not so concerned with the light are less likely to see the human condition as a ‘fallen’ one. Greenwood (p.c.) has put the same point slightly differently in stating that the “New Age” is “more Platonic”. This is perhaps a more sound formulation from my perspective, as I will argue below that those in the light realms are actually not so far from dualism as they might like to claim.

“[W]e all hate each other”? At this point, I will include the following datum in order to illustrate a typical conflict which is organised primarily around the symbols of light and dark. A (female) Thelemite informant drew my attention to the fact that her website had come to the attention of some “white lighters”. On their site’s bulletin board, she was described as a “shit”, her ideas were described as “crap” and even the humorous section of her site met with a hostile reception: “Dark Side propaganda often looks deceptively harmless.” She reported:

I tried to join the group to go and defend myself, but my application to join was rejected before I’d even returned their form to them. They won’t tolerate Thelemites, or anyone who is into the Golden Dawn. The text on the front page of the forum confirms this, but also states that they are in favour of “freedom of religion”, and they won’t tolerate “intolerance of diversity”. Apparently though, their ban
on anything to do with the Golden Dawn does not include Dion Fortune, who was a member of the original Golden Dawn.

The woman wrote to the group owner:

Dear Group Owner,

I am very disappointed in the way that your group has treated me. First I learn that people are posting nasty comments about me on your forum, and that you all consider me to be evil just because I study Crowley's philosophies, and then when I try to join the group to defend myself, I am rejected before I have even filled in the application form that was sent to me.

You are of course entitled to your opinions, however, when your opinions are based on ignorance, and this ignorance leads to you treat people badly, others have the right to criticise those opinions.

Has it escaped your notice that Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, was an initiate of the O.T.O. [i.e. the Ordo Templi Orientis, a group founded by Crowley and featuring sex magick amongst its practices], a Thelemic order, which Crowley was head of? Also, you spell "magick" with a 'k', and this spelling comes from Crowley. If you read the first chapter of [Crowley's] Magick in Theory and Practice, you'll find the term "magick" defined there. Also, if you read and understand the first chapter, and also read some of Crowley's other writings, you might learn what he was talking about, and realise that he isn't actually evil after all, and also you'll notice that Wicca and Thelema have a great deal in common. Hardly surprising given that Wicca was based on Thelema in the first place, with a smattering of European folklore thrown in.

I'm sorry if my website offended you, it is only humour, though it has it's [sic] serious side with regards to educating people. Too many people are going round saying that many occult things are "evil" when they know nothing about them. An even more stupid belief is that which says that if you start to read about certain things they'll make you become evil. What actually happens, is that when people stop being afraid to challenge their pre-conceived ideas, they start learning. One thing you learn when you actually understand what Crowley was saying, is that he is not evil, and that he has a great deal to offer humanity. Deciding that someone is evil on the basis of their beliefs when you know nothing about them is prejudice. That is exactly what you are doing to me.

I've experienced as much religious prejudice from Wiccans as I have from Christians, because of these stupid beliefs, and so my fluffy test, as well as being a joke, challenges them. I really hope that you take this email in the way that it is intended - i.e. to make you see how you are behaving. It is not an attack, and if you perceive it as such, then you need to think very hard about why that is.

Yours sincerely,

Lucifera

The owner of the group, Light Guide, replied:

Lucifera -

Your supplications have been received, and they really are unwanted. We have no desire for anyone with the beliefs of the O.T.O. in our group. That is our choice. We wish the group to be for like-minded people. That means that anyone who is a part of something that the rest of us find to be vile and without positive value, will not be welcome. That is the purpose of the group, for like-minded people, and if you are not like-minded, why join?
By the way, your e-mail address [i.e. Lucifera@...] was more than enough for us to smell your ilk. I would think you people would be a bit brighter by this point, though it does make my job so much easier in dealing with you. The whole point of our group is for like-minded people to discuss and share. Not for people with opposing points to come in and argue, and spread chaos. I am sure if that is what you seek, there are groups that would be more willing to endure you.

The obsessive compulsion so many of you Golden Dawners have to be here to argue your beliefs only tells me you are in dire need of some form of redemption and acknowledgement, and apparently that is something you have not yet found in your own faith structure, for which I do pity all of you who are thusly compelled to flock to our group, like moths to a flame, to feed on the light.

On a side note, please do not insult your intelligence [sic.] with the assumption that we have not researched Crowley or his past. We have. To great detail for a few of us. What we saw and read was reviling to us [sic.]. It is our choice and our opinions, which again, goes to the phrase “like-minded”, which is the key part of the whole point. I personally read a great deal of his work, and about his life, when I was in High School. I found it lacking, perverse, and wrong, for myself anyway. I am sure others, as your presence so eloquently points out, do not find him repulsive. I tried to revisit him in my early twenties, and still found it disgusting. I know a great deal about him, and found him lacking on many levels. But not all people are so demanding in what they desire and need. I always thought of his works as a sort of “Gee Whiz” of religion and spirituality. Easily accessed, can do so much with it to suit your needs, but ultimately it is bad for you, and leaves a nasty taste in your mouth.

Your belief structure is not wanted by anyone here, and for the few who do want it, and lurk about here, that is their choice.

I suppose their lives are tragically empty, to feel a compulsion to lead a “double life”, or perhaps this is as close to exciting as they get. Either way, I don’t care, but I am watching for them, to have them ejected from our “home” as soon as they are revealed.

Is this prejudiced? Most likely. I have judged your value system on the basis in a manner no different than the one you apparently invoked when you made the judgement that because we do not fall in line with the O.T.O./G.D. like so many mindless sheep, that it was because we did not have a very large knowledge base of Crowley or his life. Be careful on who you judge, unless you look good in total black, in the way of the pot and the teakettle.

There is no need to reply to this, because upon hitting send, I am blocking your email address.

No matter our difference in opinions, I wish you the best in life, and that you find whatever it is that you are missing, and searching for. I can only imagine that it is a terrible thing to find one’s faith so empty.

Light Guide

Later, Light Guide addressed his whole group with the following, which is based on the assumption that someone in the group had alerted Lucifera to the negative reaction her web-site had received.

I just wanted to drop a bug in the ear of you few who are leading a ‘double life’ here, and feeding what is said and done here to those who are unwelcome....

It is incredibly lame, childish, and goes against the very nature of this list “In Perfect Love and Perfect Trust”.

166
If you truly are friends with these “other” people, then why would you give them information from this list, or for them to get in touch with me? If you think I am mean to troublemakers on here, you should see how brutal I am when I don’t have to worry about offending people. Be kind to these poor simpletons, and simply don’t give them the information they want so badly, that will only subject them to my wrath when they send e-mail to the moderators. They never make a point, I mock them ruthlessly, and then we block their address. The next time some little trailer park whore Golden Dawner, (always makes me think of the term ‘Golden Shower’), from Alabama e-mails me under yet another new e-mail address on how ignorant I am, I think I am going to actually do something about it. My time is far too precious to waste on such drivel from the cesspool of modern society. Anyone’s time is too precious for such so-called people.

I personally can only suppose those of you leading the “double life” on here have horribly empty lives, to allow yourself to be relegated to such insipid and inept servitude, (inept because you are pretty much known to the moderators at this point... shame on you and shame on your ‘friends’ for being so sloppy).

I just wanted to let the few of you know, who are doing this, that I am watching, and I think I already know who you are, but until you fuck up, I am giving benefit of the doubt, but I am rarely wrong. You do a great disservice to every single person on this list who is here to learn in the spirit the list was founded upon. Grow up!

I apologise to the rest of you, but it needed saying, and I also think you have the right to know that there are people here ‘spying’ for a few other groups that we have made known are not welcome here. It is truly pathetic. I would get mad, but it is so damned juvenile, it makes me think of thirteen year-olds with no friends, trying desperately to fit in anywhere. There will be no, pardon the pun, “witch hunt” on the list, nothing more than an assurance I am watching, and at the first sign, I am ejecting the trash. The rest of you deserve the list to be clean of those who make designs and calculations on you and what you are sharing/learning.

Light Guide

The second datum in this regard is a discussion between two relative newcomers and an experienced Chaoist calling himself Television Nasty; this was one of the many cyberidentities of Stephen Grasso.

James: I’m relatively new to both Chaos and Cabala, but I have seen some disturbing trends in Chaos magik [sic], trends that Gareth Knight [a prominent member of the Society of the Inner Light ] warns about in one of his books. For instance, on one website there was an article stating that there are vast quantities of energy for use by using Aleph, the first Hebrew letter, and closely associated with Kether, the Sephirah at the “head” of the Tree [The Tree of Life or Cabala will be properly explained in Chapter 6]. I believe Gareth Knight warns against using such symbols aimlessly, and hearing a chaote’s description of it as a source of “raw, untamed power” alarmed me. I may be new, but this sounds like what may have happened to Aleister Crowley. Knight tells of his inability to control the forces he summoned which eventually led to Crowley’s later drug abuse and, according to Knight, “magical impotence”.

Please tell me that I am mistaken somehow, or that I misread something.

spidermonkey: Didn’t Crowley get fucked up cause he was called down to London in the middle of a big spell and forgot to terminate the spell and things went wrong from there?

Television Nasty: Crowley didn’t actually get “fucked up” or become ‘magickally impotent’ or die alone in poverty or any of the other myths which you hear. He in fact had a life filled with adventure
and magic, travelled the world, left an eclectic body of writing, was instrumental in bringing eastern disciplines such as Yoga to the attention of the west, was effectively responsible for the 20th century occult revival as we know it, and spent his last years at an expensive retirement home in Hastings where he was visited by friends and admirers until his death at a ripe old age. And as far as his 'later drug abuse' goes, Crowley used drugs throughout his career, and was in many ways a forerunner of experimenters like Timothy Leary.

It is often the case that the most twisted, vindictive, back-stabbing occultists are the ones who profess to be on the side of "Light" and "Good", such as the Society of the Inner Light of which Gareth Knight is a prominent member. In order to be seen as 'good' they must by definition have an opponent who they demonise as 'bad'. The intelligent magician would do well to steer clear of such nonsense.

spidermonkey: Thanks for the info. on Gareth Knight. Are his teachings still sound, though?

Television Nasty: Yes, what I've read of Gareth Knight's teachings are sound, he is one of the most prominent ritual magicians in this country and I don't doubt that the book to which James was referring to is a storehouse of excellent Cabalistic info. I didn't really mean to dis[respect] him as much as it may have appeared. I would just steer clear of accepting the questionable ethics and morality that often goes along with the teachings of the white light lot. It's a bizarre cliché, but often the nicest people you will meet on the occult circuit will be the satanists and chaos magicians, whereas the most insufferable characters are invariably those who have convinced themselves that they are working for the side of 'good'. As ever, take what is useful and sensible to you and don't be afraid to question those who present themselves as experts. Sometimes what works for one magician will not be suited to another.

The Magickal Universe: Dualistic or Monistic?

At this point we can address the related, and heated debate as to whether or not the magickal universe is dualistic or monistic. Rose (1996:48) has argued that the "New Age" worldview is monistic. Pearson (1998:48) have argued that this is not so of the magickal universe. The problem with these scholars is that they seem to be rather too keen to simplify and 'fix' social reality. In magickal discourse, the universe is indeed said to be monistic; yet closer attention to practice can make such declarations seem merely rhetorical, because dualism has a habit of subtly reappearing. By way of example, here is a typical discussion as to the relative merits of Left Hand Path and Right Hand Path magick.

Light Entertainment: Duality. L.H.P. and R.H.P. I realised, reading and responding to a recent debate [regarding the band Rockbitch], that I really don't understand people that identify as L.H.P. In fact, I don't understand it as a concept - I've been using it as a convenient shorthand for 'da magick wot i do not do.' And I realise that in a final analysis all dualities are false. I'm aware of my own darkness and I'm also aware that in a sense it gives a shape and structure to my life - it's part of the bargain we make with each breath. That said, I focus on manifesting light, and that's because what's in me is to glow. (Hence, I guess, my choice of name.) But I'm interested in how other people deal with the concept. Which side are you on? Any takers? Anyone here identify as L.H.P.? (or R.H.P.?) Care to explain why? Resolved the duality for yourself? How?
devil's avocado: I believe ultimately there is no right or left path! In our world everything is broken down from that ultimate purity. I have a left hand and a right one, a left brain and a right one, I am good and I am bad, I am negative and positive, I am female in some ways... male in others... and so on. Having studied the Cabala for so many years, I am constantly referencing with the Tree of Life. I would like to say that without the Dark, Qlippotic Side, the whole system crumbles [we will examine the Cabala in detail in Chapter 7]. I love both Christ and Lucifer equally but for different reasons. I cannot deem one path better than another. My heart says to embrace all of it.

Allah McBeal: Psychologically, it’s healthier to accept oneself in totality, than to repress a part that can be considered (morally or religiously) bad. Harnessing the power of the Light and the Dark allows humans to be more fluid, to have a better access to reality. But accepting and assimilating the “dark” side, does not mean to let oneself go into the dark side. Hell, it does not mean that one has to be a ‘bad boy’ just to unrepress the darkside.

True Will: In my philosophy there are no multiple paths, there is merely your one personal path and the ones walked by others. There is no duality as such, but merely the various elements from which one builds a lantern with which to guide one along the path. Any sense of duality is constructed by the effect these elements have on others/relationships in one’s life. It is at this point of contact with others and/or our blindness to this that provokes value judgements. In the debate that I started regarding the band Rockbitch, I do not stipulate that they are walking a L.H.P., but point out the inherent damage and upset that spreads from using a lantern made from the elements they exhibit.

Balance becomes adept once the footsteps are sure on all surfaces that ones path covers.

Lucy Fur: All sides are the same. All paths are the same.

Hell’s Belle: I hope I have understood this correctly and so what I have to say will be relevant. A friend of mine recently asked me if I was a “white witch”. To which I worldwearily rolled my eyes and drew breath to bring forth my usual spiel on this, but I paused before doing so, and had a quick recap. The end result is that I do not believe in magic being inherently good or bad, right or left. For me its all in the way that you use it. Electricity, for example, is very powerful and can be either very benign and helpful, or it can kill you. Essentially I think magic in all its varied forms is very similar.

Even a positive spell used in a vengeful way can be harmful.

slagnostic: High can be low. Low can be high. Depends on your perspective. I’d rather be high, but hey experience tells me I’ll be low too.

Upshot: They’re the same. Next...

True Will: One path, lit by lantern. Elements that make lantern may be discerned as good or bad, a mix lantern used to tread deftly across the different terrain that path contains. Others see lantern and in turn add judgements [as] to whether good or bad. Third archetypal option also unattainable, one cannot say that at any point one is a perfect mix of both or totally neutral.

Loki:

*shrugs*

When given a choice between a duality, I always choose ‘both’. That doesn’t mean I integrate them perfectly into an ‘enlightened’ state, either. Sometimes the dualities I adopt continue to compete with
each other, and I like that. The entropy is cause for me to grow to overcome it. It's all worked very well for me so far, if rather a strain at times to handle.

**Andy Pandemonium:** What a depressing 'debate'...

I thought you people could look beyond the ancient institutionalised dualities and devise your own models. Why the hell are you talking only in terms of 2 or 3 paths? Why not 6 or 23 or 42?

**Drugs Bunny:** Or just find where all the paths intersect and then dive through the nexus of the crossroads to the other side.

**Bone Idol:** We are only talking about 2 paths in magick because there are only two paths in magick. I mean, come on! Have you ever met a magician who knew any numbers greater than 2?!

**Whisky Priestess:** Didn’t we go through all this bullshit a couple of weeks ago? I mean, fuck.

‘High’ magick is completely egotistical and elitist. And people get into it for exactly the same reasons that others get into ‘Low’ magick.

a. to impress other people  
b. to assuage low self-esteem  
c. because magick – any type of magick – works.

I refuse to repeat myself and go through this nonsense again.

Goodbye.

**mental elf:**

* chants *

**Fight!**  **Fight!**  **Fight!**

As a completely, totally, uncrippled (I use both my left and right hands thankyouverymuch) Chaos Magician I found this discussion really funny.

You guys are a riot.

**Freudian Slap:** You guys laugh all you want, but I do think the 2 categories are still useful...

Here something someone once wrote:

“The Path Direct... as A.O.Spare put it... is to break away and make your own path. This almost invariably ends up being a bit crooked. Now, personally I cannot even think straight... in any sense of the word. However, most Right Hand Path types tend to classify me as Left Hand Path. Which is their right, I suppose, but where has that left me?

However, the terminology is still useful. In the Vodun sense, I say that I can ‘work with both hands’, because I work magic [sic] both aimed at the community, and magic that breaks the taboos and codes of that community in the name of personal power and freedom... which in the Tantric sense is what the Left Hand Path is all about. [...] However, many of those I work with do not consider themselves Left Handed, including those of the Vodun/Ifa, or witchcraft.”

And this is what someone else said:
“Pete Carroll calls the ‘Right Hand Path’ the ‘Path of Wisdom’ and is reflective of faith in the Universe. He also says the ‘Left Hand Path’ is the ‘Path of Power’ and is reflective of faith in oneself. He then says the paths meet in a way impossible to describe.

That word ‘impossible’ infuriates me, because it is actually quite simple to describe. How can one have faith in oneself without faith in the Universe that was cool enough to create you? How can you have faith in the Universe without having faith that it knew what it was doing when it made you? Is it not powerful to have wisdom? Is it not wise to obtain power?

Okay, that’s the theory. What about in practise? In practise there are those that call themselves Right Hand Path because they hate themselves too much to have faith in themselves. They don’t really have faith in the universe either. These people are a right pain, and are always on the lookout for people to project their inner hatred onto.

Then there are those who mistake the Left Hand Path for becoming obsessed with having power over other people. Or becoming addicted to cursing everyone. This is rare though, generally more common in L.H.P. hierarchical orders.

Mostly magicians who claim either path actually practise both.”

Kinda saves me writing anything, but then I am ill – oh, and Satan.

Lucy Fur: Actually, there’s no left-hand/right-hand duality because the position of the hands changes when you look at them from different angles. Hell, what is the left-hand path and what is the right hand path? And who decides what?

Pomosexual: I get so irritable when subjects like left hand/right hand or low/high magic come up. And I will argue against false distinctions like that, because I strongly feel that such distinctions are shite. But it shouldn’t be taken as a personal attack.

Anna Qi: Oh. This. Again.

*sighs*

Path, schmacht. I don’t consider myself right-hand, left-hand, or any other damn path. Yeah, I can, have and probably will continue to lay ‘curses’ if somebody hurts me and I have no other recourse. It’s my nature. Yeah, I can, have and probably will continue to help people out whenever they ask for it, even if it’s the same person I cursed yesterday. That’s my nature as well.

Humans are funny bastards. We contain all these different impulses, all these layers and layers of desire and intent. Nothing we do is ever simple. Was that an act of pure altruism or an attempt to salve your conscience? Was that a real curse or a misdirected attack on some aspect of yourself? How the hell do you know? And this is magick, kiddies; you’re working at a level of awareness beyond the everyday. You can’t ever be ‘good’ or ‘evil’. Most people think they’re good - how many are right?

All you can ever be is yourself; all you can ever do is what feels right at the time. I’d like to believe that taken overall my actions harm less than they heal, in my temporal as well as my magickal life. Wholeness pleases me. Harm doesn’t. That’s my nature. That’s all I’ve got.

sinthetic: I seriously doubt anyone here actually considers himself [sic] left hand/right hand, and they certainly wouldn’t admit it in this place. Not with all the “escape duality/get out of the binary world” stuff going around (not that this is a bad thing. I’m sure we all need a reminder from time to time). Labels are silly, “the name that can be named is not the eternal name” and so on. However, as Alan Watts tells us in his The Book, labels are necessary in interacting with everyone else, otherwise there
would be no way to tell you to meet me at the corner of 4th and Broadway on Tuesday, November 8th of the year 2002. So such terms are useful so long as you don’t put too much faith in their value.

Anna Qi: Sorry if that last post of mine came across as stroppy. It’s partly because I’m still smarting a little from the many previous discussion of this, and partly because I am evil! Eeeevvilllll, I tell you!

Look, I’ve got black nail-varnish on and everything! Are ya scared yet? Are ya?

Thus the debate flippantly cuts back to the dress-code of the magickal practitioner, at which point we can take our leave of it. The penultimate point made by sinthetic remains however in that despite the fact that the majority opinion is that dualism is mistaken, despite the claims that ‘high is low and low is high’ and that ‘whether it’s right hand path or left hand path is a matter of perspective’, the bifurcation of magickal acts and magickal practitioners into lower-lefter-darker and higher-righter-lighter continues. Duality seems always to sneak in through a ‘back door’ and it is always oneself (and one’s closest magickal acquaintances) who are ‘truly balanced’.

In the eyes of a magickal practitioner, there is always a ‘self-righteous, sanctimonious, jumped-up so-and-so’ claiming to be higher-righter-lighter than oneself, and likewise there will always be a ‘misguided, foolhardy ego-slave’ who is involved with a form of magickal practice which is lower-lefter-darker than one’s own. This is as true of the native perception of other (Other?) magickal groups as it is of individuals. I will let sinthetic have the last words here:

sinthetic: Clearly in a very high and true sense duality is illusion, even a joke. But it’s also one of the most frequently used gizmos in the toybox of the mind, however integrated one’s consciousness (and if you wish to disprove this, write me an e-mail that doesn’t use any dualistic terminology! Just here, in a sentence refuting dualism, I’ve used ‘high’ and ‘true’ as well as ‘illusion’. Mind you, you’d also have to resolve the dualistic/antidualistic duality... My head hurts. Can I go now?)

Qualifying Remarks: Negotiations, Not Absolutes

At this point I will briefly qualify the representation of magickal politics above with the point that in reality as opposed to the typed ethnographic page, things are not always clearcut. To return to Donna’s loft, the reader may have been wondering about the “earthy feel” reported in the article? Might that not indicate a ‘greener’, more middling symbolic location than the high and light one? The main illustration to the
article after all depicts a granite water fountain in the north of the room, which further suggests 'nature' sacralisation. This is not problematic to my analysis, but provides the opportunity to stress that native narratives deploying 'upward and light' and 'downward and dark' directional metaphors are not necessarily totalised in magickal discourse and practice. One generally encounters a mixture thereof, with one of the three 'overriding' the others. In the article in question, the fact that in the article’s main text we are presented with three ‘upward’ directional metaphors, and in its title we have another, ‘override’ the fact that we also have “earthy” in the main text. On this matter of ambiguity in native spatialities or directionals, it is worth reiterating that even the “New Age lady” had dabbled in Goetic or demonic magick. Abaddon, whose essay criticising the “New Age” was quoted from above, does sign off with “amor vincit omnia”. Also, I once asked Dan why the H.O.D. met in the woods at Highgate more often than they did in the derelict hospital. “I mean, getting out in the wood, isn’t that just what the witches do?”, I asked, rather mischievously. “I’m not one of those fat-arsed pagan retards,” Dan spat, and I suspect he has never forgiven me for noting an indisputable similarity between the location of some of his magickal work and that of the witches. My fieldnotes also record an incident in which Gerald Suster challenged another member of the H.O.D. for “lingering amongst the Qlippoth”. “But the Old Ones are not of lower realms,” Alex, had said after a moment’s thought. “The Old Ones are star-spawned... they are stellar.” Gerald remained unconvinced to the end of his days, but at least desisted from attacking Alex’s magickal location further that evening.

Another member of the H.O.D. once wrote the following:

The part of you which you regard as your everyday self has become lost in the labyrinth of your soul. Trapped inside of a cthonic puzzle box whilst your greater mind is set free to contemplate itself. The small brain occupied with the exploration of the deep catacombs, shining chasms and glistening spires of the soul, roaming it’s infinite psychogeography and marvelling at it’s structure. Walking down forbidden corridors and investigating closed rooms.

The phrase “glistening spires of the soul” presents an image of light and height, and there is more light inherent in the “shining”, even if what is shining is a “chasm”. In the last analysis, the directional metaphors and associated colours are often intermingled in discourse, but one of them will always come across as dominant, and
the magickal practitioner will be judged accordingly, relative to the position of the
individual magickal practitioner who is doing the judging.

I should finally state that of course, this symbolic locationality is by no means the
only source of social tension on the “magickal scene”. Magickal practitioners fall out
over politics (there is no necessary correlation between left/right politics and magickal
height or depth, and during my fieldwork I met left-wingers and right-wingers on both
the L.H.P. and the R.H.P.). Magickal practitioners also fall out over love, money and
all the other things over which human animals fall out.  

Notes


2. See also van Hove 1996.


4. I should offer a clarifying point here that sometimes the phrase “high magick” is
used to denote Renaissance magick as opposed to, say, neoshamanic magickal
practice. The ‘high’ and ‘low’ symbolism works differently in such a context and
as some magickal practitioners are well-aware, implies that Renaissance Italy was
a ‘high’ culture whereas shamanic societies are somehow ‘low’ in a way which is
quite contrary to both the affirmative primitivism in magick and any of the more
politically-aware descriptions of less developed cultures.
The Otherworlds

[The] otherworld [...] is viewed as another dimension both inside and outside the magician, and is structured according to different mythologies and magical traditions.

Greenwood (2000:27)

29. Replace your models of reality with models as reality.
201. Collect world views.
255. Design other worlds.


I myself am Heaven and Hell.

Austin Osman Spare, quoted in Drury (2000:125)

Introduction

In this chapter the magickal otherworlds will be examined. Initially we will commence with Greenwood's (2000) work on the "otherworld" which is flawed in that it is entirely unsympathetic to the social constructionist approach. Greenwood's (2000) entire thesis is based on the observation that practitioners of magick interact with an "otherworld". To her mind, this is a defining, essential characteristic of magickal practice and moreover, one which had hitherto escaped scholarly notice. While this assertion is not false, there are nevertheless serious problems with Greenwood's thesis. The most obvious is that as a practising witch, Greenwood is firmly convinced of the actual existence of the otherworld in thoroughly 'native' terms. At the close of her work (2000:212), she even calls for more interdisciplinary research on it. It is not for me to address whether or not there is an otherworld or otherworlds. For all I know, there might well be; so long as she or he allows for the fact that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, the scientist could never disprove such a notion, anymore than the magickal practitioner could prove it. Moreover, I am extremely wary of the political dimensions of arguing that
Greenwood is too much of a ‘native’ to be able to perform an adequate ethnography; such a stance would be to make a mockery of recent arguments that the anthropologist should allow the informant to have voice and attempt to minimise the politico-epistemological distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

One thing I can be certain of however is that the otherworld will inevitably be socially-constructed. As a social-constructionist, I could hardly argue otherwise, because everything is socially constructed. It is this analytical angle which is almost totally absent from Greenwood’s work. What we should be enquiring is not ‘is there an otherworld?’ in the magickal cosmology. Such a state of affairs hardly distinguishes our informants from those of many other anthropologists. Greenwood’s point that ‘practitioners of magick interact with an otherworld’ is not so much an argument as an observation, and not an entirely unproblematic one at that. What the social-constructionist will ask is ‘why is magickal interaction with an/the otherworld(s) it the way it is now?’ and relatedly, ‘what might this tell us about a postmodern condition’? When practitioners of postmodern magick undertake otherworldly journeys, what we are in fact presented with is (sub)culturally unique in four main ways.

The first point is that contemporary magickal practitioners do not just journey to otherworlds; they explore the otherworlds. The modernist project thoroughly informs magickal discourse and practice in this regard. Second, the point is often made that we only have various models of these otherworlds rather than unmediated experience of otherworlds in and of themselves; this line of thinking seems to me to be more postmodern than modern. Third, the otherworlds of the postmodern magickal practitioner are to a significant extent relative to that individual magickal practitioner: Dan’s otherworld is not necessarily Angel’s otherworld. The reason for this is that these otherworlds are personalised and as we will see psychologised. Fourth, otherworlds of postmodern magickal discourse and practice are subject to diachronic fluidity: the structure and contents of the otherworlds changes over time (noted but left quite unanalysed in Greenwood 2000:27); the otherworlds, in the final analysis, are as Heraclitan as any other aspect of contemporary magickal cosmology. However, here I am getting ahead of myself, because before these four basic
observations are expanded on, we must ‘revisit’ the tripartite symbolic structure which we surveyed in Chapter 5, for otherworlds are often formulated in these terms.

Those oriented towards symbolism of light and height, as we might expect, tend towards otherworlds of height and light. The Cabala is often used in this context, doubtless one of the most popular (though many of my informants claim “dumbed down”) examples must be Madonna’s Ray of Light album. We also encounter otherworlds based around ‘natural’ imagery, a good example being that which was detailed on the kitchen wall (mentioned in Chapter 1) whereby we had the Northern European axis mundi Yggdrasil. “The tree”, we may recall, “reaches deep into the earth with its roots; into the realm of the death goddess, Hel, feeding from the deep well of the ancestors and the dead and rotting vegetation. This represents our ability to recycle that which has passed its life-span. It also reminds us to heed the simpler life and wisdom of our ancestors who are dead and gone. The point in the fork of the arrow at the roots of the tree represents the realm of Swartalfheim, the deep subconscious; that which is intuitively in touch with the earth and the dark elves who busy themselves with the mineral wealth and the crafting of our landscape. This reminds us to stay in touch with the deeper workings of the earth’s movements and act instinctively with it. The stress here, as one might expect from a conceptualisation of the otherworlds created by the Dragon Environmental Group, is on environmentalism and a ‘nature’-oriented otherworld. Wiccans and witches, Druids, Pagans and neoshamans often stress the ‘green’ variety of otherworld in their practice (Greenwood 1998).

Although the Cabala is associated with height and light and all that this entails, as Greenwood (2000:194-5) rather briefly acknowledges, the Cabala can be associated with all that is dark, foul, demonic and abominable. (The reason that Greenwood spends little time on this is that as a ‘native’, she is unable to spend much time with L.H.P. magickal practitioners who offend her sensibilities as a witch. Luhrmann (1989:96-7) clearly felt the same thing as far as Chaoists are concerned.) An approach to the Cabala which is oriented around darkness and depth symbols is often associated with the work of Kenneth Grant. Put simply, every Sephira of the Cabala or Tree of Life is said to have a ‘negative’ aspect which is referred to as a Qlipha (pl. ‘Qliphoth’, the corresponding adjective being ‘Qliphotic’). It is possible to associate the Qliphoth
with being ‘down’ and ‘low’: for example Greenwood (2000:194-5) has cited Fortune’s (1987:112) description of them as “subterranean”. She has also cited Dion Fortune’s (1988:90) description of them as “sinks of iniquity” which also suggests a downward motion. At the same time however, we are presented with a bifurcation between a ‘front’ and a ‘back’ space, the former being associated with ‘light’, and the latter with ‘dark’ in the way with which we should be amply familiar by now. Sometimes the ‘lower’, ‘back’, or ‘dark’ side is termed the “Nightside”, as in Grant’s Nightside of Eden (1994), and the tunnels connecting the Qliphoth are known as the Tunnels of Set.

Of course, just as I qualified in Chapter 5, in practice we will see a mixture of these three basic symbolic locations. The Northern European influenced otherworld which we noted above included lower and upper realms, yet overall, the stress is clearly on nature as we would expect from a representation of an otherworld produced by environmentalists. Likewise, some of the H.O.D.’s “pathworkings” or imaginative otherworldly journeys involved journeys into bright, stellar realms, and Sarah “the New Age lady” also spent plenty of time in dark realms (“some hellish fucking places”, as she put it). Chris Penczak (2001:97), whose version of the otherworlds we will note in just a moment, reports that often he wanted to visit the upper realms, and yet found himself drawn inextricably downwards into realms of darkness, trial and ordeal. Nevertheless, in the last analysis and certainly in terms of native social politics, an ‘overall’ location somewhere along the ‘light/dark’ spectrum will be achieved by and ascribed to the individual magickal practitioner vis-à-vis otherworlds. The final part of this section will also show this: both Penczak (who is variously described as a “Wiccan” or “witch” and as “New Age”) and Dave Lee (a Chaoist) have created models of the otherworld based around an urban model, but Lee revels in the sewers, while Penczak’s approach is more balanced, stressing a celestial city as well as an infernal undercity.

This creation of models of otherworlds according to an urban model is a relatively recent innovation in magickal discourse and practice. It is not my place to become embroiled in native debates as to who thought of the notion first; in any case, I suspect that different individuals will have arrived at the same idea independently of
Many reality maps exist. You can use systems like the Norse World Tree, Yggdrasil, the Kabalah [sic, i.e. Cabala], the seven rays, or the twelve dimensions. They all work well if you resonate with them. Systems of mythology, runes, tarot, sounds, and colours relate to them, and are used as a system of correspondence in magick. The basic shamanistic concept of reality has a middle world, and a lower, or underworld. The World Tree, a cosmic axis, is the connecting force between them. Trees are traditional in European groups. Mountain and butte imagery is more familiar in the Native American and Australian aboriginal faiths - a stone reaching up to the sky and rooted deep within the earth. Or, if you live in a city, the three worlds are connected by the most obvious image of a skyscraper.

This skyscraper is termed the “Worldscraper” by Penczak (2001:77). The upper world is conceived as ‘above’, ‘up’, and is associated with ‘light’. It is the realm of “celestial beings, angels, ascended masters, aliens” (2001:85). The lower world is “the catacombs beneath the city, [t]he [...] sewers and subway systems, hidden rooms and bomb shelters” (2001:90). This is the realm of the dead, the dark, “our waste, our garbage, and our dead goldfish and our baby alligators” (2001:93).

Chaoist Dave Lee has managed to combine the urban otherworld structure with the Cabalistic model. He details the two realms thus (1997:83):

Cities are eerie places, profoundly dual-natured. Way back at the start of my magickal career, during an attack of gematria [magickal numerology], the numbers I generated brought together the phrases The Shining City and The Tunnels of Set. The image I got was of proud towering spires and skyscrapers, and the sewers and drainage systems above which they are built. The higher the towers are built, the deeper and wider must be the systems that carry away their waste. The cities are lit with electricity, the light of knowledge, light for visibility, for security from attack. This light is produced by the burning of fossil fuels - black oil and black coal from deep in Pluto’s mines... or from plutonium, the jump-gate to other dimensions, a non-terrestrial substance born from our manipulation of other metals born from remote cosmic processes of inconceivable energy, finding its apotheosis in the sterilising nuclear flash...

Consider the power and freedom of a car, and consider what it leaves behind - tiny flecks of rubber and metal scraped off by the road... oil, the exhaust gases, all washed away by the acid rain into the surface drainage channels... Consider a bright new pen in its disposable bag, and the fibres, plastics and disinfectants that go to the sewage beds and landfills... As one side of the equation - light, newness, freedom - advances, so does the other, the side we’d rather not know about...

The Tunnels are a half-mapped network of sewers beneath the Celestial City, where ontological terrorists move unnoticed from one zone of reality to another... they are wormholes left behind in the construction of the city’s paramount reality, wormholes under the surface of orderly appearances, under the surface of time that is marked by clocks... They are accessed through tunnel vision, through the overwhelm of horror... through the vision of the Sunken Ones in the abysses of Time... their journeying feeds the roots of our being in a way the conscious mind can barely grasp at all...
Just as we saw in the preceding chapter, the spatial differential provided by the high/light and low/dark spectrum is one of the major factors which causes social strife amongst magickal practitioners, and this is reflected in the spatio-symbolic location of the otherworlds. Any ‘wallowing’ in the low/dark realms of the Qliphotic or hellish will horrify those who are more attracted to the more high/light. The latter will be dismissed as “pseudo-Christian” and “in denial” regarding the existence of and necessity of the low/dark realms by the demonologists. In conclusion here, whether the practitioner of magick travels predominantly to the ‘light/higher’ realms, realms of ‘nature’, or ‘dark/lower’ realms, either way, in Penczak’s (2001:91) words, “you transform yourself on all levels”. We may now move on to those more obviously socially-contingent points regarding the otherworlds of the postmodern magickal practitioner I briefly enumerated above.

The Shamanic Journey as Cartographic Enterprise

Though we have seen affirmative primitivism in magick, this should not be taken to imply that there is a complete absence of modernist thinking therein. When the contemporary western magickal practitioner undertakes imaginative (or, ‘imaginative’) otherworldly journeys, her or his basic ‘brief’ is to get out there and explore. As Greenwood (2000:24) notes, the contemporary magickal practitioner maps the otherworlds. Penczak (2001:96) concludes his basic guide for the practitioner with:

[These are simple introductions […] From this point, explore on your own. Once you are familiar with the techniques, you can explore the dimensional frontiers to your heart’s content […].

We will return to the matter of cartography in Chapter 8. However, I will allow this section leads us almost immediately into the next, for maps of the otherworlds are of a very culturally-specific nature. Few magickal practitioners would deny that in
Korzybski’s (1933:23) words, a “map is not the territory it represents, but if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness”. Often different versions of this quotation are used and sometimes the notion is misattributed to various other individuals, but nevertheless, it is a commonplace refrain on the magickal scene. The use of cartographic metaphors by magickal practitioners is something which we will return to in Chapter 8.

Otherworlds Per Se, or “Models of” Otherworlds?

To provide a little more detail, Christopher Penczak (2001:13-14) has this to say about the other dimensions:

Many mystical systems are used to define these levels of reality. The most basic starts with the physical and nonphysical, lumping everything that doesn’t fit into physical, linear space-time into the nonphysical, spiritual realm. Shamanic traditions often divide the realms into the physical middle world, the underworld below us, and the upper realm, or sky world. Each is filled with various mythological characters and contains different powers. The tree symbolism is strong here, with the middle world as the trunk, the underworld as the roots, and the sky realm as the branches and leaves. More complex systems, particularly using the tree symbolism, are plentiful. Norse traditions say Odin made the universe by placing the nine worlds of their cosmology into the World Tree. The Hebrews and ceremonial magicians speak of the Kabalah [sic, i.e. Cabala], the Tree of Life, defining reality as a neat map of ten different spheres and the various paths connecting them. More modern concepts of seven, nine and thirteen dimensions come to us from the lightworkers of the New Age movement. No matter what you choose to call them or how you categorise and characterise them, they are all different areas of reality.

One thing common to all these models is the ability to find new realities. In each of these traditions, someone was able to perceive and even travel to these realms and bring back new information. The information is coloured by the tradition’s own history and outlook on the world, and the limits of the explorer’s experience in them, but so much common ground is shared between them. The mystic of the community is called to traverse these worlds and open perceptions to this new realm. The mystic goes by many names, depending on the culture, tradition and role. The shaman is the most accepted in these practices, but witches, Druids, seers, priests and mages play a similar role as intermediaries between the physical and nonphysical realms. The link between these traditions is simple - magick. Magick draws them together. Each one relies on a form of magick, making changes through their contact with unseen forces. I find that all these traditions work with the core elements of shamanism. Some traditions rely more upon the psychic medium, rituals, or otherworldly journeys, but they all create change on the physical level of reality by working in another layer of the reality spectrum.

So, many models, all with some degree of validity; to the perennialist, it could not be otherwise. Equally, all these models will reflect the cultures within which they were produced. Hence the various terms which magickal practitioners employ to denote these otherworlds. It is common to use the Theosophical term ‘astral plane’. Some
speak of “innerworlds”, a term which we will see shortly, relates to the psychologised nature of this social construction of other realms. Otherworlds may be conceptualised as other dimensions; this term is both scientistic and science-fictional, and we noted how commonly the same concept appears in advertising in Chapter 1. Like most practitioners of magick, Penczak is ultimately relativist about which “map” of the otherworld is the most accurate. His stress as we saw above (2001:74) is on finding one which “resonates” for one personally (a point we will explore in more detail in Chapter 7). The late Gerald Suster (1990:34, author’s italics) also states:

[H]e [i.e. M. Magee] argued persuasively that since the Tree of Life is just a way of structuring universal data, not the Universe Itself, there is nothing to prevent us from devising alternative means of ordering this data, providing that these structures have their internal logic and reveal truths.

One rarely hears a practitioner of magick say anything to the effect that ‘only an idiot would use the Norse World Tree’, or ‘the Cabala is quite simply drawn all wrong’. With every available cosmology being drawn upon within magickal discourse and practice, the rhetoric of the perennial philosophy “with neither birthday nor native land” (James 1985:404) prevails.

There is a further element to the multiplicity of the otherworlds here, and this is the fact that they are temporally multiple. That is to say, the one I visit tomorrow will not be the same one as the one I visited today or earlier this week. As Greenwood (2000:27) reports in the words of Ken Rees, “the otherworld [...] cannot be replicated and is ‘always open to amendment’”. A Heraclitan universe wherein one cannot step twice in the same otherworld is what the postmodern magickal practitioner must deal with. As Gerald Suster (1990:40) puts it:

I would suggest that above the Abyss - that is, Kether, Chokmah, Binah and Daath - energy behaves as it does within the atom, in the manner described by quantum theory. Just as electrons abruptly change their positions without appearing to travel any intervening distance in quantum ‘jumps’, so the energies above the Abyss are in a constant state of flux and interchange. No map can therefore be absolutely right, for we cannot fix what is in flux. However, any given map might describe accurately a given instant in time.

And (1990:39):
Are these arguments really convincing? The student should examine the data and make up his [sic.] own mind, for the matter remains in a state of flux, like the Universe Itself.

Otherworlds or Innerworlds? The Otherworlds as “Psychoscapes”

It should have become apparent by now that that magickal practitioner finds her or himself in an awkward position regarding whether or not the world ‘outside’ is really outside, or part of her or himself. Indeed, the very phraseology of this binary is problematic on the emic. “As above, so below” is as we have seen the frequent Hermetic refrain, along with “as within, so without”. And if that which is without is somehow also within, then as Greenwood (2000:29) has noted, we have the same ambivalence with the otherworld. As Greenwood (2000:27) reports:

[T]he otherworld is also the innerworld; it is both internal and external - a combination of personal and social experience that involves a paradox of going out of the self to find the self within - and is specifically different for everyone.

This highly culturally-specific version of the “otherworld” will require detailed explanation.

Practitioners of magick are quite incapable of deciding - indeed, are self-consciously unwilling to attempt to decide - whether the otherworld is a part of themselves or not. As Suster (1990:66) declares:

It is not proposed to waste space and time by discussing whether these experiences are subjective - i.e. we are exploring the Collective Unconscious within us - or objective - i.e. we are exploring another dimension of reality which is usually termed the 'astral plane'. The question is still open and the matter is still debated by the most advanced students, whose opinions differ. This does not matter. By doing certain things, certain things happen.

Needless to say, we have come a long way into the realms of both the agnostic, and the psychologistic here. The precise form of psychology is of course Jungian Analytical Psychology. This is by no means the only form of psychological discourse
on which practitioners of magick draw, though it is a popular one. Greenwood (2000:115n.5) however cites a native who expresses unhappiness with Jungian ‘reduction’ of real deities to ‘mere psychology’, and Suster (1989:89) puts it well when he reports that magickal practitioners “often find that [...] psychological] reductionism takes the magic out of Magic [sic]”. The point remains however that ambivalent as Suster might be, there is at least a possibility that what we are dealing with as far as the otherworld is concerned is a collective unconscious of analytical psychology.

Within western thinking, the unconscious (of whatever kind) is generally located downwards. For years, like the majority of psychoanalytically-aware individuals in my culture, I was under the impression that the unconscious was ‘down’ and ‘below’. When one thinks about it, nothing could be further from the truth. The unconscious is simply a portion of the mind which is not conscious most of the time. Locating it downwards is every bit as scientific as locating it ‘upwards’, ‘sideways’, be that ‘left’ or ‘right’, ‘behind’, ‘diagonally’, or even ‘at a strange wonky angle which is awfully difficult to describe linguistically’. And yet, it is only when the absurdity of these equally possible locations is seen that one realises that the location of an unconscious as ‘down below’ is a thoroughly-socially constructed, and therefore every bit as contingent and political as any other social fact. Rosalind Williams in Notes on the Underground (1990) has drawn attention to the fact that this is largely a product of the excavation metaphor through which truth claims were so readily expressed in the nineteenth century.

Some magickal thinking reflects this eminently cultural location of portions of the mind, as we might expect any product of the western world to do. To return to the Northern European model, we may recall how the “point in the fork of the arrow at the roots of the tree represents the realm of Swartalfhelm, the deep subconscious”. (We may note that here, a popularised version of the analytical psychological or psychoanalytic model presents itself.)

However, metaphor is messy, not all magickal thinking puts the unconscious ‘down deep’, and now we must see how quite to the contrary, magickal practitioners have located the unconscious as ‘up’ rather than ‘down’. Aside from Kenneth Grant’s
Nightside of the Cabala, all other models which base themselves on Cabalistic cosmology locate the unconscious as ‘up’ the Tree of Life, and hence their explorations involve ascension rather than descent.

Moreover, on top of (in every sense) the personal unconscious of psychoanalysis and/or the collective unconscious of analytical psychology, practitioners of magick have a “superconscious”. The term itself has various meanings. We have seen it defined on the poster on the kitchen wall as “home of the gods and the realm of the super-conscious”. It is also often described as the realm of the Higher Self (or Higher Selves). As for ‘why this “superconscious”?’, it would appear that such an innovation has occurred in order that the ‘lower’ unconscious could have a ‘higher’ counterpart. Given the ‘high’ vs. ‘low’ opposition which we see in the magickal thinking (and should we be sympathetic to arguments that such cognitive structures are universal, all human thought), it is hard to imagine a ‘lower’ psychological world without a ‘higher’ counterpart. And it is with the superconscious that we find ourselves further again from ‘mainstream’ psychoanalysis. Favouring the Jungian collective unconscious over the individual Freudian one is one thing, but replacing the super-ego with a “superconscious”, locus of the individual’s own divinity is yet another.

But still, this does not explain the emic use of psychological terms and concepts. There is no reason which we have thus far seen for ‘the native’ to bother to couch her or his practice of magick in psychologising terms. Christians, Muslims and Jews do not seem to do so anything like as much, if at all. I was never told anything to the effect that ‘psychology is a load of nonsense’ during my fieldwork, yet such a comment would be common enough in your average workplace or bar. Richard King (1999:12) has attempted to explain the location of what he terms the “mystical” in the realm of the psychological due to the modern location of religion in the private as opposed to public realm. However, this to my mind is a description, not an explanation. Many things are in the private realm in modern times, for example, one’s choice of clothes. This hardly entails that the average shopper feels the need to deploy psychologising discourse in order to justify shopping to themselves or others in psychodynamic or indeed cognitive and behavioural terms. Nor as I have said do Christians, Jews and Muslims deploy psychological discourse with anything like the frequency practitioners of magick do, yet their religion is to a degree forced from the
realm of the public within a secular society. And nor, finally, is there any need to combine magick or religion and psychology when the two can quite happily exist without one another and often have.

V.Crowley (p.c.) has suggested that what we have here is simply the fact that magickal and psychological discourses so often mesh because it makes magick seem to the outsider at least no more idiotic than psychology and psychotherapy generally. I am inclined to think that there is something in her suggestion; it reminds me of a statement by Chaoist Phil Hine (1995:25), who notes that there are several “models” of how magick works and that:

Should you ever find yourself in the position of having to ‘explain’ all this weird stuff to a non-aficionado or sceptic, then the Psychological model is probably your best bet.

The fact that practitioners of magick readily merge various psychological discourses with magickal discourse would seem to be an attempt to ‘cash in’ on the symbolic capital that psychology has in our society and an inevitable consequence of the fact that like psychology, magick is integrally concerned with the modernist project vis-à-vis the individual self as we have seen Heelas (1996) convincingly argue.

I have stressed the connection between magick and surrealism in Chapter 4, but must briefly ‘revisit’ it here, for it is with the otherworlds that this connection becomes very explicit. Magickal practitioner Nevill Drury has written much on the subject of surrealism and its relation to the otherworlds. He writes (1994:83) that the “surrealist journey is into inner spaces and dimensions which will yield powerful and expressive images of a greater reality”, and that (1994:72) that various “surrealists exhibit identifiable mythological content deriving from various archetypal energy sources [...]”. Using a fragmentary Cabalistic framework, Drury argues that the various surrealist painters were representing different otherworldly areas. Magritte’s contribution is in Drury’s (1994:75) opinion the offering of “a magical interpretation of our familiar physical world”. We journey further into the otherworlds in Dali’s work, elastic, oneiric and sexual, in which “one can feel the texture, catch hold of the culprit image which is the key to parallel dimensions” (1994:79). Nevertheless, Drury
holds that Dali’s images are on the whole those of Dali’s individual unconscious rather than those of a collective, Jungian unconscious realm. It is with Tanguy that we escape either the realm of this world or an individual unconscious in psychoscapes which (1994:73):

Are often lunar grey and filled with an apparently reflected light such as that which has filtered through to the bottom of the ocean. His [...] elastic shapes have a suggestion of mutability to them, and in like fashion the lunar region of the unconscious, the Yesod of the Qabalists [sic i.e. Cabalists], suggests an ocean of forms and images constantly, like the tides, in a state of flux and transformation.

Likewise lunar, Delvaux’s women walk naked and entranced beneath the moon. Max Ernst’s work might seem closer to a slightly more this-worldly technophobic nature mysticism than an exploration of the otherworlds, but on the grounds that towards the end of his career, various solar motifs appear more centrally in his work, he is identified by Drury (1994:84) with the Cabalistic sphere of Tiphareth, “an energy source of love, new life and harmony, characteristics invariably ascribed to the great solar deities of mythology”.

Dualism or Monism? (Revisited)

Just as we saw the otherworlds are spatially located and subject to a trifurcation regarding whether they are lighter and higher, greener or “darklighter”, or darker and lower, this trifurcation leads us into the ‘dualism or monism?’ debate once more.

low priest: Daath is commonly thought of as the gateway to [...] the darkside of the tree with its demon guardians of the tunnels that run between the Qlippoth. Rehmus describes this doorway as that through which “death, non-existence, and Hell come into life.” However, I see here [...] dualistic traps of thinking, for what is life without death, what is non-existence without existence, and what is Hell without Heaven? In other words, the {true, false} Sephira/Qliphah ‘Daath’ represents the unification of opposites, the sacred alchemical marriage, the union of {divine, mundane}. Christ himself said that the kingdom of God is here on earth, but we only need the appropriate way to see it (of course, he claimed that this way was through him, and I’d like to think that, as Christ is an archetype that fits into the sixth Sephira, Tiphareth, that he is a part of us, and his claim is a metaphorical one which invites us to become as Christ through our own works). By ‘Kingdom of God’ I tend to think that this is synonymous with ‘heaven’ and certainly we can see our world as a Heaven and a Hell depending on our point of view, location in space-time, and other such factors. So, what I am driving at here is that it might be better to think of Daath as a sort of black box through which we are able to run opposites to get at their resolution/dissolution.
The cost of such thinking requires that we take a step beyond our beliefs about who and what we are. Again, the Tree is a diagram of both the external world and our internal world, and as such, it appears that it itself is a diagram of the sacred marriage, but what does this mean?

For starters, I feel that it means that we must begin to take responsibility for both the good and the bad in this world. That is, we cannot merely see the horror and claim that we had no part in it, or that it was not our doing. If daath is a doorway to the darkside of the tree, but it has an elusive nature of non/existence, then perhaps it is the case that there is no door: both sides of the Tree are merely one side, and the demons and angels of their appropriate stations on the Tree are merely reflections of the same being (which, if you are picking up what I am putting down, is merely manifestations of your own being). Peter Carrol has said that "a demon is merely a god acting out of turn," and this suggests that there are no such things as god/desses or demons, but only \{god, demon\}, which we could place into another pairing: \{self, \{god, demon\}\}. In other words, each of us is both the host of angels and the hordes of demons, and it is this recognition and admittance which might actually spur us to behave in more responsible ways to the "others" that inhabit this planet (and again, these others are merely extensions of Self, but seemingly separate through our immature and undeveloped thought patterns and ways of being). [...]

Daath represents a synthesis of opposites, and it is the most important Sephira/Quippah in so far as it urges us to recognise that the nightside and the dayside of the Tree are one and the same, and it is ourselves who come to create and destroy, to heal and to harm, to live and to die. Certainly we need to be evil in the same way we need to be good (since one only has existence in contrast to the other), yet, we can certainly make the attempt to emphasise a positivity over a negativity, and in the end, transcend dualism altogether as we cease to look for answers because we have no more questions, or rather, because we recognise that there never were any questions in the first place, but only a lost and confused Self who insists on remaining trapped in a hall of mirrors which was built by the Self's own hands.

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the Fool: I see the concept of Daath as realisation that there is no tree. There is no division. The tree of life is like a game. It's all representation.

I had this sort of a revelation when I was designing my own universe. I had the forces of good and the forces of evil, in eternal opposition as they always are. As I attempted to resolve the concepts of light and dark I found that the 'universe' was represented by the fractal line between the two infinites, like in a zebra fractal or Yin Yang symbol. The infinite extremes of generating light and devouring dark were both equally inaccessible. I began to see that for any of the beings that were to represent the two infinites, to have form they must embody at least some of the opposing infinite. For only infinite good is truly, completely good, and only infinite evil is truly, completely evil. Everything else combines, at least to some degree, both.

The infinites themselves, do not exist, or at least do not exist in the universe where there manifestations are felt. (They could exist in a universe where only it existed.) We can approach the infinite, but never reach it. Think of the exponential graph, it might hit vertical but it never reaches an end. If it did it would not be infinite.

So, my metaphysical model for the universe was falling apart. There was no 'pure' good, there was no 'pure' evil. There was no reason for conflict. The opposing forces were one and the same. No black and white, just a colour spectrum between hot and cold. The metaphysical structure became transparent and then vanished.

Perhaps the same thing is found in the concept of Daath. Once you examine the structure of the tree for a time, its time to see the tree for what it is again. There is no tree. And through its dissolving leaves the world becomes visible again. There all the time but hidden behind layers of representation and self deception.

As we saw in the previous chapter, statements like this are all very well in theory. In practice, they can appear to be reduced to the status of rhetoric. Those who involve
themselves with, or perhaps involve themselves excessively with, the lower and
darker realms, those "sinks of iniquity" which Dion Fortune (1987:112; 1988:90)
warned against will be accused of having taken the Left Hand Path, of being
possessed by demons, and generally regarded as a danger to both themselves and
others. They will habitually counter such accusations by alleging that those on the
'higher and lighter' path are denying the existence of evil, are elitist, and are
hypocrites.

**Conclusion**

So, what have we seen thus far? It will be recalled that if the starting-premise of this
thesis can be reduced to one simple question it is 'why is magick the way it is now?',
the chapter-specific variant of that question which was addressed here is 'why are the
otherworlds of the postmodern magickal practitioner the way they are now?'

First, we have noted a very common bifurcation of the otherworlds into upper and
lower levels. This is consistent with the spectrum which runs right through the
postmodern magickal subculture, between the 'higher' and 'lighter' realms and the
'greener', "darklight" (Starhawk 1988) realms, and the 'lower' and 'darker' realms.
We have surveyed the Northern European otherworld, the Cabala, and Penczak's
urbanised otherworld, but there are many, many other schemata. While some
magickal practitioners are happy to use more than one of these at once, even those
who have chosen one and stuck with it often (though not always) make the
relativistic-individualistic claim that it is no more or less real than any of the others,
but that in Penczak's (2001:74) words, they "resonate" with it personally. Though of
course the splitting of the otherworlds into the 'light' and 'dark' realms rather
compromises this relativistic rhetoric, at least in theory we can see that consistent with
the common refrain that knowledge in magick and alternative spirituality generally
has to be personal in order to have value attributed to it, the otherworld is to a great
extent personal to the individual practitioner. Thus amid the globalising syncretism is
an unmistakable skein of western individualism. Not unrelatedly, what we have is a
psychologisation of the otherworld. The otherworld might well be (might, for we recall that the postmodern magickal practitioner exhibits a high level of agnosticism) explicable according to the Jungian collective unconscious. Then, we have the frequent repetition of Korzybski’s (1933:23) refrain that “the map is not the territory”; not only are the different maps all valid in their own ways (that is to say, no more or less true than one another), none of them can be expected to be totally accurate. In Lyotard’s (1984) terms, they are small truths rather than the grand truth, fragments of a greater truth that we may or may not ever arrive at. Thus higher and/or lower, multiple, personal and psychological, yet to be fully comprehended, models rather than ultimate reality, and diachronically variable are the otherworlds of the postmodern magickal practitioner. And her or his task, in a truly modern fashion, is to get out there and explore. The primitive shaman, we should recall, whatever exactly she or he does in the otherworld, is not there to anything so modern as explore and map it.
Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and take the form of impersonal forces.

Max Weber (1970:149)

Bill, to student: So, are you religious at all then?
Student: Religious? No. ... But I do believe in energies though.

Michelle: I got this massive bollocking off Rachel once. I said that I’d met this girl at a party and she’d said that she wasn’t religious at all, but that she believed in “energies”. I said that was the most ridiculous thing I’d ever heard. Rachel got really angry and said that I had absolutely no right to knock someone else’s spirituality like that. And she was right. I mean, if that’s her spirituality, then who am I to knock it?

(Michelle is a Christian friend of mine, Rachel is Rachel Storm, then a staff member at the L.S.E.’s I.N.F.O.R.M.)

Catherine: I’ve got a mate who’s gone New Age. It’s so mad, she talks about everything in terms of ‘energies’. I can’t understand a word she says, quite frankly.

Chelsea: “I was out buying girly pads today [i.e. sanitary wear], and I got these new ones, they’re breathable, so they let prana in. They’re really rather excellent!”

Introduction

In this chapter, the notion of orgonomy and the orgonaut will be introduced. I will use the former to denote the discourse of energy within magick, and the latter to refer to the exploration and manipulation of said energy which, many natives say, is an essential part of magick. We have of course encountered the notion of magickal ‘energy’ before, initially with Jason and that stressful emergency call, and thereafter at many and various points throughout this thesis, but I have refrained from detailed examination of it until now. Though not previously unnoticed, the fact that there is an
integral use of the word-concept 'energy' within magickal discourse and practice has hitherto not received scholarly attention other than in passing, attention which with few exceptions has been descriptive rather than analytical. Here this vital cosmological notion will be fully explored. It will be argued that the notion of fluxing energies is markedly postmodern, and that it is through this unique subcultural construct that the individual and social being of the magickal practitioner is described and prescribed.

Greenwood (2000:27) has rightly if rather generally stated that:

For magicians, everything is energy, and practising magic involves moving energy. Leah, a feminist witch, explained to me: ‘Magic is there, energy is there. Magic has to do with finding exactly where energy is and shifting it, making it move. That’s the magic. One just focuses it, sees where it needs to go and sends it there.’ Magical energy is seen to be in everything that exists, and magical practice concerns channelling and using that energy. Magicians see the otherworld as a separate, although ultimately linked, sacred area; it is a place where it is possible to contact magical energies of the cosmos - the greater whole. The otherworld has its own reality, and otherworldly beings have their own existence and energies, which may be tapped into.

This point has come in for a slightly more analytical treatment by Brown (1997:90), who has stated in relation to the “New Age” practice of ‘channeling’ that:

The common denominator ... was a connection to “energies”, a term that is used almost universally in channelling and related spiritual practices. Energy is a perfect organising concept because it is both all-encompassing and ambiguous. Like the spirit world itself, energy is everywhere yet difficult to see. Its elusive, mysterious quality lends itself to metaphysical speculation. [...] By bridging scientific and spiritual approaches to the world, energy offers a way to bring everything together in a grand synthesis. “Ultimately, everything is energy,” channels often say. Because energy is everything, it is also nothing very specific, which makes it a perfect vehicle for creating shared meaning between spiritual individualists. The chief lesson of the channelling class was that these omnipresent energies are texts that we can learn to read, texts that ultimately offer clues to the self. By reading them, we assimilate new identities, becoming wiser and more powerful in the process. Jim [...] felt that his new-found gift had greatly increased his ability to gather the messages dancing around him. “There’s a lot more energy out there than we think, and it’s all information,” he said. “We can pick our way through it to find our own wisdom.

Brown has not taken this observation any further, though in all fairness he had other concerns in The Channeling Zone. Another individual by whom an observation similar to Brown’s has been made is Fitzgerald (1986:281), who in her (journalistic) study of ‘New Age’ community Rajneeshepuram notes:

There was yogic “energy” and Growth Movement “energy”; the two notions were vague enough to begin with, but in Rajneeshee philosophy, they seemed to have melted and fused beyond recovery...
It is a fundamental contention in this thesis that a much deeper comprehension of this concept, and the ways in which it is deployed ‘socially’ and ‘psychologically’, is vital to an understanding of postmodern magickal discourse and practice. A note on my use of the word ‘orgonomy’ to refer to the ‘science’ of this “energy”: this word was coined by the maverick psychologist Wilhelm Reich, an investigator of a mysterious ‘energy’ which he termed ‘orgone’ or ‘orgone energy’. The or- prefix to his mind suggested what he took to be its organic nature, and is moreover reminiscent of the word ‘orgasm’, for Reich was amongst other things a psychoanalytic sexologist and one-time pupil of Sigmund Freud. As for the related term, ‘orgonaut’, this is my own, and is not simply to create puns on the phrase ‘Jason and the Argonauts’, but to stress the lamentably undertheorised fact that as we will see throughout both this chapter and Chapter 8, practitioners of magick operate in a fluid universe. Hence, nautical metaphors abound, magickal practitioners think of themselves as ‘sailors’ (sometimes ‘surfers’) on the fluxes of energies which comprise their Heraclitan “magickal youniverse”.

Initially, we need to establish what exactly this ‘energy’ is. Given that three of my predecessors (Fitzgerald 1986:281, Brown 1997:90 and Lurhmann 1989:119) have commented that the notion is a vague one, I am heartened to note that I am at least not alone in finding this to be easier said than done, though perhaps, as Brown (1997:90) has suggested, this vagueness is important in itself (after all, religio-spiritual discourse is surely always more poetic than scientific, a point which remains despite the scientistic nature of contemporary magick and alternative spirituality generally). I will commence with an examination of the cultural and historical origins of the ‘energy’ word-concept which will go at least some way towards establishing what precisely my informants mean when they talk of, think with and indeed see and feel, ‘energy’. We have already seen how orientalism is an important dimension of magickal discourse; and it is fitting then that there are not one but two eastern sources for the idea of energy which magickal practitioners draw on in their (sub)culturally-specific way.
Daoism, Feng Shui, and Traditional Chinese Medicine: Qi ‘Energy’

When he explained the “dynamic” to Westerners, he would speak of removing the psychological blocks, and releasing this body energy to the brain. The conception was still Tantric, but in English it sounded like pure Wilhelm Reich.

Frances Fitzgerald (on Rajneesh, 1986:290)

A synonym for ‘energy’ sometimes used by my informants is qi, a word-concept which has its origins somewhere and somewhen in ancient China. ‘Energy’, we should be aware, is not the only translation of qi. Fischer-Schreiber (1989:68) in fact offers the following plethora of translations: “air, vapour, breath, ether, energy ... [also] strength, temperament, atmosphere.” The accumulation, direction and transmutation of qi through breathing exercises with the aim of improved health, even immortality, forms an important part of the Daoist tradition, and this is sometimes termed ‘alchemy’ or ‘inner alchemy’ by westerners. Traditional Chinese medicine entails the concept of qi flowing through a series of channels or meridians throughout the body, and problems in this flow are related to health problems. (The reader may recall the individual on the train reported performing autoaccupressure in Chapter 1.)

Also related to the Chinese conception of ‘energy’ is the practice of feng-shui. Here we have the related art, science or practice of geomancy. Originally concerned only with the siting of graves, it now seems to potentially cover the sitting of anything from household ornaments to tower blocks and can be applied in multiplicity of ways, from ensuring one’s ancestors behave themselves to ensuring health and wealth.

In The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought, J.J.Clarke is at pains to stress that Daoism is a notoriously complex set of ideas and practices. (Some argue that it is simply too complex to define, e.g. Creel 1970; Ching 1993:85). Clarke’s work provides a useful summary of those parts of Daoism which have been adopted by Westerners, and those parts which have not, as well as informed speculation as to why this may have been the case. My informants, it must be said, generally showed little in depth knowledge of Daoism. It was myself who drew to the attention of some of them to the numerous and sometimes confusing types (states, subdivisions?) of qi, the plethora of different practices involving it (or them?), and
some of the more strange-seeming facets of Daoist practice, during a talk at the London Earth Mysteries Forum. Though the talk was well-received, it was generally decided by my informants that they need not worry themselves with Daoist ideas and practices such as the notion of loosing energy by spitting, holding their breath for a thousand heartbeats, or not doing any magick after midday because the ‘energy’ has thereafter become stale. Just as Clarke has noted of the overall Western adoption (and “transformation”) of Daoism, the affirmative orientalist syncretism practised by the postmodern magickal practitioner is clearly partial, and moreover involves high levels of generalisation of the type which has lead scholars such as Wile (1992:65, cited in Clarke 2000:133) to write of a “facile homogenisation, which blurs many distinctions between the two systems”. For our purposes, what is important is that my informants have adopted the notion that there is such a phenomenon as \textit{qi} energy, which exists in potentially different states both within and without the human animal. It may not be entirely ‘authentic’, but that need not worry the anthropologist accustomed to seeing ideas mutate as they pass between cultures in the way it obviously irks some purist Sinologists.

Hinduism: \textit{Prana and Kundalini}

Part of trance work is becoming more aware of energy. All energy is the manipulation of energy to cause change. When you experiment with colour, as you did in the previous exercise, you experiment with different frequencies of energy. Colour is intimately related to the quality, the personality, of many forms of psychic energy. The first step in understanding and mastering such energies is to be aware of the energy within your own body. Altering your consciousness brings your awareness to the realm of unseen forces. There, you can perceive energy in yourself, in others, and across the world, but first, start with your own body. The human body has energy centres, vortices of energy, much like smaller versions of the energy vortices around cities and sacred sites. These [...] most commonly [...] are called chakras. [...] Each chakra is a swirling energy centre, a vortex of spinning light. Chakras are aligned, more or less, along the spine. Each one has a particular function, not only in our physical existence, but in our multidimensional existence as well. [...] Most likely, other chakras exist, but these are the generally accepted ones. There may be chakras that lie between these seven, and other smaller ones throughout the body [...]. Working with the energy in the chakras is a way to bolster personal power. We become more aware of the chakras while in the trance state. Some people feel them, while others see them, when doing magical work. By perceiving the chakras and the field of energy around them that some people call the aura, you can tell when someone is healthy, sick unbalanced, or unhappy. If you are more tactile, you can run your hands across the aura or over the chakras and feel ‘warm spots’, ‘cold spots’, and holes. Sometimes the sensation is fluid and free for health, and thick, dense, and murky for illness. Those with clairvoyant gifts will perceive this information in terms of colour and light.

Prana is all around us, in different ways and large amounts. Unsettled land does have a large amount of this spirit energy, but the city has its own flow of prana. The very creation of the city and its buildings diverts and redirects the prana streams as boulders divert a river. They may divert the flow, but they will not stop it. The pathways and side streets between skyscrapers feel almost riverlike as you walk them. Sidewalks are like the banks of a vast river. People flow, traffic flows, and even warm and cold currents of air flow through them. Spirit flows there, too. It flows with everything.

Penczak, C., City Magick (2001:3)

Hinduism or, more accurately, that complex amalgamation of religious discourses and practices which the West constructs as ‘Hinduism’ (see King 1999), has bestowed my informants with not just one but two different kinds of energy: prana, and kundalini. Literally translating from the Sanskrit as ‘breath’, prana is defined by Friedrichs (1989:275) as: “breath, breath of life; the cosmic energy that penetrates and maintains the body and is most overtly manifest in creatures as the breath.” The same source notes that in one Hindu text, the Atharvaveda, prana is personified, and that Hinduism in fact acknowledges “five different pranas”. (None of my informants ever acknowledged the latter point and just one was aware of the former. Nevertheless, they also tend to hold that energy takes multiple forms as we will continue to see.)

As for kundalini, this literally translates as ‘serpent’; Friedrichs (1989:190) elaborates: “...also called “serpent power,” because this sleeping spiritual force in every human being lies coiled at the base of the spine”; the same scholar also renders the word-concept as “microcosmic energy” (1989:190) and also “subtle energy” (1989:58). This power, force or energy may be aroused and induced up the body from its location at the base of the spine, through six bodily loci, to a seventh locus above the head, via the practice of kundalini yoga. These loci are known as chakras (or cakras), a Sanskrit word variously translated as ‘wheel’, ‘discus’ and/or ‘circle’. Chakras are also described by some sources as ‘lotuses’, each with a specific number of petals which attach to a corresponding number of nadis, literally ‘pipes’ or ‘vessels’ which convey prana about the subtle bodies. Each chakra has an additional shape (for example a square, half-moon, triangle etc., sometimes represented within the surrounding ‘lotus shape’), and also a colour, a mantra (verbal sound), animal (mythical or real) and a number of divinities associated with it. Again, by no means all these latter details were acknowledged by my informants. To them, a chakra is a
centre of ‘energy’ with a location and sometimes a colour, but neither the colours, locations nor number of chakras were consistent. Notions of lotuses, nadis, the additional shapes, associated animals, mantras and divinities were not details of the Hindu tradition about which my informants were generally concerned. Again then, it seems that the syncretism of the postmodern mage is, perhaps like all syncretism, both selective and of a very general nature.

The fact that the chakra is associated with its literal translation of ‘wheel’ and ‘discus’, and hence a spinning or whirling pattern of motion will be mentioned again the following chapter. I now wish to address the fact that the words and imagery used to denote qi, prana and kundalini is electrical in nature, which leads us onto the next cultural source of the ‘energy’ metaphor, one somewhat closer to the West than either Hinduism or Daoism. (We will however return to certain other facets of these oriental traditions which have been appropriated by my informants below.)

**Science and Scientism**

Magicians also talk of other forces, powers or currents, which pervade the universe and can be generated or directed by the knowledgeable. These are often described as if they were electro-magnetic currents, but the analogy is loose. [...] These forces are rather badly defined but they are thought to exist, and to be elicited and directed in magickal rituals.


By no means then am I the first to note that a ‘spiritual scientism’ is an important element to the discourse of the postmodern magical subculture, and of course, the notion of ‘energy’ is rather integral to scientific (and hence ‘scientistic’) discourse. Taking as a starting-point dictums such as Michel Serres’ “[t]he only pure myth is the idea of a science devoid of all myth” (cited in Latour 1993:93) and Latour’s claim that “*We Have Never Been Modern*” (1993), Erik Davis (1998) has produced *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. The book is a study of remarkable scope (though not depth) which can best be described as an exploration of what Davis terms the “technological imaginary”, that is to say, the irrational, and frequently religio-spiritual dimensions of western culture’s fetishisation of
technology. Commenting on what he terms the “electromagnetic imaginary”, Davis’ (1998:57) notes how: “[o]ur language drips with electromagnetic metaphors, of magnetic personalities and live wires, of bad vibes and tuning out, of getting grounded and recharging batteries.” The streets named Electric Lane and Electric Avenue and the shop-sign consisting simply of an electricity bolt noted in Chapter 1 are other perfectly good examples of this.

Doubtless this is the case in western culture generally, and yet for my informants, we are beyond the realms of such figures of speech. ‘Energy’ to them is real, not always visible (though it is occasionally), and very often described in terms of electromagnetic imagery. I once for example asked an informant to tell me what he meant by a “line of force” (a ley line or terrestrial energy line) and he replied by e-mailing me a picture of a image of neuroelectricity. And we should not forget here the fact that during my fieldwork my one of my bedroom walls became graced with a poster titled Paris 1933 depicting the Eiffel Tower being struck by lightning. When I purchased it, I had no clear idea why I preferred it to the myriad other posters on sale, yet now I cannot but speculate that a native obsession with electromagnetic metaphors and imagery may have played some part in this point of personal aesthetics. As noted in Chapter 2, it was Eliphas Lévi who introduced the energy notion to magick during the occult revival, having himself taken it from the work of Mesmer. (I suspect that the translation of qi as ‘energy’ may owe much more to the western “electromagnetic imaginary” than any ancient Chinese ideology, and that the more naturalistic ‘breath’ might be a more accurate translation of the ideogram. The same could be said of prana and kundalini.)

To conclude thus far, there are many ideas which might be created by merging elements of scientistic, ‘primitive’ and ‘Oriental’ discourse which one could conceivably base a magico-religious or religio-spiritual system on, but the point remains however that the vague, polysemic and multiplex notion of ‘energy’ is the one which the magickal practitioner seems to have settled for. Moreover, it also appears that these sources of the metaphor are not all there is to its deployment in practice; significant dimensions of the metaphor seem to have gone somewhat beyond these cultural and historical roots.
Naturalistic Descriptions of Energy

It is as if magicians think of themselves as creating an electrical storm in rituals, and dispensing bolts of lightning to chosen targets.

Luhrmann, T., Persuasions of the Witch's Craft (1989:119)

In addition to Paris 1933, another poster appeared on my bedroom wall during my fieldwork, from an original photograph presumably taken from a helicopter, of a huge wave crashing against, almost over, a lighthouse. Again, when I purchased it I had no idea why it appealed to me. While we have seen how metaphorical radio waves and metaphorical electrical currents have been integrated into magickal discourse, we must recall that streams, flows, waves and currents of energy can of course also be hydrological and hence 'nature' metaphors. Moreover, the scientism of the electromagnetic imaginary can shift into nature-centred orgonomic discourse whereby 'electricity' is replaced by 'lightening'. Sometimes then it is through such more overtly naturalistic than scientistic figures of speech that my informants will talk of energy and hence their very lifeworld, and given that a significant element of magickal discourse and practice is comprised by nature religion or spirituality, this is perhaps not surprising. At times of course the notions of 'waves' and 'currents' or 'flows' could entail 'energy' in its scientific sense as well as 'energy' in a naturalistic sense, but at other times, the metaphors are exclusively naturalistic. We will more of such discourse (i.e. 'storms' and 'lava' also used as similes for 'energy') in the next section.

Flux and Rhythms in the Heraclitan Magickal Universe

One of the posters in the kitchen which I reported in Chapter 1 included the words:
Anitya means ‘impermanent’... it asserts that all conditioned things, all compounded things, are constantly changing... this is happening of course all the time. Perhaps it is easier to understand this truth nowadays than it was before. We know now from science that there is no such thing as hard solid matter - scattered in lumps throughout space. We know that what we think of as matter is in reality only energy in various forms.

Of all the eastern ideas to import, it is this one which was considered sufficiently important to be put up on a wall. The following examples (all transposed from fieldnotes or e-mails from informants) also suggest a marked fluidity of energy:

Ben, in an e-mail regarding rejoining the H.O.D. group: If it was H.O.D. stuff you were referring to then after further consideration (i.e. not being selfish) I think that H.O.D. has done too much work since I last came along to a meeting (i.e. 2 years ago) for me to properly fit back into the current. There has [sic] been many meetings I have missed and information that has been gleaned from your workings and discussions I have not been party to, so I don’t really think it’s realistic for me to come back. I do, however, have an interest in archiving; visual material from your public workings etc and also playing around with the possession tapes, but I think that’s a far as my involvement goes.

Steve Wilson: Ben, you can never be too far away from the current; the current should worry about straying too far away from you.

Ken: How’s Bill today then?
Bill: Bloody awful, but thanks for asking.
Ken: Hey, just keep on surfing that energy flux. You’ll be back on a wave in no time.

Joe: Basically, I am scared. And tense. And exhausted. Do you ever get that feeling of really not knowing what to do, and knowing that until you do know what to do, you won’t be able to get the peace of mind and the rest that would allow you to work out what to do? How does one go on from there? Not used to not knowing things. It’s destabilising. And shit.
Dan: It’s a chaotic universe. You had to learn it some time; the later in life you learn it, the harder it hits. So learn to surf the energy. You needn’t stay entirely upright, as long as you keep your head above water.
Tim: Yeah, surf the chaos.

Mike: I’ve been thinking about slogans lately, about how a simple loaded phrase can act as a mantra, implying direction to the ebb and flow of your life.

Finally, Penczak (2001:6) comments how:

Other vortices shift, move, or cease to be active at the end of a city’s life. We, therefore, may have difficulty discovering its remains, because we are not drawn by the swirling energy.

We also encounter fluidity as employed in notions of ‘going with the flow’ of energy (or indeed, against it). During my fieldwork, two different and as far as I was aware,
unconnected groups of my informants even created a goddess, called Flo, to symbolise/anthropomorphise the fact that they were ‘going with’ a ‘flow’ (see also Prince and Riches 2000:xi).

Energy then, whether conceived of in its naturalistic or scientistic sense, does not remain static; energy flows, it pulsates, it is rhythmic. Such a notion of energy flux and instability is also apparent in other naturalistic metaphors which I noted during my research. Occasionally my informants would use metaphors of riding a storm (the phrase quite possibly stemming directly from the well-known song by The Doors, *Riders on the Storm.*). When I told one informant about the events of Mayday 2000, he remarked, “I can’t believe the government pay you to attend riots and make scholarly observations Bill! You really are the eye in the centre of our storm aren’t you?” Or regarding the I.O.U., Tom declared in a differently meteorological metaphor that the group “is obviously not going to meet regularly, but just, y’know, get its energies together when the weather’s right”. On just one occasion one of my informants described the same group thus:

*I.O.U.* is and will be, I like to think of like a volcano - dormant (except for the odd rumble of pressure between individuals) but still solid under foot and simmering. This metaphor could be extended but I can’t be arsed at the moment.

She received the following reply from Ben:

I think it could be extended to imply that very soon, from that towering, rock-solid pillar will burst forth a series of vast splurts of magickal energy, as befits a group with the magickal potency of the *I.O.U.*

But then, I wouldn’t I? :-)

Frater Panspermia.

To which she responded:

Tut tut, you’re so phallocentric.

We, of course, would not like to peak too early and miss the fun of the simmering bit, so let’s not rush it, eh?

But I would say that... :-)

Soror Panvagina.
To my mind, it is the most postmodern notion that the world is in flux, extreme flux. (As I have stated previously, this could admittedly be taken as a ‘modern’ or ‘late modern’ phenomenon, but I use the word ‘postmodern’ because in the next chapter, we will see that within magickal discourse and practice, the notion of progress is though not rejected outright, highly problematised.) It is my contention that this Heraclitan dimension of magickal discourse and practice is both underobserved and understudied in terms of relations between magick and postmodernity.

**The Energy of Place**

Though there have been complaints about the vagueness of the use of the term energy, it does have some ‘concrete’ meanings and one of the most obvious is that a specific location will have its own specific energy. As Penczak (2001:4-5) states:

Our urban dwellings are built on the most natural forces of all-energy vortices. Each centre draws people to it, both geographically and spiritually. A settled area may be near resources like fresh water, abundant food, or a port to the sea, but our attraction to it is more than physical. Some other force draws us there. Each city is a sacred site, whether we treat it that way or not. [...] The planet is covered with different sets of energy lines and grids. They are like the nervous system and acupuncture meridians of earth, many of the lines cross at certain points in each grid, creating an energy zone, or vortex. Perhaps it is the other way round and the vortex creates the energy lines. [...] You can find a vortex almost anywhere. They come in all sizes, intensities, and personalities.

Each energy centre is like a chakra for the planet, much like our human chakras on the body - the heart, crown, or third eye. Each one has a different personality, characteristics, and function. The quality of the vortex, as well as the way the energy flows through and around our man-made structures, gives each city its uniqueness. I am sure everyone here has noticed a city that had “bad vibes.” Your own nature is reacting to the qualities, the personality - the vibe, if you will - of the city. you can instantly like one and dislike another, just as with people, because, in a sense, cities are alive.

Any environment is seen by magicians as imbued with energy. Specific locations will attract different practitioners and groups of people. We have already noted how spaces of the natural are often employed for magickal practice. The urban realm is also seen as being imbued with energy and can be the focus of magickal activities. In both realms are pathways of energy, known as energy lines or ley lines. These ‘lines of force’ which may constitute shared knowledge among magickal practitioners. In other instances such a line may be totally personal to one individual practitioner. The same is true of spirits or genius loci: they are formed of energy. A place’s history will also have an important impact on its energy. Neither these lines of force nor
topographical energies generally are diachronically consistent. Especially in the urban realm where building work and environmental change is commonplace, lines of energy are said to shift and change, even to disappear completely or appear suddenly.

One also frequently encounters notions of pollution in the discourse of orgonomy and the practice of orgonautics. Many sites employed by one individual or group of magickal practitioners will be employed by other lone individuals or groups, and this is something which causes tension. A group which is ‘lower and darker’ than one’s own for example can perform a ritual at or just visit a sacred site and others will resent this, and their resentment will be experienced and expressed in terms of polluted place energies. The H.O.D. rather enjoyed leaving their sigils (marked out in flour on the ground) behind in Queen’s Wood, Highgate in the knowledge that they might well shock other magickal users of that space. Of course, this renders Brown’s (1997:90) comment to the effect that energy allows for pluralism problematic to say the least.

We also encounter a notion of pollution from empirical electromagnetic energies in magickal discourse. An informant once remarked that an old knee injury flared up just as his train passed under an overhead electricity line. Erik Davis (1988:55) has used the phrase “power line paranoia” and this would seem to be an apt expression indeed for this rather antimodern skein of magickal discourse. It is also worth noting in this regard that Wilhelm Reich’s work at one point focussed on the relation of orgone energy to radioactivity, and he wrote of “deadly orgone energy”, a lethal counterpart to healthy orgone. Penczak (2001:24) advises:

Care of your own chakras and aura is an important part of magical practice. Most magical traditions use some ritual or visualisation to open, clear, and balance these energy centres. They are particularly important to urban practitioners, since we expose ourselves to many other potential dangers. The city can be more hostile to us energetically than, for instance, a remote farm. In cities, we contend with concentrated pollution, electromagnetic fields from many power lines, and the sheer volume of psychic garbage strewn about by our fellow city dwellers. This garbage is created by stress, crime, and often simple unhappiness and disconnection from life. The thoughts of unhappy, unhealthy people actually pollute our astral mindscape.

Penczak proceeds to recommend a version the Golden Dawn’s Middle Pillar exercise with seven chakras (instead of the Golden Dawn’s original five), and a form of psychic protection that involves the visualisation of a protective energy “bubble”,

203
“egg” or “sphere” about oneself (this bearing little relation to any Golden Dawn practice and as Penczak’s (2001:28) metaphor suggests, is more reminiscent of “a force field from a science fiction movie”).

The energy of place is sometimes highly relative to the individual orgonaut:

Jim: This place has bad energy.
Fred: Me, I love it.
Jim: Oh. Fair enough.

What needs to be stressed is that magickal practitioners exhibit marked awareness of a strongly subjective element to the experience of topographical energy. The emic acknowledgement that ‘energy’ is a subjective phenomenon is significant in a number of ways. First, it entails that there is not necessarily a problem should two individuals’ experiences of, say, the same place or ritual be widely different. Within the exchange between Fred and Jim cited above, there is no suggestion whatsoever that this meant that anyone’s perception of the place ‘energy’ was ‘wrong’; just different. Different experiences and judgements did not create or reflect any ‘problem’ such as, say, lack of group solidarity, at least in this instance (though below we will see examples where it does). The native justification (explicit or otherwise) for the fact that individuals may experience place energy differently to one another is that the unique energy of the locale will interact with the unique energy of the individual person. It is to the latter which we now turn attention.

Corporeal Energy

[When trance dancing, Y]ou are somewhere else. ... Dance is a wonderful medium not only to open up your perceptions to other worlds, but to synchronise your physical body with your own subtle bodies of emotions, mind and spirit. It raises energy for your magick. I do some dance-like movements in my tiny alter room to balance my body with my magickal intentions and to raise energy. I can feel and see the energy swirling around my body as I move. The energy trails from my fingertips, often weaving into an image of my needed goal.

Penczak, C., City Magick (2001:33)

The magickal individual has energy and is energy, and this is so in various different senses. One has bodily energy. I am not the first to note that magickal practice is a
self-consciously embodied practice (Greenwood 2000:36, and eco-mage Adrian Reynolds is currently working on an (autoethnographic) Ph.D. devoted specifically to this aspect of magick). The magickal practitioner has energy in the body, be that of the inhaled variety like *prana* or *qi* or *kundalini* or, more likely, a fusion of the two. She or he also has an “aura” of energy about the body. This energy can be felt. In my personal experience, I felt it as a tingling sensation in my whole body but particularly in the palms of my hands. Others however perceive it differently. Some experienced it as a sensation of heat. Conversely a feeling of the absence of heat or coldness can be related to orgonautics; especially frequent in the realms of ghost-hunting, ‘cold-spots’, or sudden chilly sensations might be said to represent a ‘negative energy’ of some kind. Other tactile energy sensations drawn from Pettis (1999:46-8) include: “slow warm and fuzzy”, “heavy”, “undulating”, “pulsing”, “flowing”, “surprise”, “electric”, “pleasing”, “a flowing directional pull, like ripples, gravity, a pulling downward”, “cold”, “powerful”, “chocolate syrup”, “calming”, “too quiet, too serene, yet refreshing”, “energising”, “light, a glowing line [...]”, “like I was weaving”, “faint smooth energy”, “lightness”, “a pulling upward”, a “pulsing, flowing, deep lively sensation just below my solar plexus”, “warm and solid”, and “crisp, clear”. Such sensations are a far cry from Hindu reports of raising *kundalini* energy, which apparently feels “like an ant creeping forward”, “like a fish swimming happily in the ocean” or “like a leaping monkey” (Friedrichs 1989:191). Some magickal practitioners experience energy visually, seeing it in the form of lights (most often blue or white) leaping about in the air in front of them. A few may claim to hear energy in the form of a buzzing sound (to a native, it would have been this which I heard during the *H.O.D.* ritual reported in Chapter 1) and it is also not unheard of for energy to have various tastes. Olfactory sense-data seems to be the only kind which does not appear to come into play in orgonautics.

**Energy and the Psyche**

The concept of energy also exists on a more ‘psychological’ level. Energy is used by the natives as a synonym for what is more conventionally termed ‘personality’:
Sally to Angel: She really loved your energy you know.

Pete: If you resonate with someone's energy, then the [oracular] reading will work well. If not then you might as well not bother.

Energy can also be used to describe mood. "My energy's all over the place," or "the energy just wasn't right" can denote a more temporary state of affairs than that of energy in its 'personality' sense. Ultimately here, what we have is a native construct which is both descriptive and prescriptive of the moods and sensibility of the contemporary (neo)romantic or 'subjectivist expressionist' (Taylor 1989:507) western individual.

The Energy of Groups

Bill (referring to a defunct magickal group): I miss those nights at Charlton House, and I miss the I.O.U.
Francis (nonchalantly): Well, energy comes and energy goes.

Magickal practitioner: Last names aren't important.

This comment was made by both one of Luhmann's informants (1989:21) and two of my own.

In a chapter of Expressions of Identity (1997) entitled "Expressive Organisation and Emotional Communities", Kevin Hetherington, drawing on the rather obscure work of German sociologist Schmalenbach (1922), attempts to revive Schmalenbach's concept of a Bund (pl. Bundê) to denote the type of group formed by, among others, "New Age groups". The Bund is according to Hetherington (1997:98) an:

elective, unstable, affectual form of sociation[;] the social bonding involved is intense but because of its elective origin is very weak, requiring considerable effort in self-management (Gurvitch, 1941). The cohesion of the group is maintained through forms of identification often organised around some form of charismatic identification. This is often expressed through the performance of one's commitment to the group's goals, and through identification with its ethics of aesthetics and tribal symbols.

This charisma is in Hetherington's eyes (1997:93) more likely to be of a generalised kind (rather than modelled along the original Weberian lines as being located in a specific individual) in accordance with the anarcho-libertarian tendencies of magickal
practitioners, though Greenwood (2000:ch.5) notes that there are individuals on the magickal scene who may be described as wielding charismatic authority over others (see also Roth 1979). In emic terms, the word ‘energy’ can be used to describe what the scholar on the etic would term the ‘charisma’ of individuals as Hetherington (1997:93) has noted. (“His energy’s gone a bit bad recently,” Charlie said of an individual whom she then perceived as behaving badly.)

Thus far all is well, if rather general, with Hetherington’s construct of the Bund. However, as Hetherington’s (1997:98) definition of the Bund continues, problems arise. “Bundë”, Hetherington (1997:98) writes, “are small in scale and generally based on face-to-face interaction.” To state that Bundë are “small in scale” is meaningless (small relative to what, precisely?), and as Hetherington slyly acknowledges in a footnote (1997:100n.4), Bundë are not necessarily face-to-face groups as we have seen in the case of the internet communities of which many of my informants were members. Further, “Bundë are maintained through active, reflexive monitoring of group solidarity by those involved”. This is not an unreasonable postulate, but the fact that one could say the same about, say, the army or a collective of office workers reduces its analytical value to nil. Furthermore, Hetherington (1997:98) claims, “Bundë are self-enclosed and produce a code of practices and totemic symbols which serve as the basis for identification. Bundë involve the blurring of the public and private spheres of life for their members.” The former is absolutely not the case with magickal groups which often interlock with others, while the latter is possibly but by no means necessarily the case with the magickal group.

Ultimately however it is this comment (1997:98) with which I will take greatest issue:

Bundë are both emotional communities and moral communities, involving affectual and value-rational forms of action. One source of their instability may be due to the fact that there is little that is private for the individual; the maintenance of a Bund as a group is paramount and an individual’s wishes are secondary to that.

Here Hetherington is overstressing the Durkheimian idea of a community of believers at the expense of the anarcho-libertarian tendencies of magick, contrary to his earlier acknowledgement that charisma is more evenly spread throughout the group rather than located in one or a few leaders. No group of Thelemites hellbent on doing their
Will could exist in such a formation, by definition. “Organising pagans is like herding cats,” an exhausted Pat was heard to mutter after the eclipse ritual in Cornwall in 1999. Or (as the reader may recall from Chapter 1) as King Arthur Pendragon stated of magickal practitioners, “we dance to our own tune, and we’re all tone deaf”.4

While Hetherington acknowledges that the Bund is similar to Maffesoli’s (1996) concept of the neo-tribe, Gurvitch’s (1941) notion of “communion” and Moss-Kanter’s (1976) “intentional community”, but social anthropologists are at this juncture most likely to be thinking of Victor Turner’s (1969, 1974) construct of communitas, which Hetherington (1997:95-98) takes to be the ‘social glue’ of the Bund. Similarly, Prince and Riches (2000) have viewed Turner’s concept as the very raison d’etre of “the New Age”. I have serious reservations about making a sharp distinction between communitas and social structure and the implication that the two can ever be truly separate (why cannot communitas in itself be a type of structure?), and moreover I am not unaware of Brian Morris’s (1987:259-63) savaging of the notion of communitas as a viable analytical construct. However, what I wish to do here however is not so much problematise the notion of communitas as focus on the lack of it. I am genuinely surprised by the naivety of an otherwise insightful scholar such as Hetherington in this regard, likewise Luhrmann (1989:7), and Prince and Riches (2000) likewise imply that their Glastafarians also enjoy relatively utopian social relations (though conflict is covered, briefly and badly, in their work, e.g. 2000:130-4, 162, 253).

As much as I would like to represent the magickal subculture as an utopia, I cannot. Sometimes, Graham Harvey’s line that pagans “all hate each other” seems disappointingly close to the truth. During my time in the field, I came to learn of death threats, fistfights, and false allegations made to police regarding child abuse. Very recently, allegations of sexual crimes were made against one of my own informants, Steve Wilson.1 Moreover, such overt magickal fallings out can only be the tip of the iceberg, because much hostility will be expressed in the form of cursing, of which Phil Hine (p.c.) remarks, “like masturbation, there is far more of it going on than anyone cares to admit”.

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We have already covered some points of tension within the magickal subculture in Chapter 5, and before going further, we should remind ourselves that we saw how the spatial syntax of ‘high and light’ and ‘low and dark’ structures the magickal subculture and its members relations to one another. If we introduce orgonomy into this equation, we see (perhaps predictably) that the ‘high and light’ realm corresponds to ‘high and light’ energies, and ‘low and dark’ corresponds to ‘low energies’ (or “base level energies” in Angel’s words quoted in Chapter 1), with ‘dark’ or ‘dangerous’ energies.

There is however more to the situation than this, because even within a group, be it a ‘high and light’ or ‘low and dark’ one, or a nature-oriented group ‘in between’ using the “darklight” symbol, energy constitutes a vital variable through which social conflict is described and prescribed. Though I agree that ‘energy’ can be deployed as a metaphorical justification for ideological pluralism as Brown (1997:90) has suggested, what Brown has not noted (possibly due to the fact his fieldwork was more limited than my own) is that quite contrary to the first suggestion, ‘energy’ may and can function equally well as metaphorical description of or prescription for social conflict. Talk of energy can be deployed in just such a way as to reduce social solidarity and increase social tensions within a group of magicians as the following example illustrates.

“Her energy just wasn’t right for this group”, the priestess of a Wiccan coven, Jane, once told me of Sarah. Sarah’s version of events was that, “the sight of her stark naked and choking on a piece of apple ain’t pretty, I can tell you!” Jane is an experienced coven priestess and had invited Sarah to participate in a ritual one festival. During the ritual, Jane had been eating a piece of apple and it had lodged in her throat. This unfortunate occurrence was then blamed on Jane’s energy. In my opinion, the most likely explanation for this was the fact that, consciously or otherwise, Jane had taken some kind of dislike to Sarah. One point which may be relevant is that Sarah is an extremely attractive woman by the standards of this society, and had indeed worked as an “exotic cabaret dancer” much of her life. Jane on the other hand, at least by those same standards of our society, is not so attractive; she is somewhat older than Sarah and, in the vernacular, ‘fat’. Perhaps what we have here is a simple case of sexual competition; Sarah’s recounting of events, it has to be
said, is somewhat ‘catty’. Had Jane not choked during the ritual, I’m sure some other event could have been interpreted as an indication that Sarah’s energy was not right for that group at that time. Moreover, Jane could have blamed her choking on anyone else who had participated in the ritual that night, an astrological phenomenon, or a magickal attack from an enemy. In sum here, energy in this case would seem to serve as a shorthand for aspects of the bodymind of the individual, be that one’s corporeality or personality, and the sometimes cruel social politics associated therewith.

**The Orgonomy of Deities, Techniques and Tools**

Devas, nature spirits, faeries, or elementals are just labels for energies, to make the discussion easier.

Penczak, C., *City Magick* (2001:68)

Raising energy requires knowledge of what energy is needed. Energy comes in many forms. You can use the energy of Earth. You can call upon the four elements of land, air, fire and water. Astrological magick is popular, beckoning the powers of the planets and signs. Specific symbols, spirits, totems, gods and goddesses have specialities. Some may be able to help you in ways others can’t. Your intention rules everything. Research the powers you need if you are not already familiar with them. If you continue to seek power in the cityscape, you will find the spirits and powers there.

Penczak, C., *City Magick* (2001:36)

Deities or pantheons are often referred to as, ultimately, energies. One “works with the energy of” Horus, or perhaps “channels Horus energy”. It is also the case that any magickal system, technique or tool will also be imbued with energy. ‘If one’s energy resonates with x then all well and good’ is a common refrain, ‘x’ being a spirit or deity, a cosmology, a particular magickal object such as a staff or wand, a set of Tarot cards or other oracle. For example, another extract from my fieldnotes:

I ask Nick about an intriguing ring he is wearing, a large silver affair with a beautiful green-white stone in it. Nick doesn’t know exactly what the stone is, but launches into a discussion anyway. It is not his usual Zuni ring, he explains, because that one is being repaired. There’s “not much energy” in the ring he is wearing, and anyway, he is wearing it on the wrong finger. However, the Zuni one has a vast amount of energy. It’s odd, he reports, but he bought the Zuni ring without knowing quite why, put it in a drawer and forgot about it. Some years later, while ferreting about in the drawer for something else he rediscovered it, after which point it had rarely left his finger.
"So," I try to sum up, "What we're saying is that there's energy in the stone, or the ring itself, which is relative to different people, yeah?"

"The unique energy of the individual is going to interact with the unique energy of the ring or whatever in a unique way? ... Yes, definitely," Nick agrees.

"They say you don't chose crystals but that the crystals chose you," chips in Chelsea.

"And on top of that the individual's energy is going to change over time, hence the fact that originally you didn't feel any need to wear the Zuni ring, yeah?"

Nick and Chelsea both agree.

Discourse such as this indicates one highly important dimension of magickal practice: the individual must understand the notion of energy and be skilled enough in orgonautics to be able to consciously assess whether she or he "resonates" with a place, object or person at any given point in time. This will also apply to a particular magickal technique or practice, and the extremely high levels of syncretism and variability observed within the magickal subculture are approached by an individual 'consumer' in precisely such terms: 'is system x or oracle y an energy which I feel drawn to work with right now?' being the underlying question in any decision-making process. As Brown (1997:90) rightly states, 'energy' is the "common denominator" and despite the perhaps bewildering multiplicity of techniques and labels, energy is what all magick and perhaps all alternative spirituality seems to come down to. We can also see from the above dinner-party chat that there is a multiplicity of variables involved in the orgonomic universe. The individual has energy which is diachronically variable, as do places and objects. All three are potentially interactive. What in fact we find ourselves presented with in magickal discourse and practice is a field theory or process philosophy.
Field Theory, Process Philosophy and the Aesthetic Correlative

In classical (Newtonian) physics, an electromagnetic field was defined as an arrangement of discreet, electrically charged particles. This field exerted a force on each particle determined by the position of the particle in relation to the others. But modern (Einsteinian) physics inverted this concept, defining ‘particles’ themselves as stable patterns of electromagnetic waves. This model viewed the energy field as primary, and the ‘objects’ in it as complicated perturbations of that field.

Belgrad (1998:120)

Art reflects this new reality. [Yaacov Agam declares] “We are different from what we were three moments ago, and in three minutes more, we will be different... I try to give this approach a plastic expression by creating a visual form that doesn’t exist. The image appears and disappears, but nothing is retained.”

Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (1970:166)

We saw that surrealism shares a great deal in common with magick. If we move from surrealism into the realms of the postwar avant-garde, we see how the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, adopted knowingly or otherwise by certain artists, presents us with another overlap of ideas and actions in the realms of art and magick. Belgrad (1998:127, author’s italics) writes, “[a]s a model [...], field theory suggests an immanent natural law that governs not the place of all objects, but the dynamics of all relations among objects”. Whitehead’s ‘process philosophy’, based on Einsteinian physics and stressing in Belgrad’s (1998:126) words that the most basic “building blocks of nature are not enduring ‘atoms’, but ‘events’ or occasions defined by overlapping fluxes of energy in space-time”. Hence, Belgrad (1998:121) writes:

The energy field model of human experience led painters and poets to develop artistic forms consistent with “composition by field,” including gesture-field painting, projective verse, and collage. The social vision expressed through these forms, articulated most clearly in the poems of Charles Olson, defined society itself as a plastic medium with which the artist grappled.

This ideological innovation which underlay so much of the art produced by the postwar avant-garde which presents us with a way of thinking remarkably similar to or compatible with that of the postmodern magickal practitioner. I am not suggesting in this instance that the average magickal practitioner is necessarily directly familiar with, say, abstract expressionism or kinetic art in the way that she or he seems to be
with surrealism. The similarity in this case would appear indirect-descriptive rather than direct-causal. What we do find however is that comparisons have been drawn between Daoism and Whitehead’s process philosophy (Graham 1981:183, Hall 1978; 1982:186,255, and Hartshorne 1979), so here lies one explanation for this similarity. Another would simply be that similar theory and practice were arrived at independently: Charles Olson, Jackson Pollock, Yaacov Agam, Alexander Calder et al. were after all operating within the same culture as western magickal practitioners.

**Energy and Agency**

Pat: I sooo nearly hit him with a blast of really nasty energy. I mean, I know you shouldn’t do that, and in the end I didn’t, I was able to stop myself, but he so nearly got it that night!

So much for energies just ‘being there’, albeit in a state of flux and change. But what of human agency? What of orgonautics and, as it were, orgometamorphosis? For the position of the magickal practitioner is not a passive one. Energies are explored and manipulated; the magickal practitioner makes energy, but not within energies of her or his own making. Almost any act performed by a magickal practitioner can be described as orgonautic. A ‘results magick’ ritual is an attempt to manipulate energy with the intention of bringing about a concrete result in the physical world. Rituals intended to affect or alter the self in some way will also be a form of orgonautics, whether the aspect of the self in question is physical or psychological. As Penczak (2001:37) states:

Those who practice magick have long known the power of the circle. The circle holds energy during a ritual. Here, as you raise energy, it will build to a crescendo. Energy can be raised through ritual, dance, visualisation, concentration, masturbation or sex. Once released, the energy from the circle will fulfil the spells cast. The circle, when made correctly, protects the user from harm during the ritual. I actually visualise the circle becoming a sphere once it is cast. This globe of light and energy blocks out all unwanted forces. Only the spirits and energies called upon can enter the circle. I call only for those coming in perfect love and perfect trust, in complete harmony with my magical intentions. You qualify the energy you want in your space by charging the circle with those intentions.

And (2001:41):
Once all the powers have gathered, I then see the circle turn into a sphere, a bubble containing energy. To psychically ‘stoke’ the flames I have called into being, I visualise the ball getting brighter and more intense as the energy grows. You can use movement, song, or intention to build the energy, then program it with your will. […]

Your intention should be simple, direct and clear. Once the energy is programmed with your intent, you are ready to release it. Through the ritual, you raise the cone of power, directing the beam of energy infused with intent through reality like a shot, a signal flare petitioning your needs to the universe. You raise it by raising your hands to the sky and visualising the energy being released. Then let go of your intention with your conscious mind. Do not hold onto it, or your thoughts will sap its energy, bringing it back to you, and undermining your spell. As with a computer program, if the designer continually tinkers with the program, it will never run. […]

After raising the cone of power, make sure to ground yourself and release whatever energy remains into the earth. Return the energy with the intention of healing for Earth and all who are part of her. Then release the circle and close the sacred space.

To release, start in the north and thank and release all the powers that have joined you, moving counterclockwise. Thank each quarter’s element and guardian and release them from the circle, with respect, honour and gratitude. These are guests in your space and should be treated as such.

Once the four quarters have been released, retrace your circle in the direction opposite to how you cast it. Visualise the energy dissipating, fading away, going back into your wand, or expanding infinitely across the cosmos, working your magick. A good magick worker is one who can not only call up powerful energy, but one who also knows how to release it.

And, when magick produces no results, energy is to blame. “Your back needs more energy than I can give it,” a healer once explained when I mentioned that the “energy healing” session did not seem to have eased my pain.

**Cosmology and Orgonomy**

202. Watch all that is solid melt into air.


Angel (to a friend on the phone): It just feels really… well, like I’m making footprints in sand really.

In reality, the different meanings of ‘energy’, the different forms thereof, are inextricably linked.

Bill: How did your meeting with Jilly go?
Jan: Badly. Dunno... think there was some bad energy around.

We see in this quotation a possible example of topographical energy, but the statement is a little less straightforward than Jim’s assertion (cited above) that the place had “bad energy”; for Jan there was energy around, but it is not entirely clear whether this energy is linked to the place in a topographic sense, or pertains to the two individuals concerned in an emotional sense, or indeed just ‘appeared from nowhere’. All three possibilities are worth exploring. Both women were Londoners and Jilly in particular demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the magickal psychogeography of London; it is inconceivable then that they would have chosen to meet in a location which either of them believed to be generally imbued with ‘bad energy’. Given also that the two women were (indeed still are) good friends, their ‘energies’ in a personality sense must to their minds be generally compatible or ‘resonating’. If therefore the use of the term here denotes a personal state, it must be ‘mood’ rather than personality. The third explanation is either valid in itself or compatible with the ‘mood explanation’, and that is that the meeting of the two women was somehow ‘polluted’ by another, possibly malevolent energy; ‘bad energy’, they would acknowledge, could have polluted one or other or both of them at any point since their last banishing ritual or ritual cleansing prior to their meeting.

At this stage we are able to use the native ‘science’ of orgonomy to further explain various features of postmodern magickal practice. First, energy is relative to the individual. In this it is quite unlike *kundalini* or *qi* in that it has been hugely subjectivised. Moreover, it is specific to the individual at a particular point in time rather than being diachronically consistent. It is here that we see the cosmological correlative to the high degree of variability in magickal practice, both within an individual’s ‘magickal career’ and within the magickal subculture as a whole. The notion of energy movement, the notion of the energy in the world being in a state of flux, is one which must be acknowledged if we are to fully appreciate the magickal lifeworld. We have seen the topographical ‘energy’ of place, which is diachronically variable. We have seen the psychological ‘energy’ of persons, which as we have seen is not static either. We see the sociopolitical ‘energy’ of human interactions, which is also not static. On all three of these levels then, “energy comes and goes”, and as the
energies come and go on these levels they will interact. The stress on spontaneity and the unpredictable and variable nature of magickal practice can also be explained by reference to the native notion of existence in the energy field. The inner self is fluid; the outer world is fluid. To my informants, as we have seen, the two are not as sharply distinguished as they are in the Cartesian tradition; “as within, so without”. A variable being existing in a variable field of energy or energies then is what the postmodern magickal conceives of herself or himself to be and it is through this cosmological construct that she or he experiences their being. I will continue to ‘unpack’ this notion in the following Chapter. For now, I will remind the reader of the painting by Jack Blackburn (Fig. 1.3 in Chapter 1).

Fig. 7.1: Painting by Jack Blackburn. Jack refuses to offer an interpretation thereof, but when questioned, Chelsea explained that to her, it represented the fluxing energies of the cosmos. None of the other residents in the flat disagreed, and as I became increasingly familiar with the Heraclitan magickal universe, Chelsea’s interpretation came to seem quite appropriate.
Finally here, I will let one of my informants have the final word on energy.

**Naked Flame:** I always get a kick out of trying to harmonise opposing paradigms. I'm that kind of crazy guy.

So... science informs us that matter is energy. So, everything's energy. Then we get bogged down trying to figure out what kind of energy and end up drowning in New Age buzzwords.

All the subjective experiences recounted above have more to do with classifying energy. But we know from quantum mechanics that the act of observation is itself an act of change - this is why it's so goddam [sic] slippery, because we can't adequately explain the senses that we're using to key into these esoteric energies, and even if we could, by interacting with them we've modified reality.

Bone Idol's description of *qigong* [energy working] feeling more like efficiency than energy is a big clue... it tells us that what we're talking about in this process of sensing is an interaction between systems. My *Reiki* instructor told me that I'd feel sensations of energy - tingling, heat, cold, etc - when I started practising but informed me that these would disappear in time. When I asked why, she told me that the sensations were not the energy but my resistance to the energy. This leaves me thinking that there are zillions of different kinds of energy both physical and metaphysical. Wavelengths. Patterns. Polarities. We cannot know them, we can only glimpse how they work when the interact with other systems. And if we're in harmony with them we may never notice that they're there. What we can do is flow with them and see what happens in our bodies and minds... but be aware that by the time you sense it, you've already transformed it into something else.

**Conclusion**

So much for the emic voice, but we of course need to return to the questions which I have argued should run through any social-constructionist study of magick: why this? Why now? Why orgonomy? Why a universe of fluid energy? Why are certain aspects of the Daoist and Hindu traditions being integrated into the magickal cosmos while others are quietly ignored? In what ways does an orgonomic universe 'make sense', socio-culturally-speaking? After all, Heraclitus declared that the only permanence is change some three thousand years ago, but it is hardly as though his idea struck a chord so voluble that he changed the face of ancient Greek religion. And here, I suggest, lies our answer. There must be something about the contemporary, about the postmodern condition, which accounts for the marked stress on the fluidity of the self and the world which we have seen in magickal discourse and practice. It is not awfully difficult to discern what this might be; like the authors whose papers appear in Lash and Friedman 1992, what concerns us (and my informants) here is an experience "of movement, of flux, of change, of unpredictability" (Lash and Friedman...
1992:1, authors’ italics), but in this regard, I will draw upon a classic of social science, *Future Shock* (1970) by Alvin Toffler.

Though the analysis therein rests on the examination of vast swathes of data, the argument presented is relatively simple. Toffler’s focus in *Future Shock* is as his title might suggest, the marked speed of change which has come to characterise contemporary life, what he describes as “the roaring current of change, a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots” (1970:11). There is no doubt that Toffler has a strong point here, and indeed the number of academic studies (most often from the field of social psychology) on which he draws indicate that he is not alone in his contentions, though he seems to have been the first to synthesize them, expand upon them and emphasize this aspect of the contemporary with such fervour. (It ought to be noted briefly that Toffler’s thesis is flawed in some regards. His perception of “occultism” and “mysticism” as pathological does not impress me, and his rather apocalyptic fears of a “massive adaptional breakdown” unless “man [sic] [...] learns to control the rate of change in his [sic] personal affairs as well as in society at large” (1970:11) seem to be either the product of an over-excited author or a crude attempt to boost sales with sensationalism.) Such problems aside however, we may readily draw on this work to elucidate magick. For magick, with its stress on a fluid cosmos and protean self, immediately strikes one as being quite in line with the rapidly-changing world analysed by Toffler. However, far from trying to reduce or control change as Toffler recommends (and as, perhaps do some other religious forms, particularly those labelled fundamentalist), magick accepts change and as it were ‘runs with it’ on a cosmological level. The notion of energy in flux may I suggest be read as a way of magickal practitioners making meaningful the vicissitudes of contemporary self and society on a cosmological level.

**Notes**

1. Steve Wilson may be renowned for being ‘blunt’ and loud, but I must take this opportunity to state that in my experience of him, he is not sexually dangerous to
young males; being both young and male, I imagine that I would have found out if he had been.

2. As Pearson (2002:121) notes, the significance of the apple in magick is because “when cut across […] a pentagram is revealed in the seed pods”.

3. In October 2000, Dr. C. Stewart and myself turned an anthropology of religion lecture at University College into a debate between ourselves as to whether the Hetheringtonian or Roth-Greenwood stance was more accurate, but as is often the way, we were both arguing partial truths.

4. The classic example of the prevailing belief that groups are non-hierarchical is provided by a commonplace exchange which I heard more than once during my fieldwork. Whenever a police officer approached a group of my informants engaged in public ritual, s/he would immediately enquire, “Who’s in charge here?” Always, the reply s/he received was along the lines of, “We’re pagans. No one’s in charge.” Eventually, officers had to settle for ‘someone to talk to’, rather than a ‘leader’.

On the other hand, Greenwood (2000:137-144) reports what she judges to be an “abuse of power” by a priestess, and such an occurrence is not an isolated one. More common would seem to be the actual or attempted sexual manipulation of women by experienced male magickal practitioners, though one of my female informants claims to have been sexually pressured by a woman priestess. However, charisma works both ways, as the following incident illustrates. After he had presented a talk on his experience of Thelema at Talking Stick one night, Ben, a few others and myself went to a nearby gay club. An audience member tagged along, despite Ben’s attempts to discourage him. Though it was not clear to me exactly what was happening, the situation culminated in Ben furiously explaining to the gentleman in question that no one needs to be initiated by anyone else; if he thought that was how things worked, then he had missed the whole point of magick and anyway, would he kindly leave. It turned out that this (“straight”) man had become convinced that Ben had a wondrous “magickal current” and that it could be passed onto him only through an act of penetrative sex. (It is also significant given the reputation of the Thelemites as being mad, bad and dangerous to know that Ben did not take advantage of this offer.)
"Found in Space"?

The puzzle most frighteningly and ubiquitously present in all daily pursuits is the course of one’s life, not the moment of death. It is the ebbs and flows of luck, the rise and fall of values one has become used to cherishing, the eccentricity of ever changing expectations, the capriciousness of the rules which keep altering before the game is finished, the cacophony of voices in which it is hard to pinpoint the leading motif - which most painfully, with the most immediate and tangible effects, defy understanding.


Live the journey, for every destination is but a doorway to another.

Motto of the Temple of the Midnight Bimbos

Americans should know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for travelling souls.

Walt Whitman (cited in Morgan 1991:288)

I’ve got to travel in a different way. A new map. A new kind of navigation for a new kind of topography.

Kano in *Bad Company* (2000AD, issue 1275:np)

Angel: It just feels... well, like I’m making footprints in sand really.

(Angel made this remark to a friend on the phone, shortly before her three-month stay in Chelsea’s flat came to an end.)

279. Draw your own maps.


Introduction

Here I will build on the data and analysis of the previous chapters by examining in more detail the frequent topographical and cartographical metaphors which one
encounters in magickal discourse and practice. Idioms of location are vital to a full understanding of magick and the postmodern condition which has engendered its form and function. We saw in Chapter 5 that everyone involved with magick will judge each other according to whether they perceive them as 'high' and 'white', 'middle' and 'green', or 'low' and 'black', and that these assessments are relative to the observer's own location and 'colour coding'. However, there is a good deal more to metaphorical locations in magickal discourse than this, for wherever they locate themselves and others, the magickal practitioner also speaks of being 'on a journey', of being 'on a path'; such a sense of movement is absolutely basic to magickal discourse and practice. This path is highly individualised, and comments such as "I walk my path and no one else's", or "We must all find our own path," occur commonly. Though I am prepared to countenance the notion that topographical metaphors are universal in occurrence, within magickal discourse these topographical metaphors are both notable in their quantity, and subculturally quite specific in their quality. I will argue that such metaphors are to a significant extent constitutive of the discourse and practice in question, and that without analysing them in detail, we will never understand the more medical anthropological dimension, the therapeutic dimension, of magick, which relates to the high levels of uncertainty associated with a postmodern condition.²

Magickal Cartography

In its fundamentalist rendition, religion is not a 'personal matter', privatised as all other individual choices and practised in private, but the nearest thing to a compleat mappa vitae [...].


In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going.

Taylor, C., Sources of Self (1989:54)

We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
Though I started this chapter by stating that the magickal practitioner is on a journey, I was perhaps getting a little ahead of myself (to use yet another spatial metaphor). For we should begin here with the experience of not being involved with magick, that is to say, ask ourselves ‘what was the metaphorically spatialised state of affairs before the magickal practitioner undertook her or his journey along their magickal path?’ The simple answer is that she or he invariably reports having been “lost”.

First, data, the magickal practitioners speaking for themselves, giving us some textual examples of the image of lostness and consequent cartographic concerns in magickal cognition. The first part of the title of this chapter is obviously a quotation; astrologer Laura Boomer has written an astrology book (unpublished at the time of writing) with that title phrase. Her implication is clearly that before one reads the book, one will have been ‘lost in space’. Moreover, not only do practitioners claim to have been lost, but certain scholars also use the term ‘lost’ with apparently no critical awareness whatsoever. Greenwood (2000:85) for example does precisely this, writing of a “lost postmodern self”.

Neoshaman Kenneth Meadows (2001:3) has more to say on the matter. He writes of an “Earth Walk”, explaining that:

Your Earth Walk is the way you live your life. It is the way you express your personality. The way you live out your dreams. Your aspirations. Your hopes. Your fears.
Is your Earth Walk an aimless stroll, or a weary trudge? Does it show the flounce of impatience or the stiff step of anger? Or is it the brisk, determined stride of ambition which will let nothing stand in its way?

Whatever the mood of your Earth Walk, where are you on this Earth journey? Where are you situated now? Where have you come from? And where are you headed? Is life an exciting adventure, or just a bore? If you are bewildered through frustration and disappointment, if you are confused, is it not because you have no clear directions? You have been given no map of the territory, and you can see no signposts to guide you. You have no co-ordinates by which to plot your position, nor any chart on which to locate it. Is it, then, any wonder if life to you is an unanswerable puzzle?

Earth Medicine provides you with a chart, and the means, to guide your way. It is a unique life science based upon North American Indian Medicine teachings which had their origins in an even more ancient wisdom and though once lost, can now be regained. [...] Earth Medicine had many uses, including methods of self-knowledge and self-realisation. Earth Medicine develops those methods and sets out to explain how the soul puts on a garment of a physical body in order to experience matter and how, according to its position or perception point on the Wheel of Life, it connects with Earth influences and forces that can further, through experience, its spiritual development.

An assertion of 'lostness' and a consequent concern with mapping then, an abundance of cartographical metaphors, emerges in the book's early pages; that life is an "unanswerable puzzle" because one is 'lost' is Meadows' basic starting point.

For Meadows, however, one is walking on the earth, and the metaphorical territory is solid. For many other magickal practitioners, this is not so. Rune mage Ralph Blum likewise thinks with topographic and cartographic metaphors, but they are more nautical, indicating a passage across a more fluid 'territory'. Writing of the runic oracular system, Blum (1982:30-31, author's italics) states:

For a brief span of interacting with the Runes you are declaring a free zone in which your life is malleable, vulnerable, and open to change. We are living in an age of radical discontinuity. The lessons come faster and faster as our souls and the universe push us into new growth. Familiar waters seem suddenly unfamiliar, alive with uncharted shoals and shifting sandbars. The old maps are outdated; we require new navigational aids. And the inescapable fact is: You are your own cartographer now.

Moreover, he further states (1982:31, my italics):

Whatever the Runes may be - a bridge between the self and the Self, a link between the Self and the Divine, and ageless navigational aid - the energy that engages them is our own and, ultimately, the wisdom as well.

Meanwhile, magickal practitioner Nevill Drury (2000:1) has written:
Some have regarded occult exploration as inherently dangerous - as a foray into uncharted waters. To some extent this fear is warranted, for magic is by definition an esoteric tradition and involves the exploration of hidden or unknown human potentials.

In an article significantly titled *Halfway Up The Mountain*, Mariana Caplan (2000, author’s italics) writes:

The bright lights of mystical experiences and ecstasy often mark the entrance to the spiritual path, and the end of the road promises something equally satisfying, but in between is a muddy road. It is a muddy road because nothing about the spiritual path is certain. [...] Our inner voice may give us necessary guidance, or it may feed us lies. [...] The spiritual path is alive. It can and will change before our eyes.

As for the witches, according to Starhawk (1990:213):

The Goddess [...] is the bridge on which we can cross the chasms within ourselves, which were created by our social conditioning, and reconnect with our lost potentials. She is the ship, on which we sail the waters of the deep self, exploring the uncharted seas within. She is the door, through which we pass into the future. She is the cauldron, in which we who have been wrenched apart simmer again until we are whole. She is the vaginal passage, through which we are reborn.

Witch (and academic) V.Crowley (p.c.) has also spoken of an experience of occupying “shifting ground”.

Finally, Alan Moore (2001:2) writes of a:

choking dry-ice smog of disappointment, pooling in the drops and troughs of suddenly uncertain ground. Mudyards, with here and there the smoking wrecks of ideologies, their wheels and radios gone. [...] These are the fretful margins of the twentieth century, the boomtown’s ragged edge out past the sink estates, the human landfill, where the wheelchair-access paving quakes, gives way like sphagnum moss beneath our feet. It’s 1999, less like a date than a number we resort to in emergencies.

What we are presented with then is a discourse in which the individual is in constructed as being in a state of transit, in which mapping is an integral concept, and moreover, it is a mapping of territory that is fluid rather than solid. On the grounds that no other magico-religious or religio-spiritual discourse is so integrally comprised by these metaphors, it seems that we need to establish why this should be the case.
Jewish student: It’s... hard to say, but when you’re following Judaism, you... it’s not that you’re not open-minded about other people’s beliefs, because you are. It’s just, well, you know where home is and you always come back to it. You know where the boundary posts are. Does that make any sense?

Colleague: I need an anchor. I’ve only been back from the field a few months, and what with splitting up with my partner and all, it’s been stormy weather inside my head. I’m sick of being tossed on that storm, y’know? I really need an anchor...

The presence of topographical and cartographical metaphors in magickal discourse is not then something which I need labour further. What I now wish to establish is what they mean, why they are there. Meadows’ (2001:3) statement that one has “no map of the territory”, “no signposts”, “no co-ordinates by which to plot [one’s] position, nor any chart on which to locate it” indicate what is often seen as a common problem, or common metaphorical expression of a common problem, of postmodernity, and not one which is necessarily confined to those who turn to magick. For example, an aspiritual student of mine wrote up her experience of postmodernity thus:

Without wishing to start this essay on a rather melancholic note, this year the glass bubble I had inhabited all my life shattered. Any master narrative I thought there might have been broke into a million shards of subjective and incompatible truths. “Welcome to “the new relative post modern era’,” I was told, almost smugly as if I had been invited into a private joke between superior minds who control this labyrinth of cruel mirrors. I feel as if I have stumbled quite accidentally across an obscure, lonely corner of thought that no one really desires to roam, nor by account of its irreversible nature can I escape and I feel condemned to the oblivion of never knowing a single truth. It is as if I were navigating a ship by the night sky and all the stars suddenly vanished.

(The phrase “new relative postmodern era”, it should be noted, is that of Lawson 2001.) In the above passage, we have a multiplicity of metaphors. Metaphors of ‘shattering’ and ‘shards’ are of course indicative of a sense of fragmentation, in this case, of truth. The ‘mirror’ metaphor is also a common one: Grant Morrison (1994:13) has written of a “cancer” of mirrors, and better-known I imagine would be T.S.Eliot’s use of the phrase “wilderness of mirrors” in Gerontion (1963:41). The bewildering multiplicity of narratives and representations associated with a postmodern condition is not something which I need detail; it is the metaphors of ‘lostness’ which concern me here. We have the metaphor of being in a “labyrinth”, and the metaphor of having difficulty “navigating” due to a lack of objective external
reference points, or at least, of fixed external reference points. Both metaphors have been used before, and this I think is highly significant. The labyrinth metaphor has a rather distinguished history: in Nietzsche’s poem *Ariadne’s Lament*, the god Dionysus informs her: “I am your labyrinth”. Foucault, High Priest of the postmodern *Kathedernihilismus*, develops the same metaphor in Raymond Roussel (1963) or *Death and the Labyrinth* (1986) and also in *Such a Cruel Knowledge* (1962:610). (We will encounter the metaphor of the labyrinth again later on in this chapter.) As for this sense of stars suddenly vanishing, T.S.Eliot also the phrase “more distant and more solemn than a fading star” in that heartrending critique of modernity, *The Hollow Men* (1963:90). Such a metaphor is hardly confined to ‘high’ culture: a popular song by the band Dubstar is called *Stars* and mournfully puts across the image of stars going out.

The image of navigational aids suddenly vanishing then is far from rare in our postmodern culture. But why do we find it alongside hydrological and nautical metaphors, these images of being on water, in water or even under water? T.S.Eliot may be of some assistance here as well, for in *East Coker* (1963:198-9), he enquires:

Had they deceived us,
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?
The serenity only of a deliberate hebetude,
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets
Useless in the darkness into which they peered
Or from which they turned their eyes. There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.
In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimmep, where there is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantment. Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

The houses are all gone under the sea.
Grant Morrison also deploys such a metaphor in his short story *lovecraft in heaven* [sic] (1994:13):

> He reaches out to touch the thing he no longer recognises as his own reflection. Long, feminine fingers pass through the glassy membrane, causing ripples and little cries.


> The mirror fluxes, alive with uncanny tides and the odours of pure creation.

(The text continues thereafter to describe a now familiar pattern of directionality whereby something “stirs and rises from the depths”; we saw enough of that sense of self and spirituality in Chapter 5.)

A lack of secure foothold, an experience of inundation, ‘territory’ which is at best unstable or at worst absolutely liquefied is also a common metaphor in fundamentalist discourse. One Randall Terry, fundamentalist Christian and militant anti-abortion activist raged against the fact that in the U.S.A., people are “floating in the uncertain sea of humanism” rather than enjoying life in a “country whose unmoving bedrock is Higher Laws” (Ginzburg 1993:568). Lawson (2001:23), who’s work was drawn on by the student quoted above demonstrates a variation on this hydrological image in suggesting that those experiencing the “new relative postmodern era” have a subjective sense of “drowning in a sea of ideas”. However, my informants are not so much *Not Waving But Drowning* as Stevie Smith’s (1983:303) famous poem has it; or at least, a graffito by one of them on the toilet wall in the Red Lion public house in Avebury claimed: *Not Drowning but Raving*.

So *why* do people report being ‘lost’ on ‘unsolid land’, ‘lost at sea’, or even ‘drowning in sea’, in these interesting times of ours? Why does *H.O.D.* member Francis believe that we are “*adrift in the peculiarity of existing*” (emphasis mine)? Why does an individual experiencing a postmodern condition want a metaphorical map of territory which is metaphorically not solid?
Epistemological Uncertainty

Strange to know nothing, never to be sure
Of what is true or right or real,
But forced to qualify Or so I feel,
Or Well, it does seem so:
Someone must know.


Most people know more as they get older:
I give all that the cold shoulder.

I spend my second quarter century
Losing what I had learnt at university.


There is no end, but addition: the trailing
Consequence of further days and hours,
While emotion takes to itself the emotionless
Years of living among the breakage
Of what was believed in as the most reliable -
And therefore the fittest for renunciation.


Confusion is a fundamental state of mind
It doesn’t really matter what I’m figuring out
I’m guaranteed to wind up in a state of doubt
And sanity is a full time job
In a world that is always changing [...]

Gurewitz, B., *Sanity*[^4]

Don’t tell me about the answer
Another one will come along soon
I don’t believe you have the answer - I’ve got ideas too

Griffin, G., *The Answer*[^4]

Drew (to traveller): Y’know, life’s not sooo bad, once you’ve figured out the rules.
Traveller: (Laughs cynically) Yeah, but by the time you’ve got ‘em figured they’ve bloody well changed!
The entire knowledge system in society is undergoing violent upheaval. The very concepts and codes in terms of which we think are turning over at a furious and accelerating pace. We are increasing the rate at which we must form and forget our images of reality.


27. Don’t seek the whole.
50. Lay claim to one fragment.
63. Without history, without heroes, rebel against the blindness of information.
73. Turn over your beliefs as fast as your assets.
78. Privatise truth.
80. Pursue multiple narratives that neither explain nor unify.
93. Wallow in an orgy of information.
95. Open up an abyss of infinite analytical regress.
102. Remember, there are no facts, only interpretations.
149. Affirm that some truth is still possible, though a final truth is not.
155. Splinter consensus.
180. Haemorrhage paradigms.
214. Occasionally pause the endless cycle of interpretation.
224. Forsake Marx, embrace Nietzsche.
228. Live without a big picture.
251. Enjoy the confusion.
301. Advance science by expanding the pool of incompatible alternatives.
326. Have beliefs, but don’t believe.
360. Seek provisional truth.


Initially here, I will attempt to separate the ontological from the epistemological (sometimes the two seem to blur into one another on the emic). A postmodern condition entails a realisation that knowledge is less reliable than modernism might have promised (Lyotard 1984). This state of affairs certainly applies to magickal knowledge. As well as magickal truths being personal, the magickal practitioner has the same complaint as did Eliot in *East Coker* (1963:199) in that “the pattern is new in every moment” and hence knowledge has a limited longevity. “I refuse to adopt any belief I can’t divorce when the honeymoon turns sour”, was how one magickal practitioner put it to me. The reader may also recall Anna Qi’s comment cited in Chapter 1 that, “Every time I think I come down to a core set of beliefs I have the rug yanked from underneath my feet”. The fluidity of belief is of course associated with and most obvious within chaos magick, but as various informants and scholars (e.g. R.Sutcliffe 1996:127) have noted, the difference between chaos magick and other forms of magick is one of degree, not kind, and a ‘high turnover rate’ for beliefs is far from uncommon throughout the magickal subculture. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 2,
S.J. Sutcliffe (2000:28) has noted the same of alternative spirituality in general, describing an “individualistic spiritual pragmatism that is ruthlessly accommodated to the cultural flux of the modern [sic] world”.

Ontological Uncertainty

If acceleration is a new social force, transience is its psychological counterpart, and without an understanding of the role it plays in contemporary human behaviour, all our theories of personality, all our psychology, must remain premodern.


Which of many potential selves shall we choose to be? What sequence of serial selves will describe us?

Toffler, A., Future Shock (1970:293)

312. Get along with each of your selves.
332. Mutate.

Boyd, A., Life’s Little Deconstruction Book (1999:np)

You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus

T.S. Eliot, The Dry Salvages (1963:210)

I thought I was him
I thought I was he
But I am neither
I am the one in between.

I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will ultimately be known for a merely polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.

Dr Jekyll, in R.L. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1994:23)

To move into the realms of the ontological then, within the magickal subculture the native is as uncertain of what she or he is as she or he is of what she or he knows. (Again, sometimes it is difficult to separate the two.) In a postmodern condition, a cultural situation wherein identity is problematic, where the mind is “homeless” (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1974), wherein *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (Berman 1983) and the self fluid and multiple (Foucault 1990, Butler 1990, Rose 1990), the ontological is as fluid as the epistemological. Anthony Giddens has of course dealt with this phenomenon at length under the label “ontological insecurity” (1991).

We have seen that the ‘native’ is making a map of her or his “youniverse”, that is to say engaged in a creative or active cosmological endeavour (we might say cosmocartographic endeavour) but as we have also seen, many times throughout this thesis, this cosmos is not distinct from the self of the magickal practitioner. Therefore, the native is mapping the self as well as the world. Mapping the selfworld or ‘autocosmocartography’ is, where the magickal practitioner is at (as it were).

We can expand upon this by drawing a ‘personality’/‘mood’ distinction like the one employed in Chapter 7, though of course in social reality such an etic distinction may be tricky to spot. At times however it is clear. We have seen how popular Jungian Analytical Psychology is with the natives, and how psychoanalytic paradigms are thought to take the magick out of magick (Suster 1989:89). We must also recall however that the humanistic psychology of the H.P.M. is also heavily drawn upon in magickal discourse and practice (York 1996:45; Puttick 2000). The self which we are presented with is one in a state of “growth” and “becoming”. It is not by any means totally fixed or static as Pike (2001:220) and Brown (1997:12,24,176-8,181,189) have also noted (and here Pike, Brown and myself stand quite against Greenwood 2000:10-11). The sheer number of references to one’s “growth” in textual and conversational discourse attests to the fact that my informants are well aware that they change or that, in the words of the bumper-sticker noted by Brown (1997:41), on a ‘personality’
level, “Shift Happens”. The net result of this would appear to be that a hotchpotch of psychological models are often employed by magickal practitioners to explain what the ‘personality’ is, but that these always seem to ‘boil down’ into spatial metaphors. A fragment of Freud, a snippet of Skinner, and a reference to energy will often coalesce into a phrase like, “My relationship with my dad’s fucked up and I’ve still got a lot of conditioning to escape from, a lot of negative energy to work through, but now at least I know where I am, and I know where I want to go”. Or, less positively, “I thought I was on the right path... maybe I wasn’t.”

We can also see the mapping ‘mood’ or what the magickal practitioner might refer to as “headspace”. Dan used the term “psychoscape”; it is possible that he took this from a book by Churchill (2000) entitled *Mindscaping* which, though he would have despised it for being “white light shite”, was on sale in the magickal bookshop in which he worked. I myself deliberately used a spatial metaphor to describe my mood changing in Chapter 1; after rather morbidly dwelling on the dead man’s coffee mug, I reported that “my thoughts move to more cheerful places” as the coffee took effect, and this is clearly a native metaphor. Another relevant datum here would be this exchange between Angel and myself during a period of particularly high workload on my part:

Bill: I haven’t slept for two nights now. It’s weird. I can hallucinate. I can control the hallucinations... they’re optional rather than compulsory. But if I stare at a blank surface, I see colours and patterns. It’s not exactly unpleasant even, it’s just...”
Angel: Not where you want to be right now?
Bill: Exactly, not where I want to be right now. I can’t focus on my work properly at all.

The metaphor deployed by Angel did not have to be a spatial one. She could have finished my sentence for me in a multiplicity of ways. And yet, typical informant that she is, she saw my sleep-deprived plight and consequently irritable mood in terms of me occupying a certain space, an inappropriate space for that time. ‘Mood’, for the native, is a metaphorically topographical phenomenon.
Orgonautics, Fluidity and Process Cartography

Later, it's just a latitude: the map
Points out how unavoidable it was:
'Such coastal bedding always means mishap.'


Furthermore, the relation of native cartography with the native orgonomy should now be considered: a necessary, if obvious step would be to link the mapping of the selfworld to the fluidity of the orgonomic universe which we encountered in the previous chapter, for often in emic reality, the two are inseparable. A Heraclitan universe wherein one cannot step twice in the same river, is integrally related to the metaphors of territorial instability and ontological, epistemological and cosmological fluidity which we surveyed above. Again, Thelemite Gerald Suster (1990:40) will provide us with an appropriate example:

I would suggest that above the Abyss - that is, Kether, Chokmah, Binah and Daath - energy behaves as it does within the atom, in the manner described by quantum theory. Just as electrons abruptly change their positions without appearing to travel any intervening distance in quantum 'jumps', so the energies above the Abyss are in a constant state of flux and interchange. No map can therefore be absolutely right, for we cannot fix what is in flux. However, any given map might describe accurately a given instant in time.

And (1990:39):

Are these arguments really convincing? The student should examine the data and make up his [sic] own mind, for the matter remains in a state of flux, like the Universe Itself.

To make the cartographic endeavour more tricky then, it is something which is ongoing. The world and self, or selfworld, is in flux and therefore so must be the map. Just as physical spaces have energy, so too do the metaphorical ones invoked in the natives' topographies of 'personality' and 'mood'. Rundstrom (1991:21) has written of "process cartography" (the echoes of A.N.Whitehead should be clear enough), and though he uses the term in a cartographological context far removed from magickal discourse and practice, his turn of phrase suggests a cartographic endeavour which is
as he states, “open-ended, ongoing”; this would seem to be precisely what we are dealing with when we look at the contemporary magickal mentalité.

“Maps, Wayfinding and Navigation”

Finally, I want to pose a deceptively simple question here: ‘what is a map?’ If we can establish this, then I suggest we can establish why some contemporary individuals, among them all magickal practitioners, require one. What we will do here is arrive at the same conclusion via, as it were, the opposite route; rather than asking ourselves ‘why do magickal practitioners need maps and think in spatial or cartographic metaphors?’ and analyse a sense of being lost with reference to a postmodern condition, we will ask ourselves ‘what are maps?’, ‘what do they do?’, and the answer to this line of enquiry should and will bring us to the same conclusion. Despite the fact that the initial question might seem rather obvious, a brief glance at the literature on cartography will reveal that if the answer is obvious, it is so in the literal Latin meaning of that term with its overtones of ‘obstruction’. The answer to the question which I have settled on has been arrived at by Tim Ingold in a chapter entitled To Journey Along a Way of Life: Maps, Wayfinding and Navigation (2000:219-242).

Ingold initially makes a foray into the realms of cognitive psychology. Tolman’s (1948) allegation that the rat builds a “cognitive map” of its environment is ‘deconstructed’ on grounds familiar to the social constructionist: it contains a double invalidity in that the work tells us about rats in mazes, not rats generally, not human animals generally and certainly not human animals in their rich (sub)cultural specificity. Ingold argues that rather than building and carrying a map in one’s head, when the human animal is engaged with the process of wayfinding (Ingold’s term for getting about without a map), what she or he is doing is actually historical (2000:219):
It is [...] the ability to situate one's current position within the historical context of journeys previously made - journeys to, from and around places - that distinguishes the countryman [sic] from the stranger.

Ingold (2000:219) concludes that "places do not have locations but histories", and that it is when a place has no history in the mind of the wayfinder that the human animal needs to employ a map.

Though the self of course does have a history, and one need only recall Giddens (1991) work on the ongoing biographical narrativisation of the "modern" self, what the postmodern self does not have is, I suggest, a history which bestows upon it an unproblematic identity or a certain ontology. 'A place with no history' is a perfectly adequate definition of an uncertain ontological future, the unexplored territory or uncharted waters, which the postmodern self is on or in. Far from building houses upon rocks as the Christian parable exhorts (Matt. 7.21-9; Luke 6.47-9), or as fundamentalist Randall Terry's "bedrock" metaphor above suggests, the magickal practitioner remains on the sea, sometimes surfing on wave crests, sometimes perhaps almost drowning in troughs or caught in sudden undertows, always moving, never arriving. As such, the cosmology of the magickal practitioner is far removed from the solid and well-signposted worlds of some others, be they secular moderns or practitioners of other religio-spiritual traditions.6

Conclusion

[...] I hate being preached to by any one group that claims to know the way.

Penczak, C., City Magick (2001:2)


Boyd, A., Life's Little Deconstruction Book (1999:np)
In the final analysis, what we are presented with is a discourse which is comprised to a significant extent by spatial metaphors of travelling and journeying and a detailed examination reveals that such metaphors are in their specifics quite unique in the discourse in question in both quantity and quality. First, no two journeys are alike. This perhaps is where a vast dissonance becomes apparent between magickal discourse and for example, the journey of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* whereby all pilgrims undertake a similar journey. Magickal practitioners however are all on *a* path, not *the* path; it is their own personal path and no one else’s. As Drury (2000:198), states, “[a]ll [...] are on an individual magical journey, and where this will take them is essentially up to them”. Second, relatedly, we *are* the path, as we have seen. The self and world are not distinct. Third, the territory is in flux and so the map is always already subject to frequent and constant revision. This is the reason I have added a question mark to the title of Laura Boomer’s book in the title of this chapter: whether or not the native can ever be “found in space” for very long is highly questionable. The magickal practitioners’ journey is a cartographic narrative devoid of closure, ever opening outwards and onwards. It is a pilgrimage without end, a journey which is ongoing and must be continually mapped as one goes along, and along, and along. As Sutcliffe (2000:17) has stated and as I myself noted during fieldwork when Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters came to the UK for the 1999 solar eclipse, the destination panel on the front of their bus merely reads: *Further*. Or as the Temple of the Midnight Bimboes would have it, “every destination is but a doorway to another”.

Thus it seems that the ‘crumbling cage’ of modern institutions of which Heelas (1996:143) writes then has become a flux of energies, a flurry of swirling subjectivities, to be mapped, remapped and metamapped via a magickal process cartography. It is not so much that all that is solid has melted into air, but that the universe is now composed of a flux of energies. Ultimately, what we are presented with is a prevalent set of metaphors which seem to stem from a culturally particular subjective experience of epistemological and ontological confusion, a lack of identity or ‘authentic’ identity on the level of the self and a spatial narrativisation of individual subjectivity. To sum up in a simple clauses: postmodern subjectivity is experienced via spatial, topographic and cartographic metaphors; contemporary subjectivity is made meaningful via these same metaphors; and a sense of epistemological and
ontological security so badly lacking within a postmodern condition is attempted and
to some extent achieved via magickal discourse and practice.

Notes

1. This motto has been taken from a science fiction television cartoon series, He-
Man. See: http://castlegrayskull.org/

2. The prevalence of topographical metaphors in magickal discourse has been noted
very briefly by Pike (2001:27-28) in her study of “Neopagan” festivals in the
United States, and though Pike has not seen the need to comment thereupon in any
detail, at least she is able to see that such figures of speech are not inevitable and
therefore implied that they constitute grist for the analytical mill.

3. http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/dd.htm#k1a


5. That said, magick does of course still have core beliefs, those outlined in Chapter
2, and agnostic and relativistic comments by informants do not mean that there are
no invariances in the field, far from it.

6. I am aware that Green (n.d.) has also written on uncertainty in paganism, but our
arguments could not be more different. I stress the presence and acceptance of
uncertainty within magick, and the cosmological ramifications of this, whereas
Green views uncertainty as being transformed within pagan discourse. I myself
think that uncertainty is more likely to be transformed in fundamentalisms, as
He experienced everyday life [...] as a whirlwind, *le tourbillon social*. How was the self to live and move in the whirlwind?

Berman, M., on Rousseau, in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1983:17)

Having dealt with spatial metaphors of a topographic and cartographic nature in Chapter 8, this chapter focuses on metaphors of directionality within magickal discourse. It is in this chapter perhaps that we shall see most clearly the postmodern nature of the spatialised discourse in question, a discourse in which notions of 'straightforward progress' associated with modernity are, though not entirely absent, rendered problematic by the frequent occurrence of various non-modern directional metaphors. After all, can one move across shifting ground in a straight line? Can one 'progress' across a fluid terrain? Metaphorical directionality in magickal discourse is not only - unlike so much else within magickal discourse - virtually invariant, but it also provides the magickal subculture with by far its most common symbol, the spiral. Before we examine metaphors of spirality however, we will start by asking ourselves whether magickal discourse can be regarded as modernist in the sense that it entails progressive forward movement. 'Onwards and upwards', is, after all, the direction we ought to be heading in, is it not?
The Evolutionary Ladder: To Climb or Not To Climb?

And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.


By definition, modernism implies progress, and this progress is usually conceptualised in terms of forward and/or upward movement. The ‘evolutionary ladder’ metaphor is of course central in this context. The significance, and ‘upwards and onwards’ nature of the modernist directional metaphor is therefore ‘straightforward’ in every sense of the word. Within magickal discourse and practice, we do encounter scientism and hence modern notions of progress and evolution. It may be a concept of spiritual evolution which raises eyebrows in secular quarters, but a futurism of some sort is clearly present. For example, in Nevill Drury’s comment on the Cabalistically-structured otherworld (1994:29), we hear that “the shaman does not rest in Tiphareth - he [sic] pushes on further up the Tree”, and this Drury regards as a form of “spiritual evolution”. The index to Greenwood’s (2000) autoethnography has eight entries under ‘spiritual evolution’, and a plethora of examples could be used to support a claim that magickal practitioners think in terms of modernist ascension.

However, by now we have seen enough I hope to at least suspect that notions of evolution and progress are not configured in unproblematic modernist terms within magickal discourse. We have seen the affirmative primitivism and orientalism, and we have noted a link with the surrealist endeavour to ‘go back’, ‘regress’, ‘devolve’ and thus mingle two normally opposed directionalities. Modernist culture may wish us to believe it was us moderns in the west who evolved furthest fastest, but the discourse and practice of magick is deviant relative to this notion. Western civilisation may be seen by magickal practitioners as pathological; the ‘march of technological progress’ may be viewed as a partial or even absolute misnomer; the primitive Other may well have a lot to teach us; ‘nature’ may be seen as superior to ‘culture’; perhaps we have not evolved especially far or fast at all. As the rune mage has it, “[i]n the spiritual life, we are always at the beginning” (Blum 1987:30). Or we can consider this statement by Austin Osman Spare (cited in Drury 2000:133), italics Spare’s):
Strike at the highest... death is failure. Go where thou fearest not. How canst thou be great among men? Cast thyself forth! Retrogress to the point where knowledge ceases in that Law becomes its own spontaneity and freedom... This is the new atavism I would teach: Demand of God equality - Usurp!

Regressive atavism leading to autodeification or apotheosis then, would appear to be Spare’s exhortation, and he is by no means exceptional in this. A skein of antimodernism then is readily apparent, and a simple upward movement along the evolutionary ladder can be seen to have been problematised within the subculture in question. Devolution is as important as evolution, and an apparently paradoxical mixture of primitivism and scientism, futurism and/or evolutionism presents itself. We are still however dealing with movement which is conceptualised in terms of a straight line. If we look more closely magickal metaphors of directionality, we see that it is not always straight lines in which magickal practitioners move.

From the Straight and Narrow to the Curved, Crooked and Twisted

Sunset Boulevard curved to the left ... right ... left ... right ... Its shapeliness made Robert want to get high, but what didn’t?

Cooper, D., Guide (1997:11)

“I’m sorry,” I say very quietly. “Don’t be,” Luke says. “See you in a while.” Then he veers toward the bedroom. Thanks to the acid, he leaves this long, crooked, translucent trail in the air that’s so weird that I space into a staticky trance.

Cooper, D., Guide (1997:53)

Anyway, Luke has been doing these ... I don’t know, magic rituals? He refuses to describe them. From what I’ve been able to gather, these rituals “bend the universe” - that’s his phrase [...].

Cooper, D., Guide (1997:61)

One such moment is when Lévi-Strauss throws across the field of his argument, with crazy curviness, some ideas about Islam [...].

Torgovnick, M., Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives (1990:216)
We had an achievable goal for our walk but we were lumbered with an unwelcome time-base. I never like that. Time on these excursions should be allowed to unravel at its own speed, that’s the whole point of the exercise. To shift away from the culture of consumption into a meandering stream.


Live and let live, love and let love, flower and fade, and follow the natural curve, which flows on, pointless.

D.H.Lawrence (cited in Schiller (1994:52)

As the above quotations from Cooper’s magickal novel *Guide* indicate, for the magickal practitioner, movement may well not be conceptualised as a straightforward, upward and onward business at all. Indeed, for the magickal practitioner, the process of movement which is *not* straightforward seems to have a distinct appeal. The following statement by one of my informants (reported Chapter 1) illustrates this:

“I love your flat,” gushes one of the guests as I walk into the dining room. “I love the way it meanders. Don’t you?”

As I stated previously, strictly-speaking the flat was ‘l’-shaped and hence its corridor turned on a right-angle. Nevertheless, the woman was drawn to the fact that the corridor is not straight rather than any other feature of the flat or its decor. Such an observation was not a one-off as we will see, for outdoors, a similar situation presents itself.

When the magickal practitioner walks through the city, straight lines are not the order of the day. Magickal psychogeographer Iain Sinclair writes (1997:5) of an:

[O]utwardly eccentric Dr Who-style progress, zigzagging by day and night from Liverpool Street and Canning Town up the Lea Valley to Ware, [which] struck me as a paradigm for a visionary exploration of the Essex fringes. An apparently scientific excuse for a glorious clandestine folly, joyriding the trail
of the cosmic serpent. As with alchemy, it’s never the result that matters; it’s the time spent on the process, the discipline of repetition.

Reporting also “jagged progress” (1997:2), “eccentric circuits” (1997:9), and “meanderings” (1997:76), Sinclair’s walks or magickal dérives may be seen to literally act out a process of moving in a line which is not straight.

And what of the office cleaner? She or he may not look like a magickal practitioner performing a ritual, but as the following post from an internet bulletin board suggests otherwise:

**low priest:** I live in a city and I live a magical life; here is part of my story: If it doesn’t assault your sensibilities, then you can think of your life as tracing out patterns through space via time. For instance, as you walk down the street or drive down the road, in some sense, you are traversing space in a way that entangles your life with the lives of every other person who has also walked and/or driven down that path. Cities are really neat for this because there are definitive areas that are marked out for transit and many of the city’s denizens will have crossed paths with your trails at some time or another: the connections, ya?

Further, I’ve had a couple of jobs (one as a courier and the other as a carpet cleaner) which allowed me to trace out paths (in crazy loops and whirls with the carpet job for sure) through most of the tall office buildings in the downtown core of the city I live in. The other night, I was on a friend’s balcony looking out over the core and I thought and pictured these crazy patterns that I have traced through much of this city’s “power structure” and how that gave me a certain “sympathetic vibration” qua connection to the magick of this city. Moreover, when I was a courier, I designed a little glyph that represented my being (at the time) and as I walked through the downtown and its offices, walkways, stairwells, etc. I scrawled this glyph everywhere. I figure there are probably hundreds of them still floatin’ around. Again, more “sympathetic connections” to the magick of this city.

In short, you can read as many books as you want but a part of any magick is certainly in the doing, and this doing, in my humble opinion, is ‘more’ when you do without following others’ paths, but instead, hoe your own row (and then your path will become entangled with [those of] these ‘others’).

A related, perhaps inseparable point is that my informants often see themselves as being somehow ‘not straight’. Their going and their being seem to blur. For example:

**Bill:** Is she still a witch?
**Caroline Robertson:** Oh no, no, she’s gone straight now.

At this point we would do well to recall the modernist metaphors which relate to ‘straightness’ and the lack thereof: we seem to have found ourselves in the realm of the crooked, the twisted, the bent, the kinky, the cranky and the wonky, all of which, it hardly need be pointed out, signify deviance relative to an hegemonic norm of one sort or another (i.e. dishonesty, immorality, putative sexual deviance of one kind or
another and madness, respectively). While I have argued that magick is for the vast part neither criminal, sexually deviant nor mentally unhealthy, in its obvious otherness relative to an hegemonic norm of instrumental rationality, it is indeed beyond the realms of the metaphorical ‘straight and narrow’, and thus the Hetroclitan identity (Heatherington 1997:148) which seems to be simultaneously sought and fought by the magickal practitioner understandably may involve a sense of being ‘bent’ or ‘twisted’.

There are however further explanations for why the postmodern magickal practitioner may be figuratively-speaking ‘out of line’, ‘off the rails’ and ‘round the twist’. The English word ‘ruler’ carries of course a double meaning, either ‘one who has power’ or ‘implement with which we draw straight lines’. We have seen that magick has an antiauthoritarian dimension whereby one looks to one’s own self as the final authority or arbiter of meaning. Thus ‘the rules’ may be what get bent here. Experienced magickal practitioners speak of “bending” and “twisting”, say, the meanings of the Tarot cards.

It is also worth noting that the nature spirituality which comprises a significant part of magickal discourse may also have something to do with this. Nature of course does not often present us with straight lines. While a ‘bender’ may imply one who is not heterosexual, or an elongated drinking session, it is less well-known outside the realms of the eco-protestor is that a ‘bender’ is a shelter made from hazel branches. It does seem then that in various ways and for various reasons the magickal practitioner may, as it were, not be thinking straight, at odds with those modernist figures of speech which behove one to do so.
Fig. 9.1: Would there be no straight lines if magic ruled the world? This advertisement for a computer game claims so.
Going Round in Circles

Lévi-Strauss (1984:411) maintains that the essential truth is [...] a truth similar, up to a certain point, to the assumptions of deconstruction: “Every effort to understand destroys the object studied in favour of another object of a different nature; this second object requires from us a new effort which destroys it in favour of a third, and so on and so forth until we reach the one lasting presence, the point at which the distinction between meaning and the absence of meaning disappears; the same point from which we began.”

Torgovnick, M., Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives (1990:222)

In my beginning is my end. [...] 
In my end is my beginning.

T.S.Eliot, East Coker (1963:196;204)

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

T.S.Eliot, Little Gidding (1963:221)

There is more however than mere twistiness to the directionality of the magickal. For at the risk of ‘going round in circles’, seemingly ‘going loopy’, advancing a ‘circular argument’ or even of ‘making the reader’s head spin’, it needs to be noted that as well as not always thinking in terms of going in straight lines and revelling in her or his meanderings, the metaphor of circular directionality is also a very common one for the magickal practitioner to employ as the following quotations illustrate:

Me: How’s it going?
James: Oh, up ‘n’ down ‘n’ round ‘n’ round.

Spinning Sal: Some people visit me in my world, which turns out to be this twirly, spinning roller coaster thaaang that I call a bridge, my life.

Even Nevill Drury (1994:24), who we previously noted writing of a process of spiritual evolution up the Tree of Life, also to describes the Tree of Life as a “wheel”, implying that movement is going to take an more circular directional
pattern than an ascensional one. Given the fact that one would not expect a tree of any kind to be wheel-shaped, this particular turn of phrase is most striking.

Again, the nature spirituality may have some connection here. Nature does operate in cycles, and Wicca and witchcraft relate the menstrual cycle to the lunar cycle and hence to the Goddess. Also, magick as we have seen borrows from Hindu religious discourse which tends to see time as cyclical rather than linear. Certainly this directional metaphor is opposed to the progressive one of modernist discourse.

Another one of my informants came out with this statement one evening at a travellers’ site in Avebury:

Tom: We’re surfing on the buckled wheel of life, mate, just surfing on the buckled wheel of life.

At the risk of pedantry, this is I think a misquote of a line from the successful drug-culture film *Human Traffic* which was: “We’re freestyling on the buckled wheel of life.” It hardly needs to be pointed out that the very title of this film suggests people in a state of movement, be that social or psychological. What Tom here managed to find was an image which combines ‘bentness’ and circular motion, as well as existence within a fluid cosmology.

There is of course a major difference between this more postmodern circular or cyclic pattern of directionality, and the modernist turns of phrase which I used above such as ‘going round in circles’ and ‘going loopy’. The phrase ‘merry-go-round’ can be deployed with very negative meaning: Mark Gertler’s painting of this title was intended as a protest against the carnage of the First World War and contains a clear questioning of modernist notions of forward progress. This however is not to imply that circularity has to be read negatively; it is so only relative to modernist ‘forward progress’ metaphors. Though circular directionality is clearly important within the magickal worldview, circular movement quickly seems to become spiralling or spiralic movement as the next section will show.
Spiral Bound

Spiralling out of shadows, silent
sorcerer rides the night sky
like the laugh of a shooting
star, arching heaven

Anna Voigt (quoted in Drury 1994: frontispiece)

The leaves spiralling up toward the novel [...] hear it in fairyland ... God had refused to accept the bribe [...] The sound was scarcely recognisable as human voices ... a cadence of vibration ... Bill felt a rush of vertigo as if the sofa was spinning away into space. Blue light filled the darkening room. Bill was breathing soft electric silence that sent the blood pulsing to his crotch ... the two boys [sic] naked bodies washed in blue twilight shivered and twitched in spasms ... He was spiralling up toward the ceiling ...


One of the most common symbols and directional metaphors employed by magickal practitioners is the spiral, and this is in a sense an extension or refinement of circular movement. Spirals appear on 't'-shirts, on interior decoration, on candlesticks and candleholders, duvet covers (such as the one in Figure 1.2), book covers, jewellery and tattooed on the skin, to name just a few examples. The following photographs illustrate this point.
Fig. 9.2: Chalk spirals drawn on the road during a riot cordon (the street was Old Compton Street, Mayday 2002, on which yet another Beltane celebration meshed with violent anti-capitalist demonstrations).
Fig. 9.3: Stones in spiral pattern, Avebury. (This site had been used for a ritual by persons unknown to us.)
Fig. 9.4: Spiral broach on Chelsea’s jacket.
Fig. 9.5: *Mysteries* bookshop, decorated with the spiral motif.
Fig. 9.6: Spiral in section of a painting by Jack Blackburn.
Fig. 9.8: Spirals form part of the Gaia ecologists’ anti-war banner, 23.02.2003.
Fig. 9.10: Spirals on Pagan Pride Parade banner (2003).
Fig. 9.11: Spiral postcard on wall in Chelsea's room.

Fig. 9.12: Spiral postcard which used to grace my bedroom wall when I lived in Brixton with my informants.
Even the Hindu *chakras* are often represented as spirals in magickal imagery, rather than as wheels or disks (*kundalini energy*, ‘coiled’ like a serpent, is less altered in magickal representation). Rituals also often feature spiral movement, sometimes a spiral dance (after Starhawk 1989), sometimes slower movement through a spiral labyrinth. The “insect angels” encountered by Alex during the *H.O.D.* ritual reported in Chapter 1 moved in spirals, and the spiral symbol was amongst those sprayed on the temple walls. The spiral moreover is recognised by all those involved with magickal practice, unlike some of the symbols which are specific to subsets within the magickal subculture such as the pentagram or the *Chaosphere*.

To move in a spiralic direction is well-ingrained in the consciousness of the magickal practitioner. Sinclair, whose work we have already noted, also describes his walks as “dizzying spirals” (1997:76; 81), and (1997:85) as following or forming “dog lines”:

> Instead of direct paths, the “dogline” is a spiral - like the sorcerer’s *vèvè*: a stool-sniffing, circling back on itself, avoidance of the shortest way.

The following conversational quotations from another magickal practitioner illustrate this point further:

John (describing the behaviour of his cat): He’s been spiralling round and round all bloody morning hoping to get a scrap of this fish. Well, he’s not getting any.

John (this time describing the behaviour of a television film-crew): They never got the point of what we’re about, they just turned up, spiralled about a bit and then got back into the van and went.

The magickal practitioner even dreams of moving in a spiral pattern as the following extract from the dream diary of Steve Wilson (my italics) illustrates:

I found myself in what were obviously artificial caves with white plaster walls. I was presented with three or four sets of three doors. With the first two or three sets, each door having a different colour, I chose the one to the right, which turned out to be set back a little from the other two. I entered to find yet another set, so I was going round in a sort of outward-going spiral.

Ben more concisely reported:
I am still doing dreamwork... odd tales of twisty spirals into blackness which then become twisty spirals into further blackness.

Even other anthropologists are not immune from starting to think in terms of spiralic directionality. Blain (2002:35) writes of “spiralling” journeys through the otherworld. Prince and Riches (2000:ix) include a description of a “twirl” of incense smoke “spiralling”, and whether a strictly empirical observation or more figurative (I suspect it is the latter), in such a context the metaphor is striking. Pike’s (2001) ethnography of Neopagan festivals in the USA even features spiralic lettering on its cover.

Moreover, to link this chapter with Chapter 6, we should note that as well as individuals, energy moves in spirals. (This might well be expected when one thinks about it; as we have seen, individuals are energy as far as magick is concerned.) One of Greenwood’s (2000:101) informants told her how:

I [...] move with the spiralling flow of energy. I move the energy into a dance; my hands paint sensuous curves into the air and my feet follow a spiral path.

A slight variation on this theme would be the idea of energy forming a vortex: Penczak’s City Magick abounds with the notion of the “city vortex” as we have seen. Penultimately, two more ‘from fields’ which are relevant in this regard are:

- whirling in the spirals of time and space

Finally here, one informant, Scott Wood, always signs off his e-mails with this:

Scott, at once a fun fair, a petrified forest, and the great temple of Amun at Karnak, itself drunk, and reeling in an eccentric earthquake.

As was the case with the circular directionality, the spiral can seem negative when viewed from a modernist standpoint. The following photograph illustrates a negative use of spiral directionality.
Fig. 9.13: Virgin Trains depict the M25 as a spiral, implying that rail journeys make progress in a way road trips do not.

However, advertisers use the spiral symbol more positively as the following advertisements show.
Fig. 9.3: *Pizza Hut* spiral.
Fig. 9.14: McDonald’s spiral.
The Aesthetic Correlative

The spiral appears in surrealist art, and by this point we have seen enough of the overlap between magick and surrealism for this not to come as a great surprise. Choucha (1991:41) has noted it appears in Duchamp’s Anaemic Cinema. Man Ray used the symbol in Logic D’Assassine. One is also reminded of landscape artist Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty in this context, and though not generally defined as a surrealist, he was certainly influenced by that school. To the artistic establishment Smithson is a landscape artist, though he is a magickal practitioner as far as my informants are concerned (see Pettis 1999:5). In an essay entitled The Spiral Jetty, Smithson wrote of the “meandering zone” in which he created the work: 

Fig. 9.15: Wrigley’s Air Waves chewing gum advertisement depicting spiral movement.
As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. [...]

He has this to say about the work itself:

After a point, measurable steps (“Scale skal n. It. or L.; It. Scala; L. scala usually scalae pl., 1. a. originally a ladder; a flight of stairs; hence, b. a means of ascent”) descend from logic to the ‘surd state.’ The rationality of a grid on a map sinks into what it is supposed to define. Logical purity suddenly finds itself in a bog, and welcomes the unexpected event. The .. ‘curved’ reality of sense perception operates in and out of the ‘straight’ abstractions of the mind. The flowing mass of rock and earth of the Spiral Jetty could be trapped by a grid of segments, but the segments would exist only in the mind or on paper. Of course, it is also possible to translate the mental spiral into a three-dimensional succession of measured lengths that would involve areas, volumes, masses, moments, pressures, forces, stresses, and strains; but in the Spiral Jetty the surd takes over and leads one into a world that cannot be expressed by number or rationality. Ambiguities are admitted rather than rejected, contradictions are increased rather than decreased - the alogos undermines the logos. Purity is put in jeopardy. I took my chances on a perilous path, along which my steps zigzagged, resembling a spiral lightning bolt. “We have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another, to account for its origin. At last, we have succeeded in constructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo! It is our own.” For my film (a film is a spiral made up of frames) I would have myself filmed from a helicopter (from the Greek helix, helikos meaning spiral) directly overhead in order to get the scale in terms of erratic steps.

Chemically speaking, our blood is analogous in composition to the primordial seas. Following the spiral steps we return to our origins, back to some pulpy protoplasm, a floating eye adrift in an antediluvian ocean. On the slopes of Rozel Point I closed my eyes, and the sun burned crimson through the lids. I opened them and the Great Salt Lake was bleeding scarlet streaks. My sight was saturated by the colour of red algae circulating in the heart of the lake, pumping into ruby currents, no they were veins and arteries sucking up the obscure sediments. My eyes became combustion chambers churning orbs of blood blazing by the light of the sun. All was enveloped in a flaming chromosphere; I thought of Jackson Pollock’s Eyes in the Heat [...]. Swirling within the incandescence of solar energy were sprays of blood. My movie would end in sunstroke. Perception was heaving, the stomach turning, I was on a geologic fault that groaned within me. Between heat lightning and heat exhaustion the spiral curled into vaporisation. I had the red heaves, while the sun vomited its corpuscular radiations. Rays of glare hit my eyes with the frequency of a Geiger counter. Surely, the storm clouds massing would turn into a rain of blood. Once, when I was flying over the lake, its surface seemed to hold all the properties of an unbroken field of raw meat with gristle (foam); no doubt it was due to some freak wind action. Eyesight is often slaughtered by the other senses, and when that happens it becomes necessary to seek out dispassionate abstractions. The dizzying spiral yearns for the assurance of geometry. One wants to retreat into the cool rooms of reason. But no, there was Van Gogh with his easel on some sun-baked lagoon painting ferns of the Carboniferous Period. Then the mirage faded into the burning atmosphere....

The helicopter manoeuvred the sun’s reflection through the Spiral Jetty until it reached the centre. The water functioned as a vast thermal mirror. From that position the flaming reflection suggested the ion source of a cyclotron that extended into a spiral of collapsed matter. All sense of energy acceleration expired into a rippling stillness of reflected heat. A withering light swallowed the rocky particles of the spiral, as the helicopter gained altitude. All existence seemed tentative and stagnant. The sound of the helicopter motor became a primal groan echoing into tenuous aerial views. Was I but a shadow in a plastic bubble hovering in a place outside mind and body? Et in Utah ego. I was slipping out of myself
again, dissolving into a unicellular beginning, trying to locate the nucleus at the end of the spiral. All that blood stirring makes one aware of protoplasmic solutions, the essential matter between the formed and the unformed, masses of cells consisting largely of water, proteins, lipoids, carbohydrates, and inorganic salts. Each drop that splashed onto the Spiral Jetty coagulated into a crystal. Undulating waters spread millions upon millions of crystals over the basalt.

I also wish to return briefly here to a phenomenon we encountered above: the labyrinth. Labyrinths within magickal thought are not just any labyrinths, but spiral-shaped labyrinths. But why all these spirals?

The spiral is a primitive symbol. It has been observed in Upper Paleolithic rock art for example (e.g. Rudgely 1993:21) and therefore we could simply advance this as its explanation. It has been noted already that magickal identity is based on a degree of alterity through affirmative primitivism. However, there are plenty of other primitive symbols which the magickal practitioner could have chosen to decorate space with and indeed to think with, so this suggestion does not explain why the spiral was chosen rather than other Other symbols. The spiral is also a scientific symbol: the D.N.A. strand is represented as taking the form of a double-helix. The same point stands however: there are plenty of other scientistic symbols which the magickal practitioner could appropriate.

Magickal practitioner Jill Purce (1974:13, author’s italics) has explained the symbol of the spiral (and its relation to the circle) thus:

If life is a path ‘through’ time, [we may conceptualise it] as a line; and [...] since it returns and yet flows on, it is a spiral. Only if it were possible to come back to the same point in time could it be a circle.

Perhaps one’s sense of self can serve as an explanation here? The wheel of the year may turn full-circle, but one will not be the same person that one was a year previously, at any rate, not in a culture like the one in which ourselves and my informants live as we have seen. Ontological flux, a sense of change without a necessary correlate of ‘upward and onward’ progress, is what we may invoke to explain the native penchant for the spiral symbol.
Or, perhaps we should be focussing attention in the realms of the epistemological? A high-level of self-referentiality might engender the same metaphor? That is to say, have we not all had a subjective experience of being ‘back where we started’, but knowing more about where we started than we had when we left it? Starting our anthropological training with the work Lévi-Strauss, then reading Derrida’s critique of his work in Of Grammatology (1974) and realising that returning to where we started and seeing structuralism in a new (post-structuralist) way was the spiral pattern which our intellectual trajectory had taken? Such was my experience, at any rate; that is my spiral. However, perhaps T.S.Eliot, in Little Gidding (1963:222) puts it better than I can:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

I will allow two magickal practitioners to have the final word on this matter. Should clarification be necessary, the “philosopher theologian” [sic] mentioned below I take to be Teilhard de Chardin, and a nautilus is a spiral-shaped sea-shell.

Rik: There was also that philosopher theologian. Teilhardt [sic]? Can’t recall. Said self was a process, like a verb. The model was of a wave, progressing through time, but with the forward end always collapsing back in on itself. I like that idea, too. The loop closing in ... surging out of an ocean, but spiralled away from it, discrete.

Jim: We’re really just in one big nautilus, always curving around but never back to the start because it’s always expanding. Wheeee!

Conclusion

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

T.S.Eliot, Little Gidding (1963:221)

It can be observed then that while modernist straightforward progress is certainly not rejected outright within magickal consciousness, it is problematised in the other
directional metaphors we have surveyed and these would seem to constitute a markedly postmodern dimension of magickal being. As I noted in relation to the circular directional metaphors above, spiralling is not necessarily to be read in a negative way. But if viewed relative to modernist ‘forward progress’ directionality, it might well seem so. The phrase ‘spiralling out of control’ is of course a common one. An artwork can still operate within such a semantic pattern, hence the memorable title of one of Tracy Emin’s recent pieces about her traumatic relationships with men: *Helter Fucking Skelter*. And yet, with *McDonald’s, Pizza Hut* and *Kentucky Fried Chicken* deploying the spiral symbol as they do, one can readily understand why the sign has a marked appeal to postmodern consciousness. Ultimately then, while not absent, the ‘upwards and onwards’ modernist directional metaphor is undercut by the metaphors of curvilinearity, circularity, and spirality within magickal discourse and practice, and therefore the postmodern nature of what we are dealing with must be acknowledged.

**Notes**

1. Clearly then, I cannot agree with York’s (1995:168) contention that the spiral is a specifically pagan symbol. He is doubtless correct however in stressing its suggestion of “open-ended movement”.

265
Conclusion: Spaces, Selves and Cosmologies of Contemporary Magick

I now wish to draw together the many threads of this thesis to form a neat, overall conclusion. (In so doing, I will also provide a summary of each of its chapters in order that the reader's task is made easier.) In the Introduction (and also in a little more depth in Chapter 3), it was stated that this work would be a social constructionist examination of contemporary magick. That is to say, the approach would not be merely descriptive, underpinned by an epistemological stance whereby ethnography consists of saying ‘magick involves x, y and z’, and leaving things at that, as predominantly characterises much of the work from religious studies (e.g. Pearson 1998) and the more autoethnographic approaches of some anthropologists and sociologists (e.g. Greenwood 1998, 2000; Blain 2002). Rather, the question which has underpinned the whole of this work is ‘why is magick what and how it is now?’, for as I have stated, magick is not (pace T.S.Eliot 1963:212) as it is “on the shores of Asia” when it is encountered “in the Edgware road”, and this state of affairs requires thorough explanation. It is to the cosmologies of magickal practitioners on the one hand, and the wider culture on the other, analysed through a theoretical concern with space, that so-called ‘spatial turn’, to which I suggested we attend in order to answer such an enquiry. By now I trust, this approach may be seen to be eminently justified.

Chapter 1 was largely phenomenological, offering a brief insight into how the occupant of the “magickal youniverse” feels and thinks. Furthermore, as well as individuals, it introduced ideas, themes, symbols and images which, although left deliberately unexplained at the time, recurred throughout the work and as they did so, their emic meanings were gradually revealed. Chapter 2 moved us to a more theoretical level, and took as its starting-point the very common observation that postmodern magick constitutes an extremely broad field of study, so broad that we have to deal with a plurality of labels for it, taxonomies and subtaxonomies of it and indeed, conceptualisations of it. However, by the end of Chapter 2 it had been established that things are not so bad as they might seem, that there is a complex of consistent beliefs which comprise the magickal worldview. Magick comprises a concern with an individual self just as Heelas (1996) argues of the “New Age”. This
self moreover is, in the Hermetic tradition, not fully distinct from what non-magickal practitioners think of as the ‘outside world’. And what, one wonders, could be more appropriate to a society as individualistic as this one? In a society focussed on the individual self, religion becomes focussed on the individual self. In a world focussed on the self, the world becomes the self, a “youniverse” rather than a mere universe, the ‘outside’ pregnant with meanings of ‘inner’ significance. Though of course Hermeticism is not a new notion, it is one eminently suited to a highly individualised being lacking secure identity; in other words, the contemporary westerner. However odd the Hermetic construct of self may seem by the standards of many a secular humanist, it makes sense, culturally-speaking. A definition of magick having been established, Chapter 3 detailed first the research methods employed in, then the theory which informs, this ethnography, and finally surveyed the previous literature on the subject. On the whole, Part 1 was more descriptive than analytical, and formed a ‘lead in’ to the analysis which comprised the next two sections of the thesis.

In Chapter 4, the relation between magickal discourse and practice and the mainstream was examined. It was shown that practitioners of magick enter into and occupy various conceptual, symbolic and/or cognitive zones, none of which are coterminous with the realm of the ‘normal’ but are in various ways distinct from the mainstream, all Other, all heterotopic. These zones relate in various ways to where magickal practice actually takes place, and they also account to a large extent for the sometimes problematic social relations between practitioners of magick and the mainstream. In Lévi-Straussian structuralist terms, magickal discourse and practice was shown to involve the inversion of traditional western binaries. Chapter 5 addressed the phenomenon of magickal identity within the magickal subculture itself (rather than in relation to those outside it as was the case in Chapter 4). Via a form of structuralism more reminiscent of Georges Dumézil’s “tripartite ideology” (see Littleton 2000) than Lévi-Straussian binary cognition, three broad types of magickal identity were shown to exist, all of which are symbolically spatial identities. These identities were shown to sometimes be analogous to some of the physical locations of magickal activity, and attention to these broad types of magickal identity was shown to readily explicate much of the social tension within the magickal subculture. Chapter 6 addressed the otherworlds, the non-material dimensions held to exist by practitioners of magick. Unlike otherworlds of traditional shamanistic practices, those
of the contemporary magickal practitioner are considered relative to the individual, are psychologised, are said to exhibit a high level of diachronic variability, and are not reducible to any single cosmological system. They are to be explored and mapped, and these maps are only ever held to be provisional. Moreover, these otherworlds, broadly falling into three distinct structural types, were also shown to often be analogous to the symbolically-meaningful physical locations in which magick takes place which were surveyed in Chapter 4, and the identities adopted and negotiated by practitioners of magick which were surveyed in Chapter 5. By this point in the thesis then, we could readily perceive analogies between social identity, physical location of magickal practice, and certain aspects of magickal cosmology. No study has previously analysed the data in such a manner. Thus far however, the theory on which the analysis drew was not in itself new; the Lévi-Straussian structuralism employed in Chapter 4 (albeit tempered by post-structuralist insights) is of course not a recent innovation, and the tripartite model so central to Dumezil’s thinking is considerably older. Moreover, establishing parallels between social structure, social identity and use of physical space is a mode of analysis which is technically antique, being precisely what concerned Durkheim and Mauss in *Primitive Classification* (1963, originally published in 1903). In other words, both the data focussed on and the modes of analysis employed in Part 2 of this work were more modern than postmodern.

As we moved into Part 3 of the thesis, more culturally specific, more overtly postmodern facets of contemporary magick were brought into focus via theory which was on the whole more recent. Chapter 7 was devoted to that fundamental aspect of magickal discourse, practice and cosmology: orgone, *qi*, etc., a “force” or “energy” which is held to permeate the magickal universe and through which the interlinked psychological, social and cosmological being of the magickal practitioner is articulated and understood. We now found ourselves far from the more static Christian cosmos wherein the wise build their houses upon rock (Matt. 7:21-7), and instead in a much more Heraclitan universe wherein the truly wise build and rebuild upon shifting sands of self and world. A fluid cosmos, it was argued, is the correlate of a fluid self and a fluid society, and analysis drew on Toffler’s *Future Shock* (1970), a classic survey of the ephemeral psychosocial universe we now inhabit. Chapter 8 focussed on the topographical and cartographic metaphors employed by magickal
practitioners as they ‘surf’ the fluid energies of their orgrownomic “youniverse”. These were related to the epistemological and ontological uncertainty of the postmodern condition (which are of course in turn integrally related to the rapid change which was alluded to in the previous chapter). However spatial or cosmological the analysis in Chapter 8 might have seemed to be, here analysis was also at its most medical anthropological, revealing magickal discourse and practice to be thoroughly informed by a culturally-specific sense of an isolated subject which, initially “lost” in a fluid reality, subsequently engages in a process of mapping and remapping, effecting a ‘process cartography’ of protean self and world. A ‘postmodern malaise’ of epistemological and ontological uncertainty is not hereby countered or avoided as it is in modernist secular humanist thinking or in certain fundamentalist manifestations of religion, but rather it is accepted and embraced, and its chaotic ephemerality made meaningful. It is not therefore an abuse of the word ‘healing’ to apply it to magickal discourse and practice. Moreover, ultimately we can perceive how one of the major differences between secular humanism, traditional religion, and magick lies in their relation to modernity. Secular humanism of course is modernity. Traditional religion, of course, is not modern; we might call it ‘unmodern’, ‘premodern’, even, in some of its fundamentalist manifestations, ‘antimodern’. Magick, finally, is postmodern. Its practitioners do subscribe to many of modernity’s ‘central tenets’ (such as scientism, individualism, liberalism or libertarianism.) However, it is of course beyond the modern, postmodern, in that it is not secular nor ratiocinatory. A further facet of its postmodern nature became particularly apparent in Chapter 9, wherein attention shifted from the mapping of space to the (related) traversal of space. Through examination of magickal metaphors of directionality, it was shown that modernist notions of progress are problematized by the presence of the various non-modern directional metaphors in magickal discourse and practice. The magickal practitioner, it was shown, undertakes a journey along a personally unique “path”, an uncertain path, and this is not a straightforwardly modern journey, for how could any journey across a shifting, fluid terrain be in any way straightforward? Instead, the magickal practitioner undertakes a different kind of journey characterised by curved, circular (i.e. unmodern) and ultimately spiralic (i.e. postmodern) directionality, a journey which is conceived of as unpredictable and endless.
Thus ultimately this thesis has shown not just what contemporary magick is, but why contemporary magick is the way it is "in the Edgware Road". Individuals on the magickal scene employ constructs of space, self and cosmos tailored to fit a postmodern condition characterised by a protean self and society, featuring high levels of ontological and epistemological uncertainty and wherein progress is by no means an unproblematic notion. Thus I trust that in this work, magick has been shown to make sense on its own terms (like magic and religion generally) and moreover to fit neatly with the postmodern condition in which the contemporary west finds itself (quite unlike magic and religion generally). I also trust that my informants have been shown to be no more, and no less human than any other group of people. Like people generally, they make meaningful their experience of self and society. Like people generally, they inspire and infuriate in equal measure.

Mention of my informants brings me to an appropriate note on which to end this work. I am still in touch with them. In some respects, little has changed on the magickal scene over the last few years. *The Haunters of the Dark* have changed their name, lost a member (due to a simple personality clash) and they do not meet as regularly as they used to, but they still climb into abandoned buildings late at night in order to invoke horrors from otherworldly depths. *Secret Chiefs* (the meeting held at the Princess Louise public house which had formerly been known as *Talking Stick*) still takes place, though at another venue. I recently attended a pre-Christmas meeting, caught up with various old friends and acquaintances (I noted that sociologist Michael York was there, doing the same thing). As opposed to most of the discussion groups, the majority of ritual groups which I joined during my fieldwork have ceased to exist. The *Companions of Horus*, the *Temple of the Midnight Bimboes* and the *Abysmal Sorcerers* are all no more, and the *I.O.D.* has fragmented (due to tension between LHP and RHP members), one portion thereof having merged with another group. Thus indeed we see that, as Francis put it, "energy comes and energy goes." However, a multitude of new practice groups has sprung up in their place, featuring different combinations of many of the same individuals.

So much for the groups, but what of the people? Some, at least, are still around. Steve Wilson now runs his own moot, and now works for the Charity Commission. Terry Dobson still rides his motorcycle up to *Secret Chiefs* now and then, and now sits on
the Avebury Parish Council, not uncontroversially as one might imagine. Francis is still writing, though he now has a day job as a care-worker. Dan still works in the magickal bookshop, making this his longest-held job. Stephen Grasso has just started a new job in publishing and is working with Chaoist Phil Hine on a new book. Artist Jack Blackburn still lives in Brixton where he always did, now the proud owner of the flat he squatted for over a decade. Others however have moved on and slipped out of touch. Ben the Chaoist is apparently doing very well at art college, but it is some years since I have seen him. Pat has left the magickal scene, fed up to the back teeth with its politics, though she does still run her “Celtic mysticism” group. Gerald Suster is dead; rightly or wrongly, many believe his death at forty-nine to have been alcohol-related. He is missed. Chelsea’s job has taken her away from London. Angel I have not heard from for some time.

Finally then, there is myself. I no longer live in the flat in Brixton, but in a more modern place which seems slightly ‘sterile’ by comparison. I have yet to (re)adjust to its more up-to-date straight-line-and-chrome aesthetic, and the crystals and ammonite on the window-ledge seem strangely out of place. And this, of course, begs the question: what, and whom have I become after the last five years in the land of chimeras that is contemporary magick?

Ultimately, I believe that my life is richer for having met my informants and having been socialised into their subculture. Of fieldwork, Hastrup (1995:19) writes that “one is not completely absorbed but one is no longer the same”; at least by the end of the process, this is undoubtedly true. I may never truly be one of my informants, but there is no going back now and I cannot help feeling that I am to some extent bicultural. I am now no more and no less at home when amongst them than I am when I am with my family, colleagues or friends. I believe therefore that at least to some extent, I can think in the manner in which they think, and be in the manner in which they are. And it is here that I can most clearly see the achievement of their subculture. For although I suspect that I will always be something of a nihilist at heart, by deliberately or otherwise consciously seeing myself and the world through the eyes of my informants, my existence may be rendered meaningful, indeed, enchanted, if only for just a moment. And in that, I have to hand it to all those magickal practitioners whom
I have met over the last five years. For in that, they have achieved something which I myself had never been able to do.
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