

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER ABSTRACTS

## The Ghost in the Writing. Magic and Mediality in the Story of Faust.

Prof. Andreas Kilcher

It is not just modern occultism that goes hand in hand with an increased awareness of technical and artistic media. The problem of mediacy and mediation is a central aspect of modern magic. It is about how hidden - physical or metaphysical - forces communicate themselves more or less indirectly. This addresses the most influential literary embodiment of the type of modern magician: the story of the polymath Dr. Faustus. It illuminates magic from the perspective of mediality, be it affirmative or critical. On the way to modernity, so my more general thesis, to power of magic shifts to the media, the spirit to the writing. Magical are the channels themselves, to paraphrase modern media theory.

## Ireland's Funerary Culture and Ancestral Memory: W. B. Yeats's Early Poetry and Prose

Dr Claire Nally

Writing on W. B. Yeats in 2006, Roy Foster suggests that death is 'perhaps a peculiarly Irish subject.' In considering Yeats's early work, this keynote addresses the influence of Golden Dawn and Rosecrucian ritual on *The Secret Rose* (1897) and *The Wind Amongst the Reeds* (1899). Through his creation of the Castle of Heroes, an invented mystery religion, Yeats experimented with ideas of death and rebirth more commonly associated with his later work in *A Vision* (1925 and 1937). However, in exploring Yeats's early work through the lens of 'continuing bonds' derived from grief theory, I suggest that early Yeats was engaged in an act of ancestral reclamation and mourning for the nation, through the intersection of occultism and fairy lore. In many ways, Yeats's early work also points towards the breadth and reach of his later occultism in *A Vision* with its ambition to account for, and penetrate, history, human existence, personality, the realms of the living and the dead. In addressing how death and mortality intersect with Yeats's early work, nationalist politics and occult practice, this lecture investigates how far Yeats also pursues a fantasy of renewal (and rebirth).

## Occulture in Contemporary Art

Dr Marco Pasi

Fifteen years ago, I began to take note of the conspicuous presence of esoteric motifs in contemporary art. Initially, I was intrigued but also surprised, and thought this was only a passing trend. At some point, however, I realized that there was something more significant and worthy of attention than I had thought at the beginning. While the influence of esotericism on modern art (i.e., roughly until the end of the Second World War) had already been the object of serious scholarly research at least since the 1960s, it became clear to me that both scholars of esotericism and art specialists were not yet paying enough attention to the role of esotericism in contemporary art. In this lecture, I would like to present my findings and reflections on this phenomenon, which I consider important for understanding the role that esotericism plays in our societies today. Contemporary art possesses considerable social capital, and looking at its relation to esotericism can give us a measure of the continuing relevance of esotericism as a social and cultural phenomenon in our

times. I will discuss among other things the applicability of the concept of “occulture” to the context of contemporary art and then a number of other conceptual gateways that could be useful for its study.

## ABSTRACTS

### Occulture and Creative Expression in the Contemporary Global Shamanic Milieu

Ms Alice Ahern<sup>1</sup>

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The concept of a resurgence of the “divine feminine” or a “divine feminine energy” is extensive throughout the holistic and New Age milieus and extends to certain spheres of Western esotericism. New ways of engagement with the divine feminine have been linked by some alternative spiritual practitioners to a hypothesised re-enchantment that is perceived by various scholars and practitioners in the holistic milieu to be occurring in Western society.

Drawing on Christopher Partridge’s theory regarding Western re-enchantment and “occulture” and particularly focusing on the key position pop culture plays in the dissemination of occultic concepts, this paper analyses tropes, symbols and motifs associated with both contemporary shamanism in Western contexts and the “divine feminine” in popular culture. This analysis draws on the term “occulture”, a portmanteau of occult and culture, that refers to the processes by which concepts relating to the esoteric, mystical, spiritual, and paranormal permeate mainstream culture, re-enchanting the lifeworlds of the modern individual. Partridge emphasises the everyday, ubiquitous nature of occulture in contrast to the underground and counter-culture nature of the cultic milieu as defined by Colin Campbell.

This paper explores how these ideas are circulating and form part of the “occulture” of contemporary shamanic practices through an ethnographic case study of neo-shamanic practitioners in Irish society.

### A Fruitful Violence: Strategies of the Grotesque in the Work of Austin Osman Spare

Mr Robert Ansell<sup>1</sup>

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Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956) was one of the first 20th century artists who explicitly expressed an interest in the occult. From an early age he excelled as a draughtsman and subsequently received a formal art education, attending Lambeth School of Art and the Royal College of Art. Over a professional life of fifty years Spare produced more than 2500 finished works (including many self-portraits) and employed a variety of approaches and styles. Common among them was a predilection for the grotesque and a latent sexualisation. As early as 1904 he began developing ‘a religion of my own’ and this found expression in a handful of books, largely self-published. At the time, such progressive themes chimed with the burgeoning Suffragette movement and the birth of the socialist Labour Party; both radical political causes to which Spare was aligned.

Drawing upon the recently discovered folio of drawings by Spare for Krafft-Ebing’s ‘Psychopathia Sexualis’ (1922) now held by the Kinsey Institute, this paper will explore the artist’s relationship with the grotesque as a means of social and political criticism. I will compare the esoteric symbolism and imagery within the Kinsey folio to other works by the artist, notably the E. M. Forster folio (1921), ‘The Book of Ugly Ecstasy’ (1924) and ‘The Valley of Fear’ (1924), to examine the differences and similarities between the works. I will also cite from

Spare's last published work, 'Anathema of Zos' (1924–27) to argue the Kinsey folio was a problematic commission. My aim is to demonstrate that Spare used the conflictive nature of the grotesque to sabotage the male gaze.

This presentation contains explicit images.

## Yeats and the Monad: Esotericism in the Late Poetry

Ms Morgan Azali<sup>1</sup>

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This paper analyses the late poetry of WB Yeats from the perspective of his lifelong engagement with Western Esotericism and his quest for Unity of Being. Produced during the modernist era of the 1920's and 30's, 'The Tower' and 'The Winding Stair' conceal esoteric symbols that have been greatly overlooked by many scholars. This paper explores the links between magic and modernism as presented by Leigh Wilson and Leon Surette, as well as the writings of Kathleen Raine and Susan Johnston Graf who focus on Yeats's practical and theoretical engagement with the magic of the Western Esoteric Tradition. By analysing their varying perspectives against the evidence of relevant esoteric doctrines and the body of Yeats's literature, I work to demonstrate that the symbol of the monad – the all-including ONE – is the best lens for understanding esoteric unity in the late poetry of WB Yeats.

## The Unbearable Whiteness of Midsommar, or, What Aster's Film May Tell Us About Esoteric Studies

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Released in 2019, Ari Aster's second feature-length film, *Midsommar*, reverses one of horror's most enduring tropes: fear of the dark. Following a group of North Americans—including two PhD students in cultural anthropology—and Brits who visit a pagan midsummer celebration in the town of Hårga, Sweden, the entire movie is shot in overwhelmingly bright daylight. One by one, the visitors are murdered as part of the extensive rituals the citizens of Hårga engage in during this once-every-ninety-years-celebration, until the protagonist, Dani, is crowned the May queen. In this paper, I will read this reversal of dark and light as the first of a series of clues—including the whiteness of clothing, the desire on part of Hårga's residents to procreate with white foreigners, the anti-immigrant banners, the fact that visitors of colors are murdered first—that, combined, allow us to understand the movie as exposing the horrors of white supremacy. Based on this observation, I make two further arguments. First, esoteric ideas and practices are depicted as central to the group's white supremacy fantasy, a critical, explicit nod to the use of (supposedly) esoteric symbolism by current extreme right-wing groups. Second, reading the plot line about the two cultural anthropologists and their wish to study the midsommar rituals as invoking and inverting the racist discourses of 1930s horror movies that depict vodou as "primitive," backward and dangerous, I see the film as offering a cautionary tale about whiteness and the production of knowledge in the academy, the study of esotericism in particular.

# Gaston de Mengel and Eutrophy: Arts Education Between Occultism and Life Reform Movement

Dr Léo Bernard<sup>1</sup>

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Gaston de Mengel, born in 1875, was an active, although not well-known, figure of European esoteric currents during the first half of the twentieth century. While he is best remembered for his encounter with Nazi politician Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) in 1937 due to their common interest in the occult, he also appears to have been well integrated within the British occultist milieu before the First World War. He spent most of the interwar period based in France, however, and as a result became more closely associated with French occult circles. Among his various involvements in French esoteric networks, he worked with occultist Louis Gastin (1884-1969) at his Institut de psycho-physique appliquée, where physiognomy, chiromancy and psychosomatic medicine were applied with the aim of correcting physical, mental and moral “deviations”. There, de Mengel taught his method of “Eutrophy”, which was first developed in collaboration with William Macdonald Smith (1859-1930) as a synthetic piano learning method. Although he later devoted a book to the subject of musical esotericism, de Mengel expanded the scope of Eutrophy to embrace the harmonious development of all human faculties, including the development of muscular strength, willpower and heightened spiritual consciousness. His method appealed, perhaps due to a shared interest in ancient aesthetics, to Kienné de Mongeot (1897-1977), a central figure of the French life reform and nudist movements through his periodical and association - both titled “Vivre”. De Mengel, who shaped the artistic educational program of Vivre, played a significant role in the early years of the movement, a role that this paper aims to describe and evaluate. Through de Mengel and his Eutrophy, “esoteric” conceptions of music, considered in their relations to the human body, were spread within certain artistic and countercultural milieux and exerted, an influence which needs to be historically studied and contextualized.

## Entertaining Esotericism. The use of themes from Western Esotericism in Japanese anime

Mr Francesco Maria Catanzaro<sup>1</sup>

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Contemporary Japanese culture is a Westernized one, although not Western and as such still very different from the latter in its values. In the process of incorporation of - and reaction to - Western thought and culture, Japanese culture operated an original and interesting process: the transmission of parts of Western (especially European) culture, even high culture like philosophical thought, via the medium of popular entertainment such as manga and anime. The peculiar use of another culture – filtered by the complex framework of the Japanese one, giving way to a very original understanding of the other – is then expressed in a very unexpected vision, exalting specific aspects of the West that the Japanese eye catches. During this process, Western esotericism itself, in its many facets, is re-interpreted. The unique agentive mean with which esotericism is read is, as I will try to show, a derivative of the capitalistic *formae mentis*, that together with relativism, used against the West itself, reverses the hegemonic relationship, challenging the importance of cultural traits de-contextualizing them and using them, ultimately, as a mere form of entertainment. I will then analyse Japanese anime featuring concepts from Western esotericism, showing how the latter ones are not studied or understood for their religious meaning, nor for their academic one, but mainly recycled as exotic, curious cultural objects, useful because incomprehensible out of their context. Still, in this process of appropriation some similarities come out at last: through this media, a unique Japanese form of art and popular culture, Western Esotericism emerges as an aesthetic and ideological support to build fluid, post-

modern animation based on internal references, occult dimension and deeper meanings behind the appearance, a model to convey and suggest without really explain.

## Mysticism and the Arts: Shape-Shifting Surrealism in the work of Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington

Dr Louise Child<sup>1</sup>

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This paper suggests ways in which relationships between mysticism and the arts may be explored with a particular focus on the work of the female surrealists Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo. Described by Gloria Orenstein as ‘an art of shamanic initiations and mythical re-birth’ (2012) and characterized as a combination of alchemy, shamanism and psychoanalysis by Nadia Choucha (1991), Carrington and Varo both participated in the surrealists’ interest in the disruption of comfortable patterns of social structure and psychological thought, thereby revealing ‘the marvellous’. Moreover, their work is striking for its engagements with animal totems (especially horses, hyenas and birds and eggs), illumination, re-birth, and subjects inspired by indigenous cultures in Mexico and Ireland, including fluid people and places who shimmer in and out of one another. Moreover, an exploration of the lives and practices of Varo and Carrington not only complements scholarly understandings of the esoteric dimensions of the surrealist movement, but also brings into the discussion the turbulent historical events that affected artists working in Paris in the 1930s, events which had an impact on the complex communities of personal emotions and professional practices of that time. While both Carrington and Varo can be thought to have participated in different ways in both intense passions and shamanic descent in this period, it is within a subsequent time in Mexico that their playful associations between traditionally feminine tasks and alchemical transformations came to fully flower in their art and work. I will therefore suggest that the study of these artists offers particular insights into the ways in which esoteric art can both depict and evoke playful shape-shifting that turns objects and tasks associated with the domestic, animal, and the mundane world into portals that offer glimpses of other forms of being and consciousness.

## An Ecstatic Lodge: The Luminous glyphs of the Élus Coëns.

Mr Stewart Clelland

As the high-degrees of écosais freemasonry swept across the landscape of eighteenth-century Europe, an obscure and occult order began to develop known as l’Ordre des Chevaliers maçons Élus Coëns de l’Univers or the Order of Knight-Masons Elect-Cohens of the Universe. Characterised by the practice of a gnostic infused form of Judeo-Christian theosophy with a Kabbalistic veneer, the Élus Coëns represented a high point in continental freemasonry’s ‘search for its own meaning’. Requiring the utmost commitment and a decidedly monastic way of life, the Order prescribed everything from hairstyle to diet, and with it a very distinct theosophical mystic-millenarianism. Indeed, far from the everyday festivities of mainstream freemasonry, the Élus Coëns saw themselves as knightly-priests engaged in a form of cosmic theurgical combat with angelic and demonic entities. The order’s artistic output then comes as something of a surprise. Focusing on a particular collection of usual ink drawings held within the Bibliothèque Municipale de Grenoble, known as the ‘Fonds Prunelle de Lière’ (T.4188) by Coën initiate Léonard-Joseph Prunelle de Lière (1741-1824), I will discuss how these strange, enigmatic images are a treasure of eighteen-century outsider art and a truly unique insight into the occult worldviews of Enlightenment France. Ranging from naïve and child-like, to geometric and symbolic, these strange visionary images were drawn up in a theurgical fever: each one a portal between the earthly and the transcendent, with depictions of fantastical creatures, winged seraphim and the ever-present

Infernal Serpent. In this presentation, I will discuss their basis in the ritualistic circles emblematic of the Coën system as a whole, and the order's overall wider historical context.

## “Tune into the Signal” – Ballard, Late Capitalism, and Esotericism in Simon Sellars’ “Applied Ballardianism.”

Mr Bob Cluness<sup>1</sup>

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In this paper I will provide an analysis of Simon Sellars’ 2018 novel *Applied Ballardianism*. In its exploration of the terrains of modernity and late capitalism from an esoteric standpoint, along with the author’s desire to achieve a disenchanted form of gnosis, I argue that the text is the latest iteration of a genealogy of occult modernism in literature that seeks to generate esoteric epistemologies and aesthetics which convey the alien rhythms emanating from modernity. What differentiates *Applied Ballardianism* from its forbearers though is that while it bears all the hallmarks of occult modernism’s response to modernity, the text situates itself within a different and contemporary historical phase of modernity, one that is experiencing intensified and accelerated psychosocial relations under a capitalist socius.

"Occult modernism" is derived from Bauduin and Johnsson’s description of the occultation of modernism, where occultism is “an integral part of modernity,” with modernists embracing the occult in their “engagement with modernity,” resulting in situations where “occultism transforms and is transformed by modernism.” The use of esoteric epistemologies and occult symbolism in this way provides artists with alternative modes of expression that allow them to articulate and engage fully with the sensations and perceptions resulting from modernity.

In its efforts to map out and connect with the ineffable existing within the immanent bounds of present-day existence, I also argue that *Applied Ballardianism* can be seen as an example of what Sasha Chaitow calls "esoteric literature," where the text not only engages with the contemporary occult milieu, but also functions as an esoteric “symbol” and vector of esoteric praxis, offering the reader a worldview and knowledge that will illuminate contemporary society’s hidden layers of reality.

## Archeosophy, Music, and Melurgy

M.Sc Daniele Corradetti

Music and what he called “melurgy” were conceived by Tommaso Palamidessi in the late 1960s as an integral part of the program developed by the Scuola Archeosofica, his esoteric school. Palamidessi’s interest in music intensified in the mid-1970s, leading him to the composition of original music pieces, including “Melody in D.” The text *Trattato di musica e melurgia archeosofica*, published posthumously, dates back to this period. Although unfinished, like most of Palamidessi’s works published posthumously, it contains the essential elements of an esoteric musicological theory. The paper explores the role that Palamidessi assigns to music in the esoteric path, particularly in the awakening of the seven psychic centers. In addition to the musical-chromatic and psychic correspondences, Palamidessi indicates the use of the eight liturgical modes (divided into four authentic and four derivative modes) as suitable for developing compositions with “mystical and ‘paramystic’ (initiatory) awakening” purposes. Following the discovery of a score written by Palamidessi, Alessandro Benassai, president of Associazione Archeosofica, began composing pieces himself, and in 1999 established a sacred music choir called Santa Cecilia and a musical academy inspired by Tommaso Palamidessi’s musicological principles. The choir held a large number of concerts both in Italy and abroad. The

paper will present the fundamental musicological principles of archeosophical “melurgy,” together with a brief history and analysis of the Santa Cecilia Choir and the compositions and musical activities of Alessandro Benassai and other archeosophists.

## Kandinsky’s Vision: Art and the Battle for Utopia

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Kandinsky’s Vision: Art and the Battle for Utopia

The 1987 exhibition ‘The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985’ curated by Maurice Tuchman revolutionised the narrative landscape around abstract art. Breaking away from Clement Greenberg’s formalist lineage, which focused on purely visual or aesthetic issues, the exhibition catalogue references Steiner, Jung, Blavatsky, Böhme, Paracelsus, alchemy, thought-forms and more with papers by Sixten Ringbom, Rose-Carol Washton Long and Donald Kuspit among others. It changed the way we think about abstract art. The mystical or magical elements were regarded not just as eccentric philosophies influencing the Fin de Siècle move towards abstraction, but were seen from the artists’ perspective as forces actively investing the works of art with an active power, a potency harnessed by the artists in pursuit of a Utopia that they contrasted starkly with the early 20th century dawning of Modernism.

In this paper, I will revisit Kandinsky, one of the pioneers of the abstract art movement, to look again at these ideas explored through the 1987 exhibition. I will explain how he understood these forces to work within his artworks, the importance of sound translated into visual form within his work, and what he wanted to achieve through harnessing these, what were to him, spiritual powers. This was a fascinating and exciting time both in terms of how the world was changing and in how Kandinsky wanted to use art as a medium for societal change.

## Goddess Visions beyond the Celtic Twilight: The Druid Clan of Dana

Dr Vivianne Crowley<sup>1</sup>

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The Druid Clan of Dana is a druid order, a branch of the goddess-worshipping movement the Fellowship of Isis, founded in 1976 at Huntington Castle, Co. Carlow, by the Anglo-Irish Durdin-Robertson family. While the Druid Clan was not formally launched until 1992, its origins lie in the Durdin-Robertsons’ decades long spiritual explorations. On the family’s return from England after the Irish Civil War, Olivia (1917-2013) and her brother Laurence (1920-1994) decided “to be Irish”. They immersed themselves in local fairy lore, Celtic myths and legends, and the mysticism of the Celtic Twilight that they encountered in everyday life through the family’s connections with such leading figures as W. B. Yeats and George Russell (A.E.). From the late 1920s while pursuing an artistic, literary and social work career in Dublin, Olivia Durdin-Robertson began to experience visions and spiritual encounters with female figures whom she later identified as goddesses. One of these, a “lady of solar fire”, she identified as the Mother Goddess Dana of the Tuatha Dé Danann and later designated her the presiding deity of the Druid Clan. The founding myths, liturgy and ritual practices of the Druid Clan are steeped in Celticity, nature spirituality, Romanticism and re-enchantment, and root the Durdin-Robertsons’ druidic vision in the spirit of place. While positioning the Druid Clan as indigenous to Ireland, the Durdin-Robertsons’ multicultural syncretism embraced deities of all pantheons and members of all ethnicities. This paper examines the Durdin-Robertson’s druidic vision as expressed through its liturgy and ritual performances and how this has evolved in the Clan of Dana’s druidic groves in continental Europe and the United States.

# Gurdjieff, Esotericism and Creativity: Movements, Music, Literature and Cultural Environments

Prof Carole Cusack<sup>1</sup>

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G. I. Gurdjieff engaged in numerous creative activities that were intimately connected to his esoteric teaching: composing music (piano music, music for Movements) with Thomas de Hartmann; choreographing Movements or 'sacred dances'; creating literature, notably Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, a science fiction epic, and Meetings With Remarkable Men, a fictionalised autobiography of a spiritual seeker; and a range of ephemeral artistic endeavours, including devising a script, decorating environs that his pupils lived in, and improvising on the harmonium in his later years. This paper examines Gurdjieff's creative activities and attempts to pinpoint the precise time he developed each one, and to identify possible influences on the cultural products. This builds on my 2017 research into possible influences on, and resemblances to, the Movements among esoteric dance systems devised by other spiritual teachers, including Rudolf Steiner and Peter Deunov and on Johanna Petsche's (2015) study of Gurdjieff's music. Gurdjieff's teaching aimed at the development of an immortal component in his followers, through the harmonisation of the human 'centres' (intellectual, emotional and moving). The study of music and rigorous practice of complex dances can naturalistically be linked to greater bodily coordination and physical harmony, but Gurdjieff claimed that the transformation wrought by such cultivation went beyond physical adeptness and spiritually developed the dancers. He remarked that he was content to be remembered as "rather a good teacher of temple dances," and became a writer only when the residential phase of his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau near Paris disbanded after he had a near-fatal car crash in 1924. Yet it is possible to trace identical purposes in all his creative outputs, and to identify their stylistic techniques as engaged in the work of spiritual advancement according to Gurdjieff's distinctive cosmology and anthropology.

## Trails of a Divine Call: Towianism between Arts and Rituality

Mr Giulio Dalla Grana<sup>1</sup>

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The aim of the presentation is to show the relations between fine arts and Towianism, the heterodox Catholic movement headed by the Polish mystic Andrzej Towiański.

Artistic production had a notable function in Towianism. The Towianists often drew and print holy pictures in order to make postcards for the epistolary correspondence between them; they wrote prayers, poetry, hymns, and music for their rituals; they had a cult for Romantic classical musicians.

Towiański is mainly known for his relations with two of the most important Polish poets: Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. Nevertheless, it is often forgotten that among Towiański's disciples can be found other fundamental names of Polish literature: Seweryn Goszczyński, Stefan Zan, Ludwik Nabelak.

Furthermore, in nineteenth-century France, the Towianists attracted the interest of several personalities among the Parisian literary clubs. In particular, the Polish mystic was known by Edgar Quinet, Jules Michelet, Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, and Paul Reveillère. A few decades later, after Towianism was consolidated in Italy, the Polish mystic aroused the interest of the writers Antonio Fogazzaro, Dora Melegari, Clemente Rebora, and Eugenio Montale.

Painting also covered an important role among the Towianists. The most notable Towianist painter was Walenty Wańkowicz, a figure claimed as one of the national painters by Poland, Lithuania, and White Russia. Curiously, the Towianist legacy of painting is identified in the works of two artists that never met the Polish mystic: Andrea Fossombrone and Jan Styka.

In conclusion, Towianism presents different interconnections with fine arts. The movement was a source of interest by numerous writers and painters, and art was a form of expression for the Towianists, as it was an active part of their rituals.

## Alternative Religion and Natural Childbirth. Comparing Discourses from the 19th and 20th Century

Mr Johannes Endler<sup>1</sup>

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This paper expounds notions of the 1970s natural childbirth movement and draws a historical comparison to a lesser known “back-to-nature” discourse on conception, pregnancy and childbirth at the intersection of hydropathy, free love and “harmonial religion” in mid-19th century United States. Points of comparison are described states of consciousness and body sensations; the perceived communication between the mother and the unborn; and an esoteric embryology that oscillates between images of mechanistic human “production” and the creative emanation of new life from a hidden source to which the parents may surrender.

## A Portrait of the Artist as a Psychedelic Prophet

Mr Patrick Everitt<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Independent, , Ireland*

A Portrait of the Artist as a Psychedelic Prophet: Examining the influence of James Joyce on Timothy Leary, Robert Anton Wilson, and Terence McKenna. Timothy Leary, Robert Anton Wilson, and Terence McKenna are three of the most influential figures of the late-twentieth century psychedelic counterculture. Their liberal use of terminology derived from magic, alchemy, occultism, and other esoteric traditions to describe the transcendence of psychedelic experiences situates them squarely in the category Hanegraaff has defined as "entheogenic esotericism". A key influence on all three was the Irish writer James Joyce (1882 - 1941), widely regarded as one of the most important figures in twentieth century literature. Leary asserts in his autobiography *Flashbacks*, that it was "in part the long training with Joycean relativity that prepared me for the psychedelic experience". Wilson wrote analyses of *Finnegans Wake* that employed the mystical terminology of Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and Qabalah to illustrate Joyce's "relativistic" perspective. He considered the work, published in 1939, rich with examples of Jungian synchronicity, including apparently precognitive references to the psychedelic counterculture. McKenna described the "unique feeling" of reading *Finnegans Wake* as "psychedelic" and "about as close to LSD on the page as you can get". He considered Joyce "one of the true pioneers in the mapping of hyperspace". For all three, Joyce's prose contained an esoteric, apocalyptic, and prophetic dimension that foreshadowed the psychedelic states of consciousness they would spend decades of their lives exploring. This presentation will examine the influence of Joyce on their thought, their work, and their psychedelic experiences.

## Faërie, Witchcraft, Magic: “modes of magicity” and “magic stories” in the English language literature

Dr Oleksandra (Alexandra) Filonenko<sup>1</sup>

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The paper discusses how the magical ideas of each age influence literature through certain “modes of magicity” - general notions about the type and nature of magic represented in a text. These “modes of magicity” are closely related to the notions of the magical, dominant in Western Europe, particularly in the British Isles, which had finally taken shape by the Renaissance. Three main subdivisions of the magical can be singled out: the magic of supernatural creatures (mode Faërie); demonised magic of women and common folk (mode Witchcraft); and so-called “learned magic” (mode Magic) – intensively intellectualised and predominantly male practice, with its two branches: White magic and Black magic. These modes can mix, yet with a certain tendency to the constancy of models; moreover, the presence of two or more “modes of magicity” in a literary work creates exciting plot developments in a story. Every mode produces a specific type of “magic story” (i.e. narratives of the events influenced by magic or its imitation) with a certain ensemble of characters, plotlines and motifs. Faërie story narrates about encounters with the Otherworld and centres on a hero's quest; there is help or hindrance from a magical agent(s) and (often) a eucatastrophic ending. In a Witchcraft story, there are (three) female characters with a malevolent or, later, an ambiguous attitude to a male character(s) who acts as a “priest-king” and is either “sacrificed” or “glorified” or both. Magic stories in the mode Magic normally have a magician as a protagonist and may follow two scenarios: a contract with an evil supernatural being and a likely demise of the protagonist (Faustian scenario) or a story of a pious mage who employs the help of benevolent spirits and uses his magic to reform other people leading to a happy-end (Prosperian scenario).

## The Alchemical Interpretation of Hieroglyphs : a Long-Lasting Story

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It is widely accepted that Western alchemy was born in Egypt around the first centuries of our era. For the oldest alchemists, such as Zosimos of Panopolis (IVth century C.E.), alchemy drew its origins from the old Egyptian sanctuaries. Thus, some temples are mentioned in the old Greek alchemists's Corpus (the famous temple of Ptah in Memphis, for instance). Simultaneously, the interpretations of the hieroglyphic writing, whose knowledge and meaning had faded, also begins at this time with the Hieroglyphica of Chaeremon (Ist century C.E.), or later of Horapollon (Vth century C.E.). These different elements probably encouraged the birth of an alchemical reading of Egyptian art. As a result, alchemists began to interpret hieroglyphs and iconographical programs of the temples as hidden instructions to complete the « sacred art ». Such a development echoed the traditional topos of the revelation, triggered by the discovery of a secret knowledge inscribed in a lost book or on a stele, which already existed in Egyptian literature (the Setne's Tale, end of the IIIrd century B.C.E.) or in Jewish culture (Jewish Antiquities of Flavius Josephus, Ith century C.E.). This exegetical practice continued in the works of Arab alchemists, and the illustrations of the Book of the Seven Climes by Abu al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-'Irāqī al-Sīmāwī (second part of the XIIth century) provide a fine proof of it. During the baroque era, intellectuals such as the Count Michael Maier (1569-1622) or the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) glossed and popularised once again this reading of hieroglyphs, in their quest of a primordial and universal language. This paper aims to present and contextualise the history and the metamorphosis of these alchemical interpretations, which ignited the minds through the centuries.

## Spatial Innovations in Medieval Ritual Magic

Mr Andrea Franchetto<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden*

The material and spatial dimensions attested in the manuscripts of ritual magic that have circulated since the middle ages have long eluded researchers. Studying where those rituals take place is important to understand the history of the practice of ritual magic. Few attempts have been done to interpret the reasons behind the construction of magic circles and the use of domestic locations attested in procedural handbooks since the 13th century. The author will offer a spatial analysis of the circles described in the second section of the *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, a 13th-century handbook that teaches how to conjure different ranks of spirits, in order to identify what are the innovations in the spatial design of the ritual space that medieval necromantic handbooks bring to the history of learned magic. It will be discussed what are the implications of magic circles in ritual experience from a social, material, and cognitive perspective.

## Rudolf Steiner's "Subtle Bodies" as Cultural Innovation

Dr Aaron French<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Universität Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany*

In 1902, the Austrian-born philosopher and Goethe researcher Rudolf Steiner joined the Theosophical Society and effectively abandoned his academic career. Given the general negative view of esotericism held by the public at large, it is fascinating that Steiner, himself extensively educated in the sciences and a well-versed student of Kantian philosophy, began claiming that the Buddhist Eightfold Path contained truths that far surpassed those of Kant. Steiner utilized Indo-Tibetan and Chinese religions and philosophies as potential antidotes, reflections, and alternatives to the perceived disenchantment of European modernity, in which individuals had lost their vitality and independence, becoming cogs in a dehumanized, dysfunctional, and mechanized universe. Asian religious philosophy encouraged Steiner to question the "western" paradigm of what science is, how it should be practiced, and whether it could produce genuine knowledge of reality and nature. He pursued this line of thinking in his ideas about what constituted modern art, as well. Anticipating contemporary concerns about a scientific method that erases the human subject, Steiner utilized theosophical, non-European, and non-Christian models to innovate a concept of energetic "subtle bodies," each with alternating states of spiritual development, in order to retain the notion of Geist (spirit) within the domain of modern Western science. This move allowed Steiner to harness vitalistic flows coming from "the East" and to dissolve what he viewed as the rigidified Western thinking of his time—in other words, as a form of cultural innovation.

# Performative Strategies of Creative Esotericism in 19th Century Jewish Communities

**Mrs Veronica French<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany*

This presentation focuses on two Jewish women during the 19th century in Europe who creatively used contact with other worlds as a performative strategy for asserting their spiritual independence as women. Hannah Rochel, known as the Maiden of Ludmir, was a female rabbi, esoteric mystic, and practicing Kabbalist who was active in Russia. She developed her own following through teaching, acts of healing, and other wonder-workings. Friedrike Wiener, known as Selma the Jewish Seer, was a devout Jewish girl who through an illness experimented with mesmerism in Germany at the height of bourgeois religiosity. Wiener was a mesmerist, seer, and healer who, through her visions, challenged Jewish female norms. Her first vision was of a person handing her a piece of milk bread soaked in pork lard, after which she declared pork lard as her main cure and healed herself and others. Both women were met with varying degrees of criticism and acceptance by their Jewish communities. While Rochel asserted her spiritual independence mostly within the confines of Jewish Law, Wiener resorted to subverting such laws and carving out her own individual path. Yet both women operated within a particular set of social norms at a time when social norms were not conducive to female spiritual independence and/or community leadership. They defied normal conventions of creativity, drawing on forms of esotericism and performance as a means of generating creative religiosity.

## The Alchemical Transmutations in Matthew Barney's Redoubt

**Dr Yang Gao<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Institute for Advanced Study in History of Science, Northwest University, Xi'an, China*

Matthew Barney's recent epic work Redoubt is a complex set of artistic creations including sculptures, engravings, and electroplated copper plates, all centered on the eponymous film which documents and exposes the making and meaning of these artifacts. Apparently, the film tells a story adapted from that of Diana and Actaeon which is recorded in Ovid's Metamorphoses, but it is also filled with motives related to various esoteric themes, the most important of which is alchemy. This paper intends to show that the ancient mythical story of the goddess and the hunter as it is recast in the Redoubt is connected with three important themes in alchemy, i.e. the process of aurification (manufacturing of fake gold), the making of philosophers' stone, and the challenge of nature by alchemical techniques. According to these, three kinds of transmutations are found throughout the film work: the copper plates are transformed into reliefs, the nature into artistic images, and the man into magicians manipulating nature. The Redoubt could be viewed as presenting an alchemical theatre without words, which reveals the deeply intriguing relationship between myth, man, and nature.

**Prof Christine Ferguson<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Stirling, Stirling, United Kingdom*

Panel Purpose, Goals, Outcomes, and Contribution to the Conference Theme

Esotericism studies has witnessed a pronounced literary turn over the last decade, as more and more of the field's scholars—many educated or situated within religious studies departments— have come to recognize literature's importance to the invention, dissemination, and reception of occult ideas and beliefs. Yet with this adoption of new types of sources (poems, plays, novels, memoir, trance writing, etc.) comes an urgent

need for new methodologies. Historically or sociologically-trained scholars of esotericism have not always been quick, willing, or able to recognize the important precedents for their research that exist within canonical literary studies, or to consider how methodological practices and debates in the latter field might help to tackle key questions for a new practice of occultural literary criticism. Our panel is motivated by a desire to improve strategies for identifying, assessing, and interpreting the impact of creative works of esoteric writing within their distinct historical, aesthetic, and reception formations. We ask:

- What role, if any, should authorial identity, belief, and intention play in the production of an esoteric literary canon?
- Why do certain literary genres seem to develop particularly dynamic relationships of influence and adaptation with esoteric traditions?
- What interpretive strategies should we bring to imaginative literature which has inspired or been adopted by esoteric communities through acts of ‘hermetic semiosis,’ despite having no originary link to them?
- How might we evidence, rather than simply assume or project, the reception of literary works, whether esoteric in provenance or not, among distinct occultural reading communities?

This panel brings together four international scholars to present short, polemic papers on key words crucial to the pursuit and development of a new methodology for literary esotericism studies: author, interpretation, genre, and reader. Presenters will consider current (mis-)applications of these concepts within esotericism studies, and explain how their own research—on the spiritualist authorship of Arthur Conan Doyle, the esoteric science fiction of Phillip K. Dick, Umberto Eco’s concept of ‘Hermetic Semiosis,’ and post-Soviet New Age reading cultures—has led to new and improved methodological applications.

## “Interpretation”

**Giuliano D’Amico, University of Oslo**

“Has Peer Gynt a Key? And how far is it legitimate to insist on the mystic interpretation of a work of art for which the author has emphatically disclaimed any hidden or esoteric meaning whatsoever? The question is most fitly answered by another: How far is it possible for a poet, writing in the full flow of what is loosely termed inspiration, to gauge, fully and accurately, the value—on all the planes—of what he has written?”

These are the opening words of the theatre programme for a Theosophical staging of Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, performed in Edinburgh in 1908. Articulated more than a century ago, the questions here raised have continuing relevance for esotericism studies as scholars have repeatedly discussed the potential and limits of ‘esoteric’ interpretations of literary works, i.e. readings that seek to find a secret, encoded meaning for initiates in works that show no apparent link to esoteric currents. Drawing upon selected examples from the reception of *Peer Gynt* throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, I discuss what the characteristics of such ‘esoteric’ readings are, and whether some of them, although they are based on the assumption of an esoteric undertone that is absent in Ibsen’s play, actually open up exciting, interpretive keys to the play in doing so. I will devote special attention to Umberto Eco’s concept of “hermetic semiosis”, which he develops in *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990) and uses in order to debunk esoteric readings of classic literary works, such as Dante’s *Comedy*. I will discuss if and how this concept is applicable to esoteric readings, such as those of *Peer Gynt*, and, more generally, whether it helps to understand how esoteric readings of literary words with no reference to esotericism can still convey useful interpretive keys.

## “Genre”

**Aren Roukema, Birkbeck, University of London**

Genre has become an important aspect of the way in which we organise ideas, histories, experiences, and ontologies. Genre's influence on the way knowledge is formed and perspective established is now such that, in Frederic Jameson's terms, it has "spread out and colonized reality itself" (1997, 249). Though historians and theorists of esotericism have frequently observed its significant engagements with literature and culture, little attention has been paid to its role in defining the assumptions, stylistics, and common concepts of this "colonizing" force (and vice versa). Observing esotericism's reciprocal relationship with genre calls forth a number of important questions: How has the enfolding of esoteric knowledge into literature (and related cultural forms) defined genres and differentiated them? How does genre, in turn, structure and inspire esoteric concepts, practices, identities, and worldviews? What role does it play in adapting esotericism and communicating its images and concepts through time and across cultures? This paper approaches these questions by assessing the convergence of esotericism and the mechanisms of genre in *Valis* (1981), a science fiction novel which fictionalises the paranormal experiences encountered in February and March 1974 (2–3–74) by its author, Philip K. Dick. Scholars have frequently observed Dick's reliance on esoteric traditions in the novel, particularly Gnosticism, but this paper will move this discussion in the direction of genre. I will argue that the explanatory mechanisms of *Valis*, even when not apparently esoteric, often remain centrally predicated on science fictional iconography and methods of worlding which have an established esoteric heritage. *Valis* thus illustrates the significant and continuing cultural impact which esotericism exerts via the tropes, assumptions, and mechanics of genre. Conversely, Dick's use of these genre motifs to narrativize 2–3–74 indicates the potential of genre to frame and categorise esoteric knowledge and experience.

## **"Author"**

**Christine Ferguson, University of Stirling**

Authorship remains perhaps the most common starting point for the project of literary canon formation currently underway within esotericism studies. As scholars seek to construct a corpus of imaginative writing relevant to their field, they often centre the literary output of high-profile occult practitioners about whose esoteric affiliation is undisputed— William Butler Yeats, Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune— or who, if no believers themselves, had demonstrable personal ties to their contemporary occultural milieux (Edward Bulwer Lytton, Arthur Machen). While there are obvious advantages to this approach, there are also clear pitfalls which require more attention if literary esotericism studies is to avoid the hazards of biographical reductionism, tautological interpretation, or aesthetic impoverishment. The very concept of authorship marshalled here is, after all, a historically and culturally contingent one beholden to a romantic vision of solitary—and typically male, white, and above the market—creation; it omits alternative forms of collective, composite, and ephemeral literary production. Furthermore, what do we lose when we read the work of avowed occult seekers only or primarily through the lens of their biographically-evidenced beliefs, as a priori confirmations of what we always already knew about their producers? In some veins of esotericism studies, authorial intention continues to occupy the unquestioned position of privilege from which it was long stripped in literary criticism. My paper demonstrates how and why such authorially-focused readings can go wrong through a discussion of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Land of Mist* (1926), the spiritualist novel which I am currently editing for Edinburgh University Press. Written for clear conversionist purposes, and with religious affordance in mind, by the early twentieth-century's most famous British spiritualist, the novel's rare and only recently available manuscript versions reveal a far less coherent authorial subject than an exclusively biographical methodology would allow or invite us to see. Its example shows why we need a more sophisticated approach to the category and consequences of esoteric authorship, one that takes emic intention as an interpretive problem rather than a given.

# “Reader”

Kateryna Zorya, Södertörn University

Emic esoteric and occult texts often blur the boundary between fiction and non-fiction. Whether presented as fiction or truth, they are filled with descriptions of events most of us find too fantastic to be believable: prophetic dreams, telepathy, probability manipulation, flight, teleportation, transforming bodies, meetings with spirits, and so on. Scholars in the field rarely see these fantastic events play out; however, what we do see more often is how these discourses are created—and therefore how emic readers determine which of these claims are true or not. This paper presents a comparative strategy of interpretation, where fieldwork with readers of contemporary esoteric texts is used as a key to their narratives. Readers determine veracity in dialogue with each other and by comparing esoteric texts to their own lives—and this procedure of comparison is one that’s usually opaque to scholars who do not do fieldwork. This paper presents a sketch of this emic procedure, using examples from post-Soviet interpretations of esoteric texts to show how readers parse several common elements in order to determine veracity. The most important markers of veracity are whether a given element has a basis in reality that is known from outside sources (e.g. the reader’s own experience), whether an element is referred to in passing or whether there is a narrative built up around it, and whether typical genre elements of esoteric narratives that hint at personal experience or, conversely, exaggeration are present or absent. A notable complication of reader interpretation is that markers denoting “fiction” have been used in certain contexts to evade censorship, making the relationship between the fantastic and the real anything but straightforward.

## Sex, Gender, and Creativity in Western Esotericism (ESOGEN Panel)

**Dr Manon Hedenborg White<sup>1</sup>, Professor Christine Ferguson<sup>2</sup>, Dr Tanya Cheadle<sup>3</sup>, Dr Shai Feraro<sup>4</sup>, Dr Sólveig Guðmundsdóttir<sup>5</sup>**

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Gender and sexuality have long been categories central to creative expression, inspiring representation, inflecting cultural understandings of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, determining access to artistic training and networks, and shaping the reception of specific works and careers. For individuals seeking to consolidate or challenge the gendered and sexual politics of art in their particular cultural locations, Western esotericism has long held a potent allure, providing a space in which, for example, women barred from art school might forge careers as naturally receptive painting mediums, or deviant sexual practices might be recoded as forms of magico-artistic expression. Artists and writers have drawn on esoteric symbolism to challenge hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality within their chosen genres. Conversely, creative practitioners have woven esoteric themes into their dance and performance work. This inaugural panel of the ESSWE Network on Sexuality, Gender, and Esotericism (ESOGEN) imports cutting-edge perspectives from gender and sexuality studies to shed new light on esoteric writers (J.W. Brodie-Innes), visual artists (Monica Sjöo, Linda Stupart, Kevin Talmeir Whiteneir Jr), practices, and works. A team of panellists drawn from across Europe will demonstrate why and how sex and gender are crucial to the occult histories of art, literature, and dramatic performance; they will also suggest how gender and sexuality studies might benefit from a closer engagement with emergent research into the history, impact, and circulation of esoteric and new religious ideas. Through short position papers that take inspiration from specific case studies, panellists will address these larger questions and explain how their ongoing research suggests a provocative new agenda for future studies of the complex nexus of esotericism, sexuality, gender, and creativity. Talks will be followed with audience/discussant response.

“I had grown from an egotistical, cynical and rather priggish boy, with one bound into a man”: Reimagining modern masculinity in the occult novels of John William Brodie-Innes (1848-1923)

**Dr Tanya Cheadle, University of Glasgow**

Keywords: masculinity; power; Scotland; novel; Brodie-Innes.

The current salience of masculinity as a category of analysis is self-evident, with a resurgent masculinist rhetoric in populist politics, and the persistence of hetero-patriarchal systems across the world. Yet within Western esotericism, masculinities remain largely unscrutinised. This paper begins to address this elision through an analysis of the occult novels of Edinburgh-based lawyer and esotericist John William Brodie-Innes (1848-1923). Termed derisively by A. E. Waite the ‘small Pope of Edinburgh’, in the 1880s and ‘90s Brodie-Innes held key roles within Scottish occultism, as president of the Scottish Lodge of the Theosophical Society and founder and Emperor of the Amen-Ra temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Between 1908 and 1919, he published six novels, including the Highland selkie romance, *Morag the Seal* (1908) and a tale of seventeenth-century witchcraft, *The Devil’s Mistress* (1915). Taking these novels as its central focus, this paper asks two interrelated questions: how did Brodie-Innes construct ‘man’ as an ontological category, and what features did he ascribe to ideal masculinity?

In posing such questions, this paper constitutes an important intervention in our understanding of sex, gender and creativity in Western esotericism. Firstly, it highlights the need to consider localities outside well-studied metropolitan centres. It is clear that masculinity was configured differently in Scotland in important ways, emphasizing the localised and differentiated nature of masculine repertoires available to individuals in their

construction of selfhood. Secondly, it underscores the importance of occulture as a space for the reimagining of sexual and gendered beliefs and practices. In his fictional writing, Brodie-Innes was able to articulate heterodox ideas not found or contradictory to those in his non-fictional work for esoteric journals. Furthermore, the novels' popularity suggest the considerable cultural purchase of these ideas in wider reimaginings of modern masculinity, during a period of significant contestation and flux in Britain's patriarchal gender order.

Feminism, Sexuality and Esotericism in Monica Sjöö's Art

## **Dr Shai Feraro (University of Haifa and Tel Hai College, Israel)**

My paper examines importance the work of artist and Goddess feminist Goddess-feminist Monica Sjöö (1938-2005) in facilitating cross-fertilization between British Wiccans and Wiccan-derived Pagans and emerging feminist branches of Witchcraft and Goddess Spirituality during the 1970s and 1980.

While most British feminists saw religion as inherently patriarchal and therefore oppressive towards women, others tried to maintain a relationship with the divine – either by reforming the Abrahamic faiths or by focusing on Goddess Spirituality, theories on prehistoric matriarchy or feminist adaptations of Neopagan religions such as Wicca. Goddess women and matriarchalists such as Monica Sjöö were an integral part of the feminist movement yet were criticized by large segments of the British WLM for engaging in irrelevant 'naval gazing', and it seems that the attitudes by feminist activists at the time are reflected in the relative lack of attention they later received from in research on the feminist movement.

Yet, as my paper will show, the powerful imagery of Sjöö esoteric feminist artwork, coupled with her extensive writings on Goddess Spirituality and women's liberation, had a considerable effect on the development of British Paganism in the latter half of the Twentieth Century while at the same time representing and inspiring a distinct tendency within the local feminist movement. My discussion would be based on some of Sjöö most iconic paintings, such as *God Giving Birth* (1968) and *The Goddess at Avebury and Silbury* (1978), her own writings on the political and spiritual experiences that led to the production of these works, and materials from her personal archives – both in public and private hands – that attest to her contacts with British Pagans during the 1970s-1980s.

## **“A Spell for Daily Hauntings from this Ghost Body”: Queering Witchcraft in Contemporary Art**

**Sólveig Guðmundsdóttir, PhD Student, WWU Münster, Germany.**

This paper examines the discursive relations between esotericism, queer theory and gender politics in the works of two contemporary artists, Kevin Talmer Whiteneir Jr. and Linda Stupart. Whiteneir Jr. lives and works in the USA while Stupart hails from South Africa but resides in the UK. The two artists were elected as subjects due to the fusion of esotericism and queer politics in their works, demonstrating numerous similarities yet individual approaches to the topic. Artists have frequently appropriated esoteric material to subvert traditions, to confront and to question their social realities. This includes interrogating concepts of sexuality and gender, often going against bourgeois morals and the norms of society. Mapping out the presence of esotericism in art and its discursive entanglements with gender and sexuality is of immense importance for our understanding of modern occulture and its socio-political dimensions. Engaging with the intersections between queerness and witchcraft, Stupart and Whiteneir Jr. draw from various esoteric practices (magic circles, rituals, sigils and incantations), utilizing it as instruments of disturbance and empowerment. Through their spell casting performances, Stupart condemns the dominating presence of white males within art and academia, while Whiteneir Jr.'s project, *Queer Heresies*, deals with colonialism and racial oppression. Esotericism is implemented to build a site of resistance and protest. However, it is not solely used as a

subversive tactic or a counter-discourse, esotericism is also employed by the artists to imagine queer futures – providing a utopian horizon that exhibits additional influences from feminist sci-fi, cyborg theory and Afrofuturism. Through ritual performances and writing they seek to utilize witchcraft’s emancipatory potential and create spaces for marginalized bodies.

## Aleister Crowley, The Thelemic Tradition, and the Creative Arts

Dr Manon Hedenborg White<sup>1</sup>, Professor Henrik Bogdan<sup>2</sup> William Peters<sup>4</sup>, Dr Keith E. Cantú<sup>5</sup>, Associate Professor Marco Pasi<sup>6</sup>

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Recent years have witnessed an increase of scholarly interest in the British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), his religion Thelema, and its relationship with the creative arts. In addition to Crowley’s vast production of magical and mystical texts, he contributed to several artistic genres, including fiction, poetry, painting, and drama. Previous research has highlighted, among other areas, the influence of Decadence and weird fiction on Crowley’s literary and lyrical production, and his indebtedness to the compositions of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) and the art of Paul Gauguin (1848–1903). Moreover, scholarship has indicated Crowley’s influence on prominent writers and artists such as Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), Xul Solar (1887–1963), and Kenneth Anger (b. 1927), and the reception of Crowley and Thelema in later popular culture. This panel takes as its starting point the multifaceted relationship between Crowley and the arts, seeking to further discussion around two main areas by presenting novel research on five hitherto under-explored topics within this nexus. Firstly, the panel will consider Crowley not simply as an occultist who dabbled in fiction, poetry, painting, or theatre, but instead take seriously the reciprocal relationship between Crowley’s occultism and artistic pursuits, examining how these mutually informed each other. This is evinced by the triangular relationship between Crowley, art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), and the artist and singer Ratan Devi Coomaraswamy (1889–1958) (Cantú); the intersection between marketing logics and visual expression in Crowley’s book advertisements (Bogdan); and Crowley’s attempt to create an illustrated encyclopaedia of symbolic correspondences with the artist Oskar Hopfer (Peters). Secondly, the panel will explore Crowley’s lasting significance for esoteric art and popular (oc)culture by considering two cases: the poet and visual artist Marjorie Cameron’s (1922–1995) engagement with the teachings of Crowley and mythologist Joseph Campbell in her illustrated notebooks (Hedenborg White), and Crowley’s influence on the artistic development of the painter Frieda Harris (1877–1962) (Whitehouse). The panel will conclude with a response statement (Pasi), summarising the discussions thus far and indicating the importance of the panel theme for theorising and understanding the broader relationship between esotericism and the arts in modernity.

“Unfold the Rose and Taste Its Death”: Grief, Desire, and the Hero’s Journey in the Art and Poetry of Cameron

### **Manon Hedenborg White (Malmö University)**

This paper will examine four, mostly unpublished, illustrated notebooks produced by the artist Marjorie Cameron (1922–1995) in the early 1960s, analysing their core themes and sources of inspiration in the occultist Aleister Crowley’s (1875–1947) religion Thelema as well as the comparative mythology of Joseph Campbell (1904–1987). In 1946, Cameron became the lover, magical partner, and eventual wife of the rocket scientist and Thelemite John “Jack” Whiteside Parsons (1914–1952), playing a key role in the latter’s “Babalon Working”, which aimed to manifest the Thelemic goddess Babalon. Believing Cameron had a crucial role to play in the unfolding of the new aeon, Parsons tutored her in occultism and introduced her to Campbell’s work on hero myths, and Cameron took an increasing interest in Crowley’s writings and the significance of the Babalon Working. After Parsons’ accidental death in 1952, Cameron delved deeper into occultism and visionary states. She hypothesised Crowley was her magical father – his writings remaining a lifelong source of inspiration for her creative output – and explored otherworldly realms and beings through art and poetry.

The sources for this paper comprise the notebooks “Arindal”, “Azrael”, “Anatomy of Madness”, and “The Black Pilgrimage”, which fuse poetry and illustrations with diary fragments and letters, showing the influence of Crowley’s writings as well as those of Campbell, with whom Cameron also corresponded in the early 1960s. In this paper, I will argue that these genre-defying works are thematically connected through the idea of a heroic or initiatory journey intersected with the theme of ecstatic annihilation. I will propose that Cameron’s artistic and lyrical work during this period represents a creative reframing of central concepts in the thought of Crowley and Campbell, shaped by Cameron’s own magical practice and meaning-making around her experiences of grief, desire, and gender.

## **"Order Early to avoid Armageddon!" Aleister Crowley as an Advertiser of the Occult**

### **Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg)**

One of the most conspicuous aspects of esotericism and modernisation is the commercialisation and commodification of the occult, and the esoteric landscape has from the 19th century increasingly turned into an occult supermarket in which the individual can pick and choose the components of his or her spirituality. This occult supermarket is not only made up by consumers, however, but also by producers trying to sell their particular brand of the occult. A hitherto understudied aspect of the commercialisation of the occult is the advertising of occult products, such as books, lectures or organisations. The advertising of the occult is ironic in the sense that it aims to sell something to the public that is often veiled in a discourse of secrecy, but it is also revealing of trends and developments on the occult market. Furthermore, advertising can be seen as an art form which draws on new movements in design and art, in which the visual medium serves a commercial end. This paper will discuss the British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) as an advertiser of the occult, with a special focus on the many prospectuses and adverts for the books which he published. Using eye-catching headings and phrases such as “Unique opportunity. – Order now to avoid Armageddon!” and “The Chance of the Year! The Chance of the Century!! The Chance of the Geologic Period!!!”, or images of himself that often verged on the theatrical or comical, Crowley sought to sell a teaching which he, by contrast, took seriously enough to devote his life to propagating it. Relying on theories of advertising, it will be argued that Crowley’s main approach to designing adverts was through the use of irony and humour as a means to distancing himself from other actors on the occult market.

## **“The Most Perfect Book in the World”: Aleister Crowley, Oskar Hopfer, and Liber 777**

### **William Peters (Independent Scholar)**

The 78 images of the Thoth Tarot, as painted by Frieda Lady Harris, are today accepted as Aleister Crowley’s contribution toward a visual expression of the key concepts of Western Esotericism. However, The Book of Thoth was neither Crowley’s first effort to bring the “previously secret attributions of the Tarot” to the wider public, nor his first attempt at an illustrated encyclopaedia of symbolic correspondences. Years prior to the collaboration with Harris, Crowley had sought to issue a revised edition of his “magical and philosophical dictionary” Liber 777. As originally published in 1909, its 64 pages presented in “concise tabulated form a comparative view of all the symbols of the great religions of the world”. Shortly after its initial publication, however, Crowley conceived plans for an expanded edition, employing commentary and illustration to bring the correspondences to life. These plans remained unfulfilled until, in 1925, Crowley met German artist Oskar Hopfer during his sojourn at the home of Heinrich Tränker. Crowley, admiring Hopfer’s work for Tränker’s journal Pansophia, commissioned the artist to produce the dozens of illustrations required for the expanded Liber 777. While Hopfer set to work, Crowley sought a publisher in Europe and the United States. Unfortunately, difficulty in communication across languages and over great distances, as well as a global

economic depression and ensuing world war frustrated their efforts, and the work remains unpublished to this day. This paper examines the conception, execution and ultimate fate of Hopfer and Crowley's attempt to produce a visual "key to all religions and to all practical occult working."

## **A Love Triangle of Art: Aleister, Ananda, and Ratan Devi**

### **Keith Cantú (University of California, Santa Barbara)**

In this paper I will offer a historical reexamination of the triangular relationship between the occultist and poet Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), the scholar and art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), and the artist and singer Ratan Devi Coomaraswamy (alias Alice Ethel Richardson, 1889–1958) in 1916. Details about this relationship has been well-documented by Richard Kaczynski and Marco Pasi, which serves as a useful starting point for analysis. Mark Sedgwick has also treated on Ananda Coomaraswamy, of Sri Lankan Tamil heritage, as one of the most important Traditionalists in the twentieth century, and on his correspondence with René Guénon (1886–1951). Additionally, Coomaraswamy's two-volume book on 'Yaksas' (< Skt. yakṣa) or tree spirits, published by the Smithsonian Institution, remains a classic among art historians and academics to this day. Ratan Devi, with her published book *Thirty Songs from the Punjab and Kashmir* (1913), would have been an artistic celebrity in her own right; the book even received a foreword by the celebrated Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), a profound honor that reveals its prominence. To connect these threads I will first show how Crowley's interest in the yoga of South India, having personally studied with Coomaraswamy's cousin Ponnambalan Ramanathan in Sri Lanka as well as the writings of Sri Sabhapati Swami, would have at least partially informed his interactions with Coomaraswamy and Ratan Devi. I will then juxtapose the Traditionalist impulses behind Coomaraswamy's art history and Ratan Devi's preservation of North Indian folk music with Crowley's mostly innovative (yet in some ways traditional) views on yoga, subsumed within his vision of Thelema and ceremonial "magick." Their triangular relationship accordingly serves as a useful example to contextualize potential tensions resulting from the innovations of occultism on the one hand and impulses to preserve artistic tradition on the other.

# Capital Magic: Esoteric Narratives and Shaping the Capitals of East-Central Europe

Dr Pavel Horák<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology, Prague, Czech Republic*

From Paris to Istanbul, Stockholm to Rome, many European capitals have always been havens of various esoteric activities. Some of them, like Prague, for instance, are widely considered as magical. However, what happened and how selected capitals started to be considered as magical or esoteric centres? How have the capitals served the purposes of various esoteric groups? What groups and esoteric figures found a home in various capitals? What esoteric narratives can we identify when discussing particular capitals? Can these narratives influence the ways how a public image of a particular capital is presented? Can the narratives influence contemporary tourist experience? This panel aims to explore the esoteric narratives about selected Central European cities – Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, Belgrade, and Sofia – and analyse how these narratives contribute to shaping the public image of a particular city nowadays. In particular, we will track both historical sources of these narratives, their overlaps and transformations and focus on how they shape the current physical form of the cities – from statues and historical palaces to tourist traps and various museums of alchemical tools. We embed our scholarship between history, literary studies, the study of religions, and urban anthropology focusing on the example of the overlaps of architecture, art, and esotericism.

The panel has four parts: firstly, we do a group brainstorming on what the panel audience consider magical/esoteric about Prague, Warsaw, Belgrade, Budapest, or Sofia or any city in general. Secondly, we present a short experimental video showing answers of the very inhabitants of the particular city and their ideas on magic and esotericism there. Thirdly, we present five short papers, briefly introducing analysis, supplemented with visual material. This introductory part would take approximately 50-60 minutes. Fourthly, the remaining time will be devoted to getting back to the original brainstorming ideas and further discussion.

Panel Convenor:

Pavel Horák, Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology;

Panellists:

Karolina Maria Hess, University of Silesia in Katowice;

György E. Szönyi, Central European University and University of Szeged—YouTube Video Contribution

Victoria Vitanova-Kerber, Fribourg University;

## **Esoteric Warsaw – Heart of a Nation and City of Spirits**

### **Karolina Maria Hess**

In the second half of the 16th century Warsaw became the capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (due to its convenient location a similar distance away from both Krakow and Vilnius). The emblem of Warsaw is a mermaid – a mythological being, half-woman, half-fish, that became the patron and protector of the city. Especially in the period of partition (1772–1917), Warsaw itself became a magical symbol, the heart of Poland, a legendary place which, if freed from foreign occupation, could lead the whole nation to freedom and rebirth. In the interwar years of the 20th century, Warsaw also became the capital of Polish esotericism: it was here that the most active Theosophical lodges, Spiritualist circles and Anthroposophical groups were based. Some called it a “Spiritualist plague” that fell over the city. The most famous of Polish astrologers (like Karol Chobot) and clairvoyants (Józef Marcinkowski a.k.a Kara Mustafa or the renowned Stefan Ossowiecki) were active in Warsaw, and their prophecies are referred to in Polish literature to this day. After World War 2 and the

reconstruction of Warsaw (which was almost completely demolished), despite the new communist regime, the city remained a site of intense activity of esotericists. Since the 1970s the city hosted psychotronic organizations, dowser's associations, courses in hypnosis and psychotronic experiments (one name that needs to be mentioned here is Lech Emfazy Stefański). However, due to the immense devastation and death of thousands and thousands of people during the Nazi occupation, Warsaw also became a city of spirits, a graveyard of the old, magical world, which can now seem as the golden age of Poland.

Magical Budapest 1900-1940: Lifestyle, Attractions, Literature, Philosophy

## **György E. Szönyi**

By 1900 Budapest became one of the fastest growing and most vibrant capital cities of Europe. A twin city of Vienna in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, similarly multinational and multicultural, its cultural flourishing even surpassed that of the Austrian metropolis. Although the conclusion of WW1 put an end to this Central European empire, during the two WWs Budapest preserved its cosmopolitan character. The nationalistic fervor and the suppression of the Jewish population from 1939 onward pushed Budapest back to a provincial level and it lingered on throughout the period of Soviet-block status, at least until the late seventies, early eighties. The period, designated in my title, saw a growing impact of Western esotericism in various respects. Cultural contacts, such as Rudolf Steiner's several lecture tours promoted a special lifestyle while spiritism combined with the new fashion of psychoanalysis (Sándor Ferenczi, Géza Róheim) provided social attractions as well as scientific challenges. Esotericism also became a topic for arts and literatures (Antal Szerb, Mária Szepes) and, last but not least, filtered through philosophy with the reception of the theories of crisis and the leading traditionalists (e.g., René Guénon) reaching a final flowering in the thought and work of Béla Hamvas.

## **Narrating, Embodying, and Experiencing the Magical Prague**

**Pavel Horák**

People say that Prague has a strong esoteric nature engraved in its streets and buildings. This idea has historical roots. During the reign of the Czech king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316–1378), Charles wanted Prague to become a holy city, a new Jerusalem, and the place of Christ's second come. Therefore, Charles rearranged the city's plan according to his vision where places and buildings bear peculiar esoteric meanings. Later, in the early modern period during the reign of Rudolf II of Habsburg (1552–1612), Prague became a truly esoteric capital of Europe, and Rudolf's court hosted the most famous alchemists, astrologers, and magicians of the time. These periods' memories contributed to form a specific image of Prague as "esoteric and mystical" throughout the whole twentieth century. Authors like Gustav Meyrink, scholars Angelo Ripellino and Umberto Eco or the Czech artists like Petr Sís or Martin Stejskal, they all ascribed Prague esoteric and mystical nature and thus contributed to the creation of the magical Prague narrative. This paper analyses how this narrative is embodied in Prague's physical shape and subsequently experienced. Using mapping techniques from urban anthropology, I consider a double dynamic of the narrative embodiment on two juxtaposed examples: the first is an esoteric interpretation of the "Prague's mystery" by Martin Stejskal and, the second considers Prague's tourist infrastructure representing the magical narrative by alchemical museums. Finally, I reflect on how the narrative's embodiment contributes to a peculiar experience of Prague.

## **Archeosophy and the Arts**

Dr Massimo Introvigne<sup>1</sup>, Dr Gina Lullo<sup>2</sup>, Mr Daniele Corradetti<sup>3</sup>, Mr Francesco Cresti<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CESNUR, Torino, Italy, <sup>2</sup>University of Siena, Siena, Italy, <sup>3</sup>University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal, <sup>4</sup>Independent scholar, Rome, Italy

While much has been written about the Theosophical Society and the arts, research on the views on the arts, and relations with artists, of smaller esoteric movements whose founders came from Theosophy is still scarce. Archeosophy is an esoteric doctrine and movement based on the teachings of Italian spiritual master Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983). In the late 1930s and 1940s, Palamidessi explored astrology, Egyptology, alchemy, and yoga, and published several books. He evolved around the Rosicrucian, Masonic, Martinist, and Theosophical circles that flourished in the Italian city of Torino. On May 4, 1948, he founded there the Ordine Iniziatico Loto+Croce (Initiatic Order Lotus+Cross), which he led under the name of Grand Master Rajkunda until his death. In 1953, he moved to Rome, and increasingly devoted its time to the study of both Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. His later works and his project of Archeosophy, an esoteric school he established in 1988, which became one of the largest esoteric movements in Italy with groups in several other countries, propose an esoteric interpretation of Christianity. Among the tools for spiritual and esoteric self-realization proposed by Archeosophy are the visual arts and music. In Italy and elsewhere, Archeosophy attracted several painters and musicians, and promoted a revival both of the production of classical icons and of Christian liturgical music.

### **Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR, Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy)**

#### **“Archeosophy and the Arts: An Introduction”**

- Abstract: In order to understand why the visual arts and music are crucial to the self-realization process in Archeosophy, a general introduction to the life and doctrine of Palamidessi will be presented. According to Palamidessi, God sent his son, the eternal Avatar, to incarnate on Earth several times as Rama, Krishna, and Jesus. In the lineage of the Avatars, ekklesiae (churches) develop throughout history. Ekklesiae consist of an external (exoteric) and an internal (esoteric) body. One of these esoteric bodies was the Rosicrucian Order, which however ended up in decline. Hence the need of a new esoteric center, the Lotus+Cross order, whose wider external circle is the Archeosofica School. The lotus mentioned in the name of the order is a clear reference to the wisdom of the East, which however is accepted selectively by Palamidessi, as long as it does not contradict Christianity as he understands it. Archeosophy’s techniques are aimed at a full grasp of an esoteric, “more comprehensive” Christianity. They also prepare for death. *Il libro cristiano dei morti* (The Christian Book of the Dead) remains among Palamidessi’s most popular books. It is a practical guide for the dying, who are also taught about what happens immediately after death, based both on Christian theology and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (whose coexistence is somewhat difficult). The techniques and rituals taught by Archeosophy encompass the whole spectrum of Western esotericism, from alchemy to numerology, from breathing exercises to astrology. Among these techniques, some enter the domain of the arts. Producing and contemplating sacred images, and composing and performing sacred music, are regarded in Archeosophy as being among the most valuable techniques for obtaining a full comprehension of esoteric Christianity, and preparing for the crucial, difficult days immediately following one’s death and preceding either reincarnation or a direct transit to the Divine Light.

### **Gina Lullo (University of Siena)**

#### **- Title: “Iconography and the Archeosophical ‘Iconosis’”**

- Abstract: In the archeosophical doctrine of Tommaso Palamidessi, art, and more specifically the icon, is seen as a support for inner elevation and for various forms of meditation, liturgy, and theurgy. Both the aesthetic dimension and its operative techniques are illustrated in his work *L’ascesi artistica, i colori e la pittura* (Artistic ascesis, colors, and painting), published posthumously in a reduced version in 1986 under the title *L’icona, i colori e l’ascesi artistica* (Icon, colors, ad artistic ascesis), and then in 2012 in its full form, in four volumes. This text, which draws from an experience of what Palamidessi claimed where his reminiscences of past lives dating back to 1971, was presented as a manual of “esoteric art in theory and practice.” It taught the student how to prepare a sacred icon, the theurgical consecration of the icon, and meditation on it. In addition to a general overview of the art and the pictorial techniques necessary to create an icon, Palamidessi also taught

operational details, including the geometric figures to be used in the proportions, the influence of colors on the psyche, the techniques of visualization and “colored breathing,” and the formulas of blessing the materials and theurgical consecration of the table on which the icon would be painted. The aim was to transform the icon into a “theophanic mirror,” which manifests the divine presence, a true sacrament that can become a support for different ritual practices. The iconography presented by Palamidessi is no longer only art, but, more precisely, as he claimed, a “icognosis,” an esoteric technique capable of producing a spiritual transmutation of the artist. Since 1992 the principles and painting techniques outlined by Palamidessi have been taught and applied in the various iconographic workshops of the Associazione Archeosofica. The icons created during the workshops have been exhibited in personal and collective exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The paper will analyze the main features of archeosophical “icognosis,” and the meditative and theurgical techniques described in the four volumes of Palamidessi’s main opus on the arts.

Daniele Corradetti (Ph.D. candidate, Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal) and Francesco Cresti (attorney, Rome)

### **“Archeosophy, Music, and Melurgy”**

-Abstract: Music and what he called “melurgy” were conceived by Tommaso Palamidessi in the late 1960s as an integral part of the program developed by the Scuola Archeosofica, his esoteric school. Palamidessi’s interest in music intensified in the mid-1970s, leading him to the composition of original music pieces, including “Melody in D.” The text *Trattato di musica e melurgia archeosofica*, published posthumously, dates back to this period. Although unfinished, like most of Palamidessi’s works published posthumously, it contains the essential elements of an esoteric musicological theory. The paper explores the role that Palamidessi assigns to music in the esoteric path, particularly in the awakening of the seven psychic centers. In addition to the musical-chromatic and psychic correspondences, Palamidessi indicates the use of the eight liturgical modes (divided into four authentic and four derivative modes) as suitable for developing compositions with “mystical and ‘paramystic’ (initiatory) awakening” purposes. Following the discovery of a score written by Palamidessi, Alessandro Benassai, president of Associazione Archeosofica, began composing pieces himself, and in 1999 established a sacred music choir called Santa Cecilia and a musical academy inspired by Tommaso Palamidessi’s musicological principles. The choir held a large number of concerts both in Italy and abroad. The paper will present the fundamental musicological principles of archeosophical “melurgy,” together with a brief history and analysis of the Santa Cecilia Choir and the compositions and musical activities of Alessandro Benassai and other archeosophists.

## **Designing Reality: The Art of Magic**

**Mr Tancredi Marrone<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic*

Designing Reality: The Art of Magic

The aesthetic and narrative components of esoteric and occult culture have a strong grasp on the collective imagination. Symbols used in alchemy evoke the mysterious and cryptic pursuit of the philosopher stone, generating metaphors of personal growth. Reframing extraordinary events as being meaningful narratives. Writing of music which is dedicated to the evocation of a particular mood. The setting of a ritual or sacred space with specifically chosen symbology, which can be encoded into music, images, decorations, or smells, is replete with the attempt at organizing a sensorially stimulating environment. With the oversaturation of the visual, or aesthetical elements in the modern (pop) culture, elements of esoteric teachings, or occult symbolism can be found in unexpected places or events. The visual appeal of occultism has invaded the mainstream pop-culture and subcultural expressions alike. Psychedelic art, fictional stories involving real-life

magical practitioners, or cartoon characters using practices from real historical grimoires are slowly, but gradually omitting any border between art and esoteric practice. This panel will explore the transformational power of interacting with the aesthetic aspects of esoteric and spiritual culture in contemporary society. The structure will be the presentation of case studies that are dedicated to the exploration of methods of sensory manipulation, perception, and the subsequent effects that they have on the audience.

### **Aesthetics of Set and Setting**

#### **Mr. Tancredi Marrone, Masaryk University Brno**

Psychonauts, navigators of the mind, have in the course of decades worked on the manipulation and careful selection of appropriate environments which would optimize the transcendental experience of psychedelics. The setting, term that designates this carefully prepared trip space has been observed to be a fundamental component of the more spiritually oriented experiences. A place which is structured to provide a particular mood or emotion, employing various means such as auditory and visual support which can include shamanic drumming sounds, electronic beats and icons derived from various systems of belief. Psychonauts but also shamanic traditions which employ psychedelics as entheogens have often taught of the importance of the setting in contrast to the aseptic and laboratory oriented psychedelic experimentation. Whether inspired by traditional shamanic performances or their reinterpreted variations often fused with syncretic contemporary western esoteric practices, the capacity to manipulate the senses by designing an environment relies on an aesthetic sense. In this presentation I will analyze the principles that underlie the organization of a setting with the intention of optimizing psychedelic experiences. I will also analyze what is the preferred symbolism and design which is employed in the preparation of the setting.

### **Pop-magick: Hacking Reality, One Cartoon at a Time**

#### **Mr. Andrej Kapcar, Masaryk University Brno**

Long past are the days, when esoteric teachings and occult practices were reserved for an initiated few, clandestinely hidden away from the public eye. Contemporary society, oversaturated with visual stimuli has, thanks to modern technology, obtained an unprecedented access to sources of old esoteric knowledge, as well as modern interpretations, re-interpretations, or new ideas altogether. As early as the 60s, but predominantly in the 80s, several artistic groups, strongly influenced by esotericism, have initiated ways of spreading occult knowledge and symbolism among the population, formulating it as a practice of “changing reality”, but free of the dogmatic hierarchy of the more “traditional” orders. Everything was free to interpretation and appropriation to the modern magicians’ needs. Today, the fusion of the occult and the profane has reached new peaks. Occult-inspired pop-cultural phenomena are emerging through the whole spectrum of popular entertainment. The visual appeal of occultism has become a commodity, produced, presented, and sold on a massive scale. The practice of Chaos Magick, a highly syncretic esoteric practice has benefited from this new renaissance of the occult. What has been known as “low art” is becoming a new medium for magical expression, employed in entertainment and ritual practice alike. This presentation will focus on several case studies representing the utilization of magical symbolism in pop culture and design, their connection between the occult and the audience, as well as the influence it has on the spectator.

## **The Geometry of the New Jerusalem: John Michell’s Geometrical Interpretation of Glastonbury as Heavenly City**

#### **Marleen Thaler, Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna**

The English writer and self-proclaimed radical Traditionalist John Michell (1933–2009) occupied an outstanding position within the alternative religious landscape of Britain. By means of his influential sacred place theory, he aimed to re-sanctify the English landscape, and to launch a revived Golden Age with

Glastonbury as point of departure. The millenarianism promulgated by John Michell was based on various numerological elaborations and found its visual expression in the New Jerusalem Diagram. This geometrical map of the Heavenly City links Glastonbury to Atlantis and to the New Jerusalem. Michell regarded this map as the key to the re-emergence of an alleged lost Golden Age on earth, or more precisely in Britain. The New Jerusalem Diagram's association with Glastonbury fostered Michell's vision of the new age heralding on British ground. He held the firm belief that the secrets of creation and of heaven are manifested as sacred geometry. For this reason, he aimed throughout his life to crack sacred geometry's subtle codes.

Devoted artist as he was, Michell aimed to visualise those 'patterns of creation' by means of geometric formations. His artistic oeuvre has culminated in his final colourful publication (with Allan Brown) *How The World Is Made: The Story Of Creation According To Sacred Geometry* (2009). Within this book he once again emphasises the pivotal role of sacred geometry for unveiling the secrets of the Heavenly City.

This paper aims to expound on Michell's concept of the New Jerusalem Diagram as well as his examination of sacred geometry as means of revealing esoteric knowledge. I argue that this geometrical interpretation of the Heavenly City constitutes the centrepiece of Michell's theory.

Keywords: John Michell, Sacred Geometry, New Jerusalem Diagram, Heavenly City, Glastonbury

**Larissa De Freitas M.A.: Masaryk University Brno**

**Women's sexuality as threat: erotic magic in Burchard of Worm's "Corrector sive medicus".**

Abstract: This presentation centres its theme around magical practices and how they relate to the sin of fornication in Burchard of Worm's *Corrector sive medicus*. This ongoing study focuses on the penance prescribed for what Neyra (2010) calls 'erotic magic' or 'love magic', which is 'one that is connected to emotions, love, hate and passion' and the reasons for regulating these practices on the eve of the Papal Reform. The *Corrector sive medicus*, is a penitential manual formatted as a questionnaire, that was composed between the year 1000 and 1025 a.D by Burchard, bishop of Worms. This research contextualises the Ottonian Kingdom and its kingship mechanisms as well as the kingdom's relationship with Burchard. Through the analysis of the political and religious context of the Holy Roman Empire during the reign of the Ottonian dynasty we are looking to understand Burchard's thought where it concerns the sexual practices in the *Corrector* and to observe the document's internal logic, according to the severity of the penance prescribed for each practice. Some of the spells condemned by Burchard contain peculiar elements such as the insertion of a live fish into a woman's vagina which would then be fed to the husband to make his love for her stronger. When possible, we try and ascribe meaning to these practices to better understand them.

## Thinking about Creativity, Innovation, and Esotericism

Dr Tim Rudbøg<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*

This panel will contribute to the conference theme by exploring constructive ways of thinking about creativity, innovation, esotericism and the relations between these concepts. In doing so, the panel also aims to pose useful theoretical perspectives and possible solutions to central problems that are associated with this area of research. Often-posed questions include: is creativity the creation of something completely new or improvisation on existing themes? How and why does cultural innovation in esotericism happen? Is esotericism the sum of rejected cultural products or a vital source of creativity across artistic domains? Do implicit national and global perspectives influence our view of cross-cultural esoteric innovations? How to address the question of authorship in a text that is said to be mediated through a spiritual guide or in other words, where does creativity actually happen? In addressing such theoretical and methodological questions, this panel will explore the cognitive and social sciences, post-structural conceptions of history and creativity, global history, and literary theory, as these approaches are currently used by a number of Nordic scholars working in the field.

Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to the conference theme:

The purpose of this panel is to contribute to the conference theme on more general theoretical and methodological levels, as the ways we think about, theorise, study, and use certain academic tools is considered of central importance for further development of this particular research focus. The goal is to generate and stimulate novel thinking about esotericism and innovation by posing questions and offering creative perspectives. We expect this panel will provide cognizance of how some of the scholars working in the field in Nordic countries think about the conference theme and as the final SNASWE/ESOSTERICS panel generate fruitful discussions and shared understandings that can be used by scholars in the field, as a whole.

**Tim Rudbøg, University of Copenhagen**

**Unbounded lines of flight: History and Esotericism as Creativity?**

This paper will explore how habitual ways of thinking about history, events, classifications, and categorisations can hinder more nuanced understandings of the complexities and possibilities inherent in the study of esotericism. Rather than focusing on processes of rejection and seeking to categorize esotericism as a type of knowledge, a polemically constructed category, or an alternative form of spirituality, this paper will, based on Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and others, explore what thinking about esotericism and historical processes, as creative processes can offer. It will be argued, that what we term esotericism often and continually transgress boundaries and provide reservoirs of potential cultural production. Combined with historical perspectives on creativity in the history of science and artistic production, esotericism has in many instances functioned as a creative context for innovative developments in a variety of domains, and across these domains whether classically defined as scientific, philosophical, religious or artistic. In this connection esotericism, as a creative process, as a number of cases from Theosophy and other esoteric traditions will show, provides lines of flight, wild growth, overflow, experimentality, entanglements, philosophical perspectives and renewed creativity.

**Bjarke Stanley Nielsen, University of Copenhagen**

**Methodological Nationalism and Eurocentrism in studying Esoteric Innovations**

Much has happened since the early 1990s when Antoine Faivre, Wouter J. Hanegraaff and others, established the framework for the study of “Western Esotericism”. Initially, it was conceived as the study of “Western Esotericism” or cultural-historical currents belonging to the West. However, the notion of the “West” or Europe as the centre and point of departure for historical understanding has since the 1990s increasingly been put under scrutiny, particular within the field of Global History. Within this field and in pursuit of a more global perspective, scholars have sought not just to do away with a Eurocentric focus on history, but the so-called 'methodological nationalism' inherent in European history. In the light of this, this paper will discuss theoretical perspectives and related methodology for the study of esotericism and innovation from the viewpoint of Global History. What does this perspective offer the study of esotericism? What does the 'global' imply in contrast to studies on esotericism with a more Eurocentric or national focus when addressing changes in esotericism? By addressing such questions this paper does not seek to leave older definitions of esotericism behind. Rather it seeks to stimulate a fruitful discussion on their methodological boundaries. By doing so, the hope is to contribute with new ways of addressing the global character of modern esotericism.

**Egil Asprem, University of Stockholm**

**Inventing “Gypsy” Tradition: Racialized Enchantment in Occultism and Gypsyologist Scholarship**

Exotic others often play supporting roles in esoteric claims to tradition. Even when such others are imagined as important links in a chain of primordial wisdom, their portrayal tend to be based on, and reproduce, widely shared stereotypes of other peoples and races. In the modern period, such racialized invented traditions have often been imagined in tight connection with contemporary academic disciplines such as orientalist scholarship, ethnology, folklore, philology, and the history of religion. This paper thus focuses on some conditions for the forms of creativity that went into the invention of esoteric tradition in the modern period,

emphasising two aspects: 1) the role played by new scholarly disciplines' imaginative constructions of peoples, religions, and descent; 2) the still under-theorized ideological, political, and often racist dimensions of the scholarly and occultist imagination.

An illuminating but little-studied case is the portrayal of Europe's Romani populations, under exonyms such as "gypsies", "bohémiens", and "Zigeuner", as ambiguous carriers of esoteric and magical tradition from a lost enchanted past. While such narratives have older roots in early-modern Europe, they were elaborated, concretized and put to strategic uses in the nineteenth century, resulting from the confluence of academic, occult, and political currents. The paper focuses on Charles Godfrey Leland's (1824-1903) influential work on *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling* (1891) in order to analyse how new elements from ethnology, folklore, Orientalism, occultism, and psychical research were mobilized in the invention of "gypsies" as an "enchanted people" and, as such, an "internal Other" to the modern, rational West. Special attention is given to the ideological functions of the resulting narratives: on the one hand as defining the place of "enchantment" in modernity through a racialized and classist genealogy of religion; on the other as repackaging and reifying long-standing antiziganist stereotypes that have continued to flourish in an enchanted filoziganist garb in some occultist circles.

### **Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, University of Turku, Finland**

On methodologies of interpreting automatic writing in a cultural historical context

In this paper I will examine how to analyse and interpret the history of spiritualist automatic writing in the context of historical research. In our Finnish research project "Seekers of the New. Esotericism and the transformation of religiosity in Finland during the era of modernisation, 1880-1940" we have analysed artists and writers in the previously understudied context of Finnish cultural history of esotericism. Spiritualism and automatic writing has been one of my interests in this field. Automatic writing presents a methodological challenge as compared to other literary activities and genres, and it also presents an ethical challenge for a scholar: how to make people like spiritualist automatic writers understandable as part of a historical research in an ethically solid way?

In my presentation I will analyse some of these methodological and ethical questions, and seek for ways to find out how automatic writing could be seen as part of literary creativity and artistic practice: How to address the question of authorship in a text that is said to be mediated through a spiritual guide? Is the writer then only a mediator or a channel? Where does creativity happen? I will also take up the theoretical and methodological question of gender, since in the context of early 20th century spiritualistic automatic writing, spiritual guides were usually addressed as males, often also in orientalist contexts.

## **Literary and Visual Representations of Theosophically Inspired Concepts in a Nordic Context**

**Dr Tim Rudbøg<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*

The Theosophical Society established itself in Sweden at a relatively early date, and soon afterwards lodges were also established in the other Nordic countries. Theosophical journals were printed, books were sold and circulated, and lectures were offered to wider audiences. All of this had the effect that many Theosophical ideas began to spread to the culturally creative class of the Nordic countries, often in syncretism with Christian concepts. Such ideas infused literary works (such as those by Kersti Bergroth in Finland and Anker Larsen in Denmark) and gave rise to visual representations (e.g., in the art of Lucie Lagerbielke in Sweden and the religious iconography of Martinus Thomsen in Denmark). This panel explores how ideas ultimately grounded in Theosophy and Theosophically based movements infused literary works and the visual arts during the first half of the 20th century.

Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to the conference theme:

The purpose of this panel is to focus attention on the interconnections that existed between Theosophy, related forms of esotericism, and literature and the visual arts in the Nordic countries during the first half of the 20th century. One goal is to explore the interchange between esoteric ideas, mainstream religion, and artistic creativity in the Nordic context in the modern period. The participants in this panel thereby hope to inspire a renewed interest in the substantial amount of Nordic literature that creatively intersected with esotericism, especially as esoteric concepts were developed within a Theosophical family of currents.

**Tiina Mahlamäki, University of Turku**

**Anthroposophy and War. A correspondence between Finnish author Kersti Bergroth (1866–1975) and General Lennart Oesch (1892–1978) during the WWII**

In my paper, I analyze the letters written by a Finnish first generation Antroposophist and author Kersti Bergroth (1866–1975) to General Lennart Oesch (1892–1978), sent during and after the years of WWII. During the war Oesch was leading the Finnish troops in the Karelian Isthmus. After war Oesch was found guilty in war responsibility trials and spent years in jail. Bergroth wrote regularly to Oesch, and in her letters, besides describing daily routines and inconveniences caused by the war, she tries to convince the general of the doctrines and practices of Anthroposophy. The paper thus examines an Anthroposophist's views on war and spirituality, how they relate and how they are elaborated in private letters to a military general.

**Johan Nilsson, Lund Universitet**

**Vitus: The Art and Religion of Lucie Lagerbielke**

As was the case in many countries, the Theosophical movement in Sweden attracted a number of active artists working in different mediums, as well as several authors and literary figures. Among the later are a few who, although largely forgotten today, provide important insights into not only Swedish Theosophy, but the larger Scandinavian esoteric environment. One of the most prolific Swedish Theosophical artists and writers was Lucie Lagerbielke (1865-1931). Lagerbielke was an author and visual artist who worked almost exclusively with esoteric themes. Unlike her contemporary Hilma af Klint, however, she published a considerable number of non-fictional books and texts where she explained her worldview and religious belief system. She was also the editor of an esoteric journal called Framtidens Folk. Lagerbielke's works provides an insight into several of the questions which occupied Swedish Theosophists around the turn of the 20th century, above all the highly debated status of Christianity.

## Performing esotericism between tradition, play, and innovation in rituals of initiation and video gaming (P4)

**Dr Tim Rudbøg<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*

This panel explores relations between esotericism and performance in various Nordic settings. It is quite clear that rituals, agency, commands, and performances constitute important facets of what we broadly term esotericism, but like other cultural phenomena esotericism is not an isolated thing. Often rituals and performances in the form of initiatory systems or gaming become practices that involve creative acts of merging cultural material from a number of different traditions either innovating upon older traditions or creating a new fusion. Another facet of performance is also the tension between play and more fixed rules and structures. In both cases there is a tension between differences, which is central to the creative process. This panel will engage with four different cases of this in connection with esotericism.

Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to the conference theme:

This panel contributes directly to the conference theme by exploring the centrality of performance and rituals in modern Nordic esoteric creativity. The purpose is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debates about how ritual and performance can be said to embody, maintain, and communicate tradition, but also—on the other hand—constitute ways of introducing new elements and innovations by creatively blending features from various traditions. The purpose of the panel is also to place focus on the tension between play and structure in esoteric rituals and new ways of performance. Contemporary esoteric societies embody this tension, as does the practice of playing esoteric oriented video games. More particularly, this panel seeks to contribute with new research on the topic in a number of historical and contemporary Nordic contexts and thereby contribute to the study of esotericism in the Nordic countries. Finally, the hoped outcome is a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion about the papers and the panel theme.

**Fredrik Gregorius, Linköping University**

**Walking with both Balder and Christ: Understanding the initiatory structures within The Manhem Society**

Manhemsförbundet (the Manhem society) was an initiatory and educational society that was active in Sweden between 1815 to 1823, and while short-lived had among its members several of Sweden's most prominent cultural figures, most famous being the author Carl Jonas Love Almqvist and the society was at the centre and a node of several cultural trends that started to emerge in Sweden, most notably the emergent Romantic movement that drew a lot inspiration from Germany, and also included esoteric ideas about knowledge and education. Politically it was both nationalistic, inspired by Herder's ideas about a "Volkgeist", and also often displayed progressive and liberal ideals, this is particularly notable in the writings of Almqvist. The paper will focus in how the Manhem society used initiatory structures as a means of fostering a new form of Swedish youth. Central to this is Almqvist who developed a complex nine-degree initiatory structure based on an attempt to create a unity between old Norse Religion and a Swedenborgian based mystical Christianity. This paper will address how the society attempted to create a symbiosis between Heathenism and Christianity and also how some of the members tried to develop the society further to include a concept of mystical knowledge based on an often heterodox and Romantic interpretation of Christianity.

**Olivia Cejvan, Lund University**

**Ritual creativity in the contemporary initiatory society Sodalitas Rosae Crucis (S.R.C)**

The Sodalitas Rosae Crucis (S.R.C), is an initiatory society founded in Sweden 2002, perpetuating the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Based on the author's two years of fieldwork as an initiate in the Stockholm Temple of S.R.C, this paper explores how the elaborate ritual heritage from the Golden Dawn is brought to life in the regular performance of group rituals such as initiations, as well as the solitary ritual work of individual members. Through the lens of anthropological theory, this paper analyses creative aspects of ritual performance, manifested in productive tensions between inherited ritual scripts and improvisation, rule-governance and play.

## Art as a Spiritual Practice

**Dr Tim Rudbøg<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark*

This panel will take a step away from art as a product to be analysed from the outside and instead explore art as a practice in connection with esotericism. Can art and the creative process involved—in direct relation to esotericism—be viewed as a form of spiritual practice? In dealing with this question and related theoretical perspectives this panel will explore three relevant cases and pose a number of relevant analytical concepts that can be employed in future research, such as the notion of 'the seeker', 'personal development', 'spiritual evolution', 'ego-loss', 'anonymity' and 'authorial concealment'. As this panel will show in a number of different and relevant ways, discussing these concepts in connection with art and esotericism the importance of agency becomes absolutely fundamental to the artistic process.

Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to the conference theme

The purpose of this panel is to reconnect the study of art and esotericism more strongly with theoretical concepts and artistic practice. In addition, it provides concrete examples of how this can be done by focusing on three concrete cases. Furthermore, in entering this domain of esotericism, art and practice, this panel will suggest a number of analytical tools that can be useful to understand the process better with special reference to esotericism and individual practices of modern forms of spirituality. The panel also intends to facilitate a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion about how to approach this theme and test how widespread this aspect of esoteric related art is.

**Nina Kokkinen, University of Turku**

**Artists as Truth-Seekers—Focusing on Agency in the Study of Art and Occulture**

The paper focuses on the concept of 'seeker' and considers how the analytical tool of seekership defined and developed in the sociology of religion could be applied to the study of art and esotericism. The concept is suggested to be helpful especially regarding those artists who do not subscribe to any esoteric movement or doctrine but stress a more individual relationship with 'occulture' of their time. Focusing on the agency of seekers also provides an opportunity to outline how the connections between art and esotericism have changed over different times and places – or in the context of different 'occultures'. The theoretical argument of the paper is made more tangible with an example of Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931), whose life, art and writings resonate in an interesting way with the concept of seekership. The ways in which Gallen-Kallela expresses his interest in esotericism and the dawning of the 'New Age' appear in a new light – as parts of the processes of spiritualization of modern art and religiosity

**Marja Lahelma, University of Helsinki**

**"Sigrid af Forselles and The Development of the Human Soul"**

This paper focuses on the relief series *The Development of the Human Soul* (c. 1887–1903) by the Finnish sculptor Sigrid af Forselles, examining it in the context of late 19th-century esotericism. Identifying in Edouard Schuré's *The Great Initiates* (1888) one possible source for its esoteric symbolism, I will argue that the main theme of the series is spiritual evolution that attaches itself to the idea of progress and liberation through art. The five individual parts present significant turning points in the history of humankind and its spiritual development from pagan prehistory to final liberation in the spiritual realm. While the artist's esoteric interests have been acknowledged to some extent, the reliefs have caused a fair amount of confusion and hesitation among those who have tried to interpret them. This is due to the inability of scholars coming from art historical backgrounds to properly understand and analyse their esoteric content. In addition, the first part of the series has been separated from the rest, and the four remaining parts have been installed in the Kallio Church in Helsinki. It is therefore difficult to appreciate the narrative structure of the whole as it was intended. Moreover, when the first part is removed, it is possible to understand the content of the four remaining pieces in Christian terms, especially when they are displayed in a church. In addition to providing an esoterically motivated interpretation of the relief series as a whole, I will also offer a brief discussion on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion connected to esotericism that have served to marginalise this particular work of art.

**Samanta Viziale, University of Torino-University of Copenhagen**

**Authorial Concealment and Trans-culturally Inspired Art in the Case of Theosophy**

This paper aims to investigate from different points of view the phenomenon of authorial concealment as an integrative part of the artistic production inspired by Theosophy. If the author becomes an intermediary between the human kingdom and the divine one, what really matters is the message conveyed by the work of art and not the personality of its creator. In this way the artistic production assumes a new perspective: texts and pictures become expressions of transcendental values which the artist doesn't own but can convey. Therefore, the hidden identity of the author plays a fundamental role in the idea of art as a form of spiritual service. The creative process takes the shape of a ritual, in which the artist generates a connection to another

region; the result of the artist's production becomes a portal towards a deeper Truth, that makes visible an invisible reality. This paper will consider the function of authorial concealment as a fundamental element in this particular esoteric way of perceiving works of art and the process of making them; this ground-breaking artistic system creates a new perspective about the agency in creativity and the role of the artist as "medium".

## Occultism and the Nordic Modern Breakthrough

Dr Giuliano D'Amico<sup>1</sup>, Dr Tim Rudbøgg<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate professor, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, <sup>2</sup>Associate professor, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

The "Modern Breakthrough" (ca. 1870–1900) is considered one of the most seminal and crucial periods for the development of the arts in the Nordic countries. Following the call to "submit problems to debate", as the famous Danish critic Georg Brandes put it, writers and artists of the Modern Breakthrough shared an interest in social problems such as the tension between the working classes and the capitalist bourgeoisie, the role of women in society, and the conflict between science and religion. In this panel, we will present a number of case studies that challenge the mainstream narrative of secularization and freethinking, which has been commonplace in the scholarship on the Modern Breakthrough. We will instead show how the Modern Breakthrough was informed by a strong undercurrent of unorthodox spirituality. We hope to offer an exciting and innovative reading of this crucial period, providing new insights into Nordic cultural history.

Purpose, goals, expected outcomes and contribution to the conference theme:

This panel contributes directly to the conference theme by exploring the centrality of unorthodox spirituality for the Nordic Modern Breakthrough. The purpose is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debates about the need for revision of the narrative of freethinking and secularization, which the Modern Breakthrough is often entangled in. The purpose of the panel is also to open this fresh perspective on the Modern Breakthrough to other periods and geographical areas. As the Nordic Modern Breakthrough has been called "The Scandinavian Moment in World Literature" (Fulsås&Rem, Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama, Cambridge UP 2018), due to the importance of figures such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Munch etc. for European culture, it is also timely to investigate whether such spiritual unorthodoxy left trace in a wider European cultural life. More particularly, this panel seeks to contribute with new research on the topic in a number of historical and contemporary Nordic contexts and thereby contribute to the study of esotericism in the Nordic countries. Finally, the hoped outcome is a fruitful interdisciplinary discussion about the papers and the panel theme, as well as specific publications by ESOSTETICS members.

**Henrik Johnsson, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway**

**The route to Catholicism: Johannes Jørgensen's occult symbolism**

The presentation examines the relationship between Catholicism, symbolism and occultism in the works of Danish author Johannes Jørgensen (1866–1956). I will argue that Jørgensen conceived of symbolism as an artistic movement capable of addressing the spiritual needs of modern man. By reading Jørgensen's writings on symbolism against the context of contemporary occultism, which was viewed by him as a reaction against processes of modernity, I will show that Jørgensen sought to define symbolism as an artistic faith. Jørgensen's understanding of occultism and symbolism later came to inform his views on Catholicism, and the presentation will conclude with a discussion of how symbolism, occultism and Catholicism can in Jørgensen's case be understood in terms of his engagement with modernism and modernity.

**Per Faxneld, Södertörn University**

**"Mirages and visions in the air": Tyra Kleen and the paradoxes of esoteric art**

Around the year 1900, European discourse on art was increasingly "esotericized". The 1890s saw esoteric art salons create a sensation in Paris, and art critics and theorists painted a picture of the true artist and the

esotericist as overlapping figures. There was also at the time a conflict regarding mediumistic art, a phenomenon initially made popular through Spiritualist mediums. This debate also had interesting gendered dimensions. In my presentation, I will discuss how the Swedish female esotericist and artist Tyra Kleen (1874–1951) attempted to situate herself in relation to the concept of the artist as a "magus", and the tensions between the positive view of mediumism in Spiritualism and the more negative or cautious approach to it in Theosophy, as well as in relation to the attendant gender issues.

**Giuliano D'Amico, University of Oslo**

**"Is it you, Ibsen?" Ragna Nielsen's spiritualism as an hauntology of the Modern Breakthrough**

Ragna Nielsen (1845–1924) was a Norwegian pedagogist and women's rights activist, and is today most famous for having founded the first Norwegian mixed school for boys and girls in 1885, and for the leading roles she took in various feminist organizations. What is less known about Nielsen is her interest in spiritualism, which culminated in a long series of weekly séances held in her home in Oslo between 1913 and 1923. In these séances she regularly talked to her dead relatives as well as a number of personalities of the Modern Breakthrough, whom she had known when they were alive. Among others, Nielsen contacted the spirits of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Aasta Hansteen, Ragnhild Jølsen, Amalie Skram, Ivar Aasen and Søren Kierkegaard. In my paper I will present an ongoing research project on Nielsen's séances, which, drawing upon the field of hauntology, will show the dynamics and the significance of Nielsen's reconstruction of the vanished Modern Breakthrough in her own living room. Within this context, the paper will also address the significance of Henrik Ibsen's absence from the séances, whom Nielsen publicly claimed she had contacted, but whose name I have not found in the séance transcriptions.

# Islam and Esotericism in the Visual and in Artefacts

Prof Mark Sedgwick<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism, , Europe, <sup>2</sup>Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

This is one in a stream of 3 panels submitted by the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE).

Chair: Mark Sedgwick, PhD. Professor, Aarhus University, Denmark. mjrs@cas.au.dk

The panel examines the range of visual expressions of Islamic esotericism starting in the thirteenth century. Then and afterwards, artistic production with esoteric ritual purposes included both visual material such as diagrams and drawings that aimed to guide the follower in the comprehension and conceptual realization of esoteric doctrines, and actual objects of handicraft, artefacts designed to enclose and enhance gemstones with an apotropaic or spiritual value, often engraved with religious or magical inscriptions, as well as round images such as statues, created to be employed in magical practices. These objects were often made according to precise instructions of cosmological, astrological, esoteric and magical orders. Both varieties of artistic production are covered by this panel. The first paper, Giovanni Maria Martini's "Visual Sufism: Notes on the Emergence of Visual Elements in Sufi Literature," looks at how the great Islamic esotericist Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) used graphical and visual elements for the transmission of esoteric knowledge, establishing a "visual Sufism" that grew and spread. The second and third papers examine objects. Luca Patrizi's "Production and Esoteric Use of Artefacts Enclosing Gemstones in Pre-modern Islamic societies" sheds light on the birth and the development of Islamic art connected to the creation of artefacts containing precious stones with an esoteric purpose. Emily Selove's "Look at it and Ponder it Well: The Power of the Well-Made Image in Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī's Book of the Complete" takes the case of talismans, investigating the readership of al-Sakkākī (d. 1229), the efficacy of the objects concerned, and, especially, one particular talisman that depicted scenes of lovemaking.

The panel examines visual manifestations of creativity linked to mystical experiences and specific ritual needs, addressing the conference theme of the intersection of esotericism and the arts. It focuses on visual forms, and forms a pair with the following ENSIE panel, which looks at literary forms.

Giovanni Maria Martini, "Visual Sufism: Notes on the Emergence of Visual Elements in Sufi Literature".

Postdoc, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy.

From the Late Medieval period onward, many Sufi treatises began to display an increasing amount of visual elements, mainly in the form of diagrams. The production, use and diffusion of visual materials and the consequent meditation on graphic symbols within an esoteric tradition and literature in which the auditory element—represented chiefly by oral transmission and oral incantatory practices (dhikr)—have always been prominent, represents a significant development, the outward sign of transformation in the methods and instruments adopted in certain Sufi milieus for the transmission and acquisition of esoteric knowledge. The development of this visual modality appears to be strictly tied with another of the most important phenomena in the history of Sufism, namely the emergence and progressive affirmation of the work and the doctrines of the Andalusian Sufi scholar Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) who frequently utilized visual elements in his works.

From the point of view of codicology, book history and art history, the production of texts pertaining to "visual Sufism", containing graphic devices and illustrated pages next to the written text, are immediately recognizable. From the point of view of the history of ideas and aesthetics, the use of visual symbols implies the development of a theoretical reflection by the authors on the reasons and functioning of such devices. A better knowledge of "visual Sufism" will also enable scholars to investigate possible intellectual osmosis with

analogous phenomena in Western esoteric traditions. This is particularly true for the Jewish Kabbalah, in which comparable visual tools started to flourish at almost exactly the same time as in Sufi texts in works by authors who in many cases acted in an Islamicate environment, knew Arabic, and were acquainted with Islamic philosophical literature.

Keywords: Islam; visualization; diagrams; Ibn 'Arabī.

**Luca Patrizi, “Production and Esoteric Use of Artefacts Enclosing Gemstones in Pre-modern Islamicate societies”.**

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From the symbolism of gemstones, highly represented in the religious and esoteric literature of various civilizations, developed the production and usage of artefacts, jewels or amulets adorned with gemstones, often engraved with specific religious and esoteric formulas. Islamicate societies present interesting examples of practices involving the use of gemstones. The most common one, based on the custom of the prophet Muhammad, is to wear a ring with a gemstone. The use of artefacts adorned with gemstones became especially common in the context of Islamic courts, as a symbol of the heavenly origin of earthly power but also as a form of protection from evil influences. Practices of this kind developed in connection with specific cosmological, astrological, esoteric and magical knowledge, often through reference to pre-Islamic sources. This knowledge eventually gave birth to an actual art, connected to the crafting of different sorts of artefacts according to precise rules of production and utilisation. The paper will investigate the production and esoteric usage of artefacts enclosing gemstones through the analysis of textual sources and artefacts in the context of pre-modern Islamicate societies. Some specific information on the artefacts is available in the literature on gemstones—al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) and al-Tifāshī (d. 1253)—as well as in and court literature of the Fatimid period (tenth to twelfth century) and Mamluk period (thirteenth to fifteenth century). Evidence on the practices related to these artifacts can be obtained from Islamic historiographic and esoteric literature of the same period.

Keywords: Islam; symbolism; gemstones; artistic craftsmanship.

**Emily Selove, “Look at it and Ponder it Well: The Power of the Well-Made Image in Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī’s Book of the Complete”.**

PhD. Senior lecturer, University of Exeter, England.

The Book of the Complete (Kitāb al-Shāmil), an Arabic grimoire attributed to Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī (d. 1229), contains a diverse collection of incantations, recipes, and instructions for creating talismans. These instructions offer detailed practical advice on the creation of the images (often statues or engravings to be worn as jewellery), describing, for example, substitutions that can be made in the absence of certain materials, and admonitions to polish, file, and securely affix images that should be rendered “as accurately as possible.” This advice on the practicalities of artistic craftsmanship goes hand-in-hand with detailed astrological calculations and the proper application of aromatics necessary to imbue the image with planetary influences. Such instructions are often attributed to famous thinkers associated now most strongly with the history of science, e.g. Hippocrates and Ptolemy. In focusing on several evocative examples of these instructions, this paper will explore the following questions: what can we discern about the implied readership of Sakkākī’s grimoire and the types of artistic and scientific skills they were expected to have? Who is the implied audience of the striking jewellery and statuettes whose creation is advised? How can their efficacy be linked with that of poetry (sometimes called “ḥalāl [permitted] sorcery”) which, through a combination of proper lexico-grammatical technique, effective use of symbolism, and artistic inspiration, influences the spirit

of its listener? Special attention will be allotted to a talisman which, through depicting scenes of lovemaking, was intended to arouse love and lust. How does the genre of erotology help shed light on this talisman and on magical texts like the Book of the Complete in general?

Keywords: Islam; talismans; statuary; jewellery; erotology; poetry.

## Islam and Esotericism in Literature

Prof Mark Sedgwick<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism, , Europe, <sup>2</sup>Aarhus University, , Denmark

This is one in a stream of 3 panels submitted by the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE).

Chair: Sara Kuehn, PhD. Marie Curie Fellow, IDEMEC/CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, France, and Centre of Islamic Theology (ZITH)/University of Tübingen, Germany. sara@sarakuehn.com

The panel examines the range of literary expressions of Islamic esotericism, from the classic (Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, d. 922) to the contemporary (graphic novels). The first paper, Keith Cantú's "The Literary Motif of Mansur al-Ḥallāj in Bengali Fakiri Songs", starts with classic literary forms, looking at how nineteenth-century Bengali folk music received the classic story of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), and used song to explore and communicate esoteric themes. The second paper moves to a very modern literary form, the novel, and explores the uses of magic. Kurosh Amoui's "Nimā Yushij, Sādeq Hedāyat, and a Re-enchantment of Storytelling in Modernist Persian Literature" looks at Persian novels and the ways in which they present and use magic, and also understand writing and poetry as esoteric. Finally, Francesco Piraino's "Drawing Islam: Comics, Graphic Novels, Islamic Esotericism and Sufism" looks at an even more modern literary form, English and French comics and graphic novels, showing how these are new instruments for Sufi proselytization, and how Sufism is imagined and represented in the occulture comics sphere.

The opening case is classically Islamic, the Persian case enters a dialogue with modern and contemporary world literature and the novel genre, and the final case of the graphic novel is fully global and contemporary. All three cases address the conference theme of the intersection of esotericism and the arts, looking specifically at literary forms that are, in one way or another, esoteric-inspired manifestations of spiritual creativity. The different cases, however, represent different modalities of the relationship between esotericism and literature.

### **Keith Cantú, "The Literary Motif of Mansur al-Ḥallāj in Bengali Fakiri Songs"**

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Some of the most field-defining scholarship on Sufism in the twentieth century has centred on the personality of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). Earlier scholars such as Louis Massignon and Henri Corbin, as well as Anne-Marie Schimmel and more recently Carl Ernst, have all engaged this classic figure to some degree. What remains little known, however, is how the literary motif of Ḥallāj's martyrdom and declaration of "I am the truth" (anā'l-Ḥaqq, a name reserved for Allah) also spread as far as India and Bangladesh, where it became integrated into the artistic culture of Bengali folk music. This paper builds upon my research into the Islamic esotericism of Bāul Fakirs to focus on how aspects of Ḥallāj's story were expressed through oral songs that were also written in diaries and subsequently published, the substance of which serves as a kind of literature for both the literate and illiterate alike. It will accordingly analyse two nineteenth-century songs by the celebrated poet Lālan Fakir that mention Ḥallāj directly. One of these songs, "What message did the Prophet

pass on to this world... Find out from a murshid (Sufi shaykh)" (Muršider thāi ne nā re tār bhed bujhe) alludes to Ḥallāj in the context of how sharī'a (religious law) is zāhir (exoteric) while the latter, ma'rifa (mystic knowledge) is bāṭin (esoteric). The second song, "What am 'I' — if that is known then my striving will be complete" (Āmi ki tāi jānile sādhan siddhi haṃ) questions the identity of the "I" (anā, āmi) in "I am the truth." In closing the paper will demonstrate the performative context of the latter song, which I learned directly from a Bāul Fakiri guru during my fieldwork in Bangladesh, and indicate how esoteric themes can travel through oral literature as well as the written word.

Keywords: Islam; al-Ḥallāj; Bengal; poetry; oral literature.

### **Kurosh Amoui, "Nimā Yushij, Sādeq Hedāyat, and a Re-enchantment of Storytelling in Modernist Persian Literature".**

PhD Candidate in Social & Political Thought, York University, Canada. kamoui@yorku.ca

This paper is an investigation into the writing careers of two canonical literary figures of early 20th century Iran, Nimā Yushij (1897-1960) and Sādeq Hedāyat (1903-1951), and the ways in which their understandings of magic and folklore plays a vital part in their modernist projects of renovating Persian poetry and prose. The intertextual relationship of Nima's Afsāneh (Persian 1922) and Hedayat's The Blind Owl (Persian 1937, French 1953, English 1957) reveals a network of inquiry concerning the study of esotericism and literature in conversation with Islamicate and Persianate magics (the Arabic Sihr, and the Persian Jādu). Although two Persian words Fesāneh (meaning story, fable, or legend) and Fosun (meaning enchantment, magic, or incantation) have accompanied each other numerous through centuries of Persian poetry (from 10th century Ferdowsi to 18th century Bidel), their close association becomes a fundamental element in several works of Nima and Hedayat as a re-enchantment of old stories in new literary formats. This association of magic and storytelling, further exemplified in Nima and Hedayat's fascination with the Japanese folk tale Urashima Tarō, provides a framework for asking broader questions about esoteric properties of writing and of poetry recital. Additionally, the contrasting movements of the two authors draws a constellation of modern Persian literature on the broader map of world literature: with Nima exercising his socialist internationalism by diving into periphery and locality in the jungles of northern Iran and writing back in his mother tongue Tabari language; and Hedayat traveling between Tehran, Paris, and Mumbai, gradually turning away from an Aryanist nationalism towards a cosmopolitan and postcolonial mentality in his posthumous The Pearl Canon, while being consistent in his warnings against the rise of political and fundamentalist Islam.

Keywords: Islamicate; Persianate; 20th century interwar period; World literature.

### **Francesco Piraino, "Drawing Islam: Comics, Graphic Novels, Islamic Esotericism and Sufism"**

PhD. Postdoc at Ca' Foscari, University of Venice, Italy, and director of Centre of Comparative Studies on Spiritualities and Civilizations at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, Italy. francescopiraino84@gmail.com

This paper deals with comics and graphic novels representing Sufism and Islamic spirituality and esotericism. In the last thirty years, we have witnessed an extraordinary evolution of the "comics arts", conquering different markets worldwide and attracting different publics. This diffusion is also due to a continuous refinement of comics art that developed new drawing techniques and elaborated plots and narratives. This refinement implied also a redefinition of some works, often called graphic novels, stressing their intellectual and artistic values. Following this perspective, graphic novels have no less value than old school non-drawn novels. Graphic novels participate in the occulture, in the sense that myths, symbolism, esotericism, and spirituality are key subjects widely diffused in this art form. Having said that, the encounter between graphic novel and religions is still an under-researched topic, especially as regards esotericism, Islam and Sufism.

This paper will discuss English and French Sufi graphic novels and graphic novels representing Sufism and Islamic spirituality. It will show how Sufi graphic novels are instruments of diffusion of Sufi and Islamic ideas that aim at new publics (young and non-Muslim audience). These Sufi comics well exemplify the cultural transformation of Islamic pedagogies and the Islamization of new media. Furthermore, the paper will also discuss the representations of Sufism and Islamic spirituality in the artworks of non-Muslim European and American artists, examining the continuities and discontinuities with Orientalist literature. It will show how several Orientalist stereotypes are reproduced and reinforced, and on the other hand, how comics could work in the opposite direction, de-orientalising Sufism and Islam.

Keywords: Islam; Sufism; graphic novels; comics; occulture.

## The Arts and Contemporary Western Sufism

Prof Mark Sedgwick<sup>1,2</sup>

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This is one in a stream of 3 panels submitted by the European Network for the Study of Islam and Esotericism (ENSIE)

The panel examines the relationship between Sufism and the arts in the contemporary West. The first paper, Ricarda Stegmann's "Theory and implementation of creativity in the works of the Sufis Zia Inayat Khan and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee", is a comparative study of the understandings of creativity by the first major Western Sufi, Inayat Khan (1882-1927), and a later Western Sufi, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (1953-). The second paper, Sara Kuehn's "The 'Wisdom Book': A Live Music-Cinema Zoom Performance of a Play in Seven Acts", focuses on one particular instance of the production and subsequent reception of the arts within the Inayati tradition, that of a play written by Inayat Khan's daughter Noor-un-Nisa (1914-1944), unknown until its rediscovery in 2017 and its music-cinema zoom performance in 2020. This case is particularly interesting because of the gender element: Noor-un-Nisa is the only woman in the canonical Inayati lineage. The third paper, Mark Sedgwick's "Traditionalist Sufism and the Arts: Ananda Coomaraswamy", looks at the influential art theories of the Traditionalist movement, a form of Western Sufism comparable in importance to the Inayati tradition, though very different in other ways. The paper argues that Coomaraswamy was the most important of the Traditionalist theorists of art, and looks at the origins, development, and impact of his theories. Finally, Gulnaz Sibgatullina's "The Oriental Trail: Music and Poetry in Darqawiyya-Habibiyya Sufi community (1969-1979)", looks at a later Western Sufi group that was strongly identified with both music and poetry, arguing that this artistic production engendered a self-identification that was simultaneously a cause and a response to the socio-political transformations of the 1960s in the UK and the US.

**Ricarda Stegmann, "Theory and implementation of creativity in the works of the Sufis Zia Inayat Khan and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee".**

Marie-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, Aarhus University, Denmark. rs@cas.au.dk

This paper discusses the conception of creativity in the works of two Sufi authorities of the late 20th and early 21st centuries: Zia Inayat Khan (1971-), current president of the Inayati Order and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (1953-), Shaykh of the Sufi order Naqshbandiyya Mudjadidiyya. Both are mainly active in Europe and the US and combine concepts from different world religions, theosophical ideas and the conceptions of Carl Gustav Jung in their Sufi teachings. But they also assign a central place to Sufis, such as those of their order lineages or the famous 13th-century Jalal ad-din Rumi. Zia Inayat Khan and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee both formulate a

theory of creativity that they distinguish from fantasy: they understand creativity as a direct channel to the transformative divine and thus to individual and collective spiritual advancement. In a first part, this paper presents the conceptual-theoretical basis of both Sufis' conceptions of creativity, which, it is argued, are embedded in a particular variety of American transcendentalism. In a second part, it is shown how these theoretical conceptions are concretely related to an area of application: to the consciousness-expanding power of language and poetry in the teachings of Vaughan-Lee and to that of music in the teachings of Zia Inayat Khan, who refers to the theories of his grandfather and founder of the order, Hazrat Inayat Khan. An outlook is also given on the practical role of music and language within the framework of the respective teachings and activities. The basis for my analyses is some of Vaughan-Lee's most popular book publications as well as eight to ten course units of Zia Inayat Khan, supplemented by further online material and interviews with both teachers.

Keywords: Sufism, Creativity, Language, Music, Transcendentalism

**Sara Kuehn, “The ‘Wisdom Book’: A Live Music-Cinema Zoom Performance of a Play in Seven Acts”.**

PhD. Marie Curie Fellow, Institut d’ethnologie méditerranéenne, européenne et comparative (IDEMEC)/CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, France, and Centre of Islamic Theology (ZITH)/University of Tübingen, Germany. sara@sarakuehn.com

The discovery of a “wisdom book that was hidden from humanity until its time has come” in the Inayati archives in 2017 prompted Pīr Zia Inayat Khan (b. 1971), the spiritual leader of the Inayati Sufi community, to issue a path-breaking declaration. He admitted the first woman to the Inayati spiritual and genealogical lineage (silsila): his aunt Pīrzādi-Shahīda Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan, who was executed at Dachau in 1944.

Called *Aède of the Ocean and Land*, the discovered “wisdom book” is the only play Noor-un-Nisa wrote. Told in the light of the twelfth-century Sufi classic “The Conference of the Birds” by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. c. 1220), it retells one of the great foundational stories of Western civilization, Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*, the journey of the Greek hero Odysseus being seen as an allegory of Inayat Khan’s spiritual journey in the West. The play has seven acts, each corresponding to one of the valleys in ‘Aṭṭār’s famous story, which have to be crossed by the birds of the earth in their yearning for the divine. Similarly, in Noor-un-Nisa’s story, Ulysses’ heart transforms in the course of his journey, as he becomes a renunciate with a Sufic vision of detachment.

In this paper, I use the example of the live music-cinema Zoom performance of *Aède* performed on the day after the anniversary of Noor-un-Nisa’s death (‘urs) on 13 September 2020 to explore the role of *Aède* in Inayati teachings today. Directed by Elli Papakonstantinou with music composed by Shirish Korde, the visual and auditory language employed in this virtual performance drew on classical South Asian as well as contemporary American and European sources.

Keywords: Sufism; Inayati Sufism; Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan; women in Sufism; plays; music-cinema.

**Mark Sedgwick, “Traditionalist Sufism and the Arts: Ananda Coomaraswamy”.**

PhD. Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Among the most important expressions of Western Sufism are the various “Traditionalist” ṭarīqas (Sufi orders) derived from the teachings of the French esotericist René Guénon (Abd al-Wahid Yahya, 1886-1951). These include the Maryamiyya of Frithjof Schuon (‘Isa Nur ad-Din, 1907-1998), himself a painter, among whose followers was Titus Burckhardt (Ibrahim Izz al-Din, 1908-1984), author of several books on art and architecture. Some work has been done on the art theories of these Traditionalists, but almost nothing has

been done in recent years on the art theory of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), the earliest art theorist in the Traditionalist movement, and an influential curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This paper traces the origins of Coomaraswamy's art theories in the British Arts and Crafts Movement and the Indian Swadeshi (self-sufficiency) movement, and then their development after 1933 on the basis of Guénon's esoteric perennialism and anti-modernism. It looks closely at Coomaraswamy's 1943 collection *Why Exhibit Works of Art? Collected essays on the Traditional or "Normal" View of Art*, his most complete (and last) publication on the topic. In this, Coomaraswamy explores both the purpose of art and the importance of symbolism. The paper closes by looking at the impact of Coomaraswamy, though Schuon on Burckhardt, on contemporary art, from the Princes' School of Traditional Arts in London to the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha.

Keywords: Western Sufism; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy; Traditionalism; art theory; symbolism; craftsmanship.

**Gulnaz Sibgatullina, "The Oriental Trail: Music and Poetry in Darqawiyya-Habibiyya Sufi community (1969-1979)"**

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The paper focuses on musical and literary works produced by members of the Darqawiyya-Habibiyya Sufi lodge in London (later Norwich). Founded by a community around Ian Dallas (known as Abdalqadir as-Sufi, 1930–2021), it included several English and American artists who joined the lodge in the late 1960s–early 1970s after having travelled with Dallas to Fez, Morocco, to visit Darqawi shaykh Muhammad Ibn Al-Habib (1876–1972). The trip to Morocco, encounter with the shaykh, and the consequent conversion to Islam had a profound impact on these artists. Members of the Mighty Baby band, all of whom were initially part of the London community, produced the album "Jug of Love" (1971); later, under the new name The Habibiyya (without guitarist Martin Stone), they issued "If Man but Knew" (1972). Lyrics and music of songs featured in these albums directly referenced transformative experiences that the musicians had undergone upon joining the Sufi order. American poet Daniel Abdal-hay Moore (1940–2016), who also was part of the lodge until the late 1980s, published "The Desert is the Only Way Out" (1985) and "The Chronicles of Akhira" (1986), two poetry collections that told the story of his travels across Europe and the Middle East as a Muslim Sufi.

The converts' work illustrates how traditions of English and American Orientalism have been revived in the "cultural decade" of the 1960s to construct a distinct European Islam and claim it as part of Western culture. The specific interpretation of this religion, coupled with Sufi practices, exotic dress, and code-switching between English and Arabic, engendered a self-identification that was simultaneously a cause and a response to the significant socio-political transformations of the 1960s in the UK and the US. Although clearly grounded on complex forms of appropriation, this "white Islam" nevertheless has survived over the decades and formed an intricate network of influential Muslim convert leaders.

Keywords: Sufism, Ian Dallas/Abdalqadir as-Sufi, Orientalism, European Islam

# Contemporary Anthroposophy: Politics, Pandemics, and Conspiritoriality

Prof. Dr. Helmut Zander<sup>1</sup>, Mrs Viktoria Vitanova-Kerber<sup>1</sup>, Herr Ansgar Martins<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Universität de Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland, <sup>2</sup>The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

## Contemporary Anthroposophy: Politics, Pandemics, and Conspiritoriality

Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy is arguably the most important political actor among esoteric associations today. With its extensive public branches -- more than 1200 Waldorf schools worldwide, pioneering efforts in ecological agriculture, distinctive hospitals, physicians, banks, and foundations -- the movement Steiner founded in the early twentieth century has developed notable fields of practice throughout Europe and the world. In the context of the Corona pandemic, the hitherto underestimated social and political significance of Anthroposophy has come to the fore in highly publicized controversies. Many Anthroposophists have responded to public health measures with politically charged narratives based on classic themes of conspiritoriality. In some cases, Anthroposophical milieus have reinforced vaccination refusal, while the boundaries between Anthroposophists and radical right groups in Germany and elsewhere have become permeable. The mixture of esoteric spirituality and conspiracy thinking has gained renewed social influence through various forms of Anthroposophy, both ideologically and in practice. As journalists and academics begin to study these developments, the political consequences of esoteric ideas and activities can be examined in detail.

This panel features a range of scholars engaged in analysis of the Anthroposophist milieu in order to present initial insights on the recent resurgence of conspiritoriality during the global pandemic. Central topics to be addressed include: What are the basic elements of an Anthroposophical understanding of politics? What inner logics have fostered vaccine refusal among Anthroposophists and the associated conspiracy narratives? Why does the heterogeneous Anthroposophical scene struggle to distinguish itself from far-right positions? What are the relations between Anthroposophy and new party formations in Germany? Case studies will combine considerations of esotericism, science, and secularization with approaches centered on critical political analysis in historical and contemporary context.

Helmut Zander, Université de Fribourg

Viktoria Vitanova-Kerber, Université de Fribourg

Ansgar Martins, The Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem

Ann-Kathrin Hoffman, FernUniversität Hagen

## **Helmut Zander: Anthroposophy and Democracy - an Ambivalent Relationship**

After the German Revolution of 1918, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) presented a political programme for the reorganisation of the society, the Social Threefolding (Soziale Dreigliederung), in which he proposed a functional differentiation (of politics, culture, and economy). This concept still forms the backbone of reflections on politics in Anthroposophy. Democratic procedures are integrated there within the framework of Anthroposophical ideas: The insight of initiates should guide democratic decision-making. This resulted in a critical attitude towards parliamentary and consensus-oriented decision-making processes. The consequences can still be found in the Anthroposophical milieu today. The restriction of parliaments through direct democracy or the disregard for scientific consensus in dealing with covid are, since behind them lies the ideas of a "higher" knowledge, consequences of Steiner's epistemology. In the current pandemic, criticism of democratic procedures, which for decades led a shadow existence in the Anthroposophical milieu, has increased again because there is no fundamental positioning vis-à-vis Steiner's political ideas.

## **Ansgar Martins: Ahriman ante portas or the vaccine that comes out of the cold**

Rudolf Steiner expected the year 2000 to be an apocalyptic turning point in world history: The first generation of Anthroposophists would be reborn to vanquish the dark – and cold – demon Ahriman, who would take on a physical body. While some parts of the Anthroposophical milieu have long since abandoned this apocalyptic vision, orthodox Anthroposophists are still preparing to go to war against the Ahrimanic forces. The Covid-19 pandemic has weakened liberal Anthroposophical narratives and led to a revival of apocalyptic Anthroposophical thinking. The proliferation of mRNA-vaccines – can it be any coincidence that they need to be kept cold? – on the one hand, and of widespread critical and polemical commentary in the German media targeting so-called alternative medicine, on the other, has nurtured the perception that Anthroposophy is under attack and that it is high time for Anthroposophists to fight back. The paper will discuss the nexus between public discourse on Steiner's followers and their changing self-perception.

Ansgar Martin: Ahriman ante portas or the vaccine that comes out of the cold.

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## **The Role auf Waldorf Schools between Social Policy Player and Pedagogical Institution**

**Ann-Kathrin Hoffmann<sup>1</sup>**

FernUniversität Hagen, Germany

»Education towards freedom« in the sense of Rudolf Steiner is the paradigm of Waldorf Education and a claim renewed in the first statement of the Association of Waldorf Schools during the pandemic in May 2020, highlighting the pedagogical dimension of their work, characterizing themselves as an exclusive pedagogical institution. Nonetheless Waldorf Schools compelled attention with the protest of teachers and parents against measures against Covid-19 and vaccination and raised the question of the proximity between Waldorf education, anthroposophy and conspiracy theorists/right wing extremists. The question about the self- and outside perception of the social policy role of Waldorf schools arises. The following contribution argues that the pandemic revealed the social policy consequences of the individualistic concept of freedom in anthroposophy which contributed to a more political view of Waldorf Education as an social policy player in public– a view the Waldorf Schools itself want to avoid.

## **The Funkadelic Experience: A Methodological Intervention into the Study of Psychedelic Spirituality**

Dr Christian Greer

<sup>1</sup>*Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, , United States*

This paper will perform a methodological intervention into the study of modern psychedelic spirituality. Despite recently accepting the deep historical roots between drugs and religion across a wide spectrum of human cultures, scholars of esotericism persist in mischaracterizing the use of psychedelic drugs as constitutive of a purely oppositional “counter-culture.” Reassessing this assumption, this paper demonstrates how religious innovation, and not opposition, is the core feature of psychedelic spirituality. Serving as a case study for my methodological intervention, this paper will examine the popular musical subculture of Funk (an abbreviation of “funkadelic”), which superseded the hippies as the touchstone for psychedelic spirituality in the 1970s. By tracing the religious impulses that gave rise to Funk, as well as its influence on later occultural musical subcultures, my paper ultimately recenters innovation, both artistic and religious, as the defining feature of modern psychedelic spirituality.

## “A Reincarnated Druidess”:1 Ella Young and the Origins of Neo-Paganism in the United States

Dr Amy Heath-Carpentier<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, United States*

Title: “A Reincarnated Druidess”:1 Ella Young and the Origins of Neo-Paganism in the United States

1925 was a pivotal year in the life of Ella Young (1867-1956). This avant-garde, self-proclaimed Pagan, Irish republican nationalist, writer, teacher, and mentor to a generation of writers embarked on a lecture tour of the United States. She would not return to her beloved Ireland. Having established two, religiopolitical organizations in Ireland during the revolutionary period (1898-1923), Young transported her strand of Western esotericism to the United States, particularly after she accepted the Chair of Celtic Studies at University of California Berkeley. In 1900, Young established the religiopolitical organization the Fine “to draw together for the freeing of Ireland the wills of the living and of the dead in association with the earth and the elements”.<sup>2</sup> Young turned to native Irish sources, including the Irish landscape, for inspiration. In doing so, she diverged from Theosophy, the Golden Dawn, W.B. Yeats, and George Russell (AE), who drew on Hindu, Buddhist, or Egyptian sources. This paper considers how Young’s Irish nationalism led her to develop a bioregional and environmentally conscious Neo-Paganism that she transported to the United States where she establish a relationship and bioregional practice in accordance with her new home. As such, the paper argues for Young’s place as a founder of Neo-Paganism in the United States who began teaching fourteen years prior to the Church of Aphrodite and thirty-eight years prior to the arrival of Ray and Rosemary Buckland in 1963.

1 Colum, Padraic. 1931. *Ella Young: An Appreciation*. New York: Longmans, Green and Company.

2 Gonne, Maud. 1995. *A Servant of the Queen*. Edited by A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White, 334-335. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. First published 1938. 334-335

## Repetitive or Creative? Ideas of the Polish Theosophical Society in the Interwar Period

Dr Karolina Hess<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Jagiellonian University , Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Kraków, Poland*

The proposed paper is an attempt to synthesize the most important ideological threads on which members of the Theosophical structures focused in the interwar Poland. It was a period of very vivid esoteric activity in

Poland, time building and enhancing the structures of the Theosophical Society and related organizations. In my doctoral dissertation, which was just prepared for publication, I analyzed both the organizational and ideological aspects of this activity, based on internal documents and unpublished source materials. The aim of the paper is to present the main areas of interest of Theosophists, including their focus on the matters of Poland itself, its freedom, history and future, and an attempt to answer the question whether these concepts can be treated as simple reception or original views, and if we are dealing with the second case - in what sense and scope we can talk about creativity. An important element of my speech will be the analysis of the relationship between Polish Theosophy and Christianity. The lecture will be accompanied by a wide range of additional materials that I managed to digitize during my 7 years of work on my doctorate - from photos of members, through their publications, to leaflets - including posters informing about lectures in the 1920s and 1930s.

## MISA (Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute) in 2022: Art, Eroticism, and Donald Trump

Dr Massimo Introvigne<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*CESNUR, Torino, Italy*

MISA (Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute) is one of the largest groups in the world teaching neo-Tantrism and what it prefers to call esoteric sacred eroticism rather than “sex magic.” Most studies of MISA focused on the legal problems of its founder, Gregorian Bivolaru, and the controversial participation of some of its members (called “students”) in the world of adult movies and erotic shows. Based on the author’s book “Sacred Eroticism: Tantra and Eros in the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA)” (Mimesis International 2022), and on extensive fieldwork, the paper argues that COVID-19 deeply transformed MISA. Its conspirationist attitudes were further developed and brought the movement close to the anti-vaccination milieu and the supporters of Donald Trump in the United States. Visual arts, which were always cultivated, became even more important as the quest for sacred eroticism could no longer be pursued through mass camps and gatherings, which COVID made impossible, and the arts provided an alternative avenue to express the same ideas and feelings without in-person contacts.

# John Osborne Varian, Irish Myth, and Theosophical Mystery Plays on California's Central Coast

Dr Paul Ivey<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Arizona, Tucson, United States*

At an early 1914 annual convention of the theosophical group the Temple of the People, John Varian presented his first mystery play "Cauldron of the Gods" to a large crowd. It was an ambitious program that included solo, quartet, and choral work performing the building of the Cauldron of Light, a Celtic story of creation. In its mystical subject and combination of music, theater, and effects, Varian believed with other theosophists in a connective synesthesia they heartily embraced as indicative of advancing spirituality. John Varian, Irishman, poet, and playwright, was a visionary artist whose works were meditations on theosophical cosmological ideals and Irish mythology. With his sister Suseen he published *Cuchulain, Oisín the Hero* in 1906, with illustrations by his friend George Russell (AE), which anticipated his still unpublished 7 volume masterwork of Irish myth, *Banba of the Pathways*. His mystery plays, poetry, and musical inventions inspired internationally-acclaimed ultramodernist composer Henry Cowell, who set several of his plays to music. Varian's work celebrated the epic qualities of Irish myth, his faith in spiritual development, and the grandeur of nature and its processes. Originally from Cork, Ireland, and an active member of the Dublin Lodge from 1892, Varian and his wife Agnes, an early feminist, settled in Palo Alto, California, in 1903, and created a rich intellectual and literary salon atmosphere in their regular theosophical meetings. Moving to Halcyon, California in 1914, their home became a center for artists, authors, musicians, and others interested in the Irish nationalist cause, including important author Ella Young. John Varian created a rich textual practice based on theosophical conceptions of the universe, Irish myth, and spiritual evolution. My paper will address the rich interconnections between Varian's various literary works and Theosophy, and will include new archival material on both Varian and Young.

## 'Maha Kali, come to me:' Hinduism meets "Western" Esotericism in Extreme Metal.

Ms Maggie Kastlund<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sverige*

Scholars of religions have increasingly directed attention to the phenomenon Partridge designates 'occulture,' i.e., the connections between popular culture and different aspects of esotericism. While esoteric themes remain the most common sources of inspiration for extreme metal bands, there are several examples of bands inspired by other religious traditions. This paper will, correspondingly, examine the growing interest in Hinduism among extreme metal bands, how this is combined with "Western" esotericism, and how said combination illustrates cultural entanglement and globalization. During the last thirty years, bands from South Asia (for instance, India and Nepal), Europe (for instance, Sweden and Greece), and North America have increasingly been influenced by Hindu themes. This global interest has been expressed through the usage of Hindu imagery, the use of traditional Indian musical instruments, and more. The most common themes for South Asian, European, and North American bands are Hindu goddesses and gods. Whereas themes such as revolt against organized religion and the use of esoteric and satanic symbolism are employed alongside Hindu influences by European and North American bands, this is a rare occurrence for the South Asian bands who rather focus solely upon Hindu influences, such as the incorporation of Sanskrit lyrics and the usage of instruments commonly used within Indian classical and folk music. Additionally, European and North American extreme metal bands commonly employ Hindu imagery and themes that are interpreted as 'evil' or 'horrifying' in an occultural sense, whereas South Asian bands tend to demonstrate deeper knowledge of the Hindu religious tradition, employing textual sources such as the *Mahābhārata*. The paper will explore these

differences, highlighting both the function of Hinduism in the occultural framework of US and European extreme metal bands and how their South Asian counterparts are creating a local version of a previously 'West'-centered occultural form of expression.

## Idir Eatarthu: Encountering the Otherworld in Productions by the National Folk Theatre of Ireland

Dr Daithí Kearney<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dundalk, Ireland*

Encounters with an 'otherworld' and the suggestion that artistic talent has an otherworldly source is a recurring theme in productions by Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. The title of the paper, translated as 'between worlds' is taken from a dance piece choreographed to music by Mícheál Ó Súilleabhán (1990) involving a coming together of different music and dance styles representing the old and the new. It takes inspiration from the idea that the dancer defying gravity is caught forever in our minds between time and eternity. In *Ding Dong Dederó* (1991), there is a suggestion that the creative inspiration for the dance comes from an otherworldly source, which juxtaposes pagan and Christian symbols. In some productions, including *Samhain* (1992) and *Immram* (1995), the production follows the journey of an individual into another world, drawing on mythology and folklore but productions such as *Oilean* (2003) again focus on the influence of otherworldly powers and religious practice on peoples' lives and creativity. A contemporary, personal engagement with these themes is evident in the current work-in-progress 'Keep the Faith, Keep the Folk' (2022). In this paper I critically reflect on Siamsa Tíre's exploration of esoteric themes in their productions, highlighting the co-presence of Christian and non-Christian elements that reflect the complexity of esoteric beliefs in Irish society.

## The Demonic Lesbian Embodied: Lilith and Queer Semiotics in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Lady Lilith' (1866-68)

Ms Brennan Kettelle<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands*

Antique wind spirit turned Adam's first wife, Lilith holds the fascination of both contemporary academia and popular culture alike. Namely, feminist scholarship and interpretations of the Lilith myth arguably construct the dominant academic and pedestrian understandings of the demoness, presenting her as a rebellious, patriarchy-smashing femme. However, scholarship on Lilith thus far has primarily positioned her within a heteronormative framework. As a result, more complex and nuanced inquiries into Lilith's mythic and discursive history have been overshadowed. The lacuna my paper aims to expose and address is the overlooked historical queer currents and connections within artistic, literary, and sociocultural discourses regarding Lilith. Specifically, this paper will examine queer semiotics and themes of lesbionic monstrosity within Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Lady Lilith* (1866-68). Misogynistic fears of feminine sexuality and lesbianism coalesce within Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*, and the accompanying poem "Body's Beauty," both positioning Lilith as a site of the juxtaposition of subservient heterosexual femininity against uncontrollable, villainous lesbianism. By contextualizing both artistic tropes of this period, as well as nineteenth-century understandings of female homosexuality, queer coding and motifs imbued within Rossetti's portrayal of Lilith are exposed. More than a representation of the demonic feminine, Lilith was specifically employed to depict the monstrous lesbian. As such, a historic association between the demoness and queerness is established. This link exposes the ways in which Lilith has been historically utilized to represent - and in this instance,

demonize - queerness. Moreover, this paper intends to contribute to scholarship regarding Lilith's historical, cultural significance within the intersectional realms of sexuality, gender, and esotericism studies.

## Tarot Decks and Tarot-inspired Art in Ukraine

Dr Ruslan Khalikov<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Workshop for Academic Study of Religions, Kyiv, Ukraine*

The circumstances of the XX-th century were not conducive for the development and spread of Western esoteric movements in Ukraine. Repressions by the Soviet authorities led to the decline of pre-revolutionary occult schools in the USSR, the emigration of some key figures, the severance of ties with Western European like-minded people, and radically hampered the influence of occult trends. Despite the spread of arcanology in Masonic and Martinist circles of the Russian Empire, when several series of drawings which depicted at least the Major Arcana were created, neither then nor in Soviet times can we find evidence of mass deck printing in Ukraine. However, there is some evidence that arcanology existed in the USSR, and after Ukraine's independence, the opening of borders, and especially since the Internet became available to the masses, occult arcanology and the creation of Ukrainian Tarot decks has developed significantly. The interest of the general public in Tarot received a significant boost after a series of publications in the Science and Religion journal. The first tarot deck, titled "TAROT: cards for divination", was printed in Ukraine, likely in 1992. The design of the cards is somewhat reminiscent of Soviet journal: the cards are painted in red, while captions and Latin numbers inked in black. The symbolism of the deck does not include many occult components but remains generally recognizable. During the 30 years of Ukrainian independence, several dozen decks were issued, most of which can be classified into several distinct types: Ukrainianized, mythological, demonic. Tarot has also become a source of inspiration for some Ukrainian professional artists who are interested in esoteric themes and have had their own mystical experiences. However, the history of Tarot cards in Ukraine has not been described systematically to date.

## “Farinelli’s Breath”: Nineteenth-century Euro-American Voice Culture, American Delsartism, and Yogic-Occult Prāṇāyāma

Ms Magdalena Kraler<sup>1</sup>

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Nineteenth-century voice culture, which includes the art of elocution, singing, and breathing, was represented by numerous artists, teachers, and theorists contributing to the performance arts scene thriving in New York in the late nineteenth-century. As will be shown, this melting pot of practices also yielded new definitions of yogic breath cultivation, or prāṇāyāma. Genevieve Stebbins (1857–c. 1933), a major player of American Delsartism, combined voice culture, physical culture, breath cultivation, and occultism in her seminal *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892), which was highly influential for modern yogic breath cultivation. Stebbins, who was acquainted with the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the sexual magic practices taught therein, not only diffused breath practices but also occult ideas into the emerging scene of modern yoga. Besides Stebbins, a main case in point is Leo Kofler's *Art of Breathing* (1890) which taught numerous influential breathing exercises, including one allegedly applied by the Italian castrato singer Farinelli, bestowing almost magical breathing and singing capacities. While Stebbins and Kofler hardly associated their singing and breath work with yoga, it was the New Thought author William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932) alias Yogi Ramacharaka who pulled together various practices from these discourses—merging rhythmic breathing, voice culture, as well as magnetic healing and allusions to sexual magic into what he termed “yogi breathing”. Charged with immense potentiality, in a way, “Farinelli’s Breath” became

Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "yogi vocal breath". In any case, the yogic-occult breath cultivation presented in his *The Hindu Yogi Science of Breath* (1904) was seminal for nearly all subsequent manuals on *prāṇāyāma*. By innovatively investigating these understudied sources and subjects, this paper shows how nineteenth-century voice culture moulded discourses of yogic breath cultivation as we know it today.

## Universal Wisdom – A Christian Kabbalistic Lithograph by a Freemason Rabbi

Peter Lanchidi<sup>1</sup>

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The talk will address a Christian Kabbalistic lithograph entitled *Sapientia Generalis* which was made and supplemented by an explicatory volume by David Rosenberg, a Freemason rabbi, in Paris in 1843. The artwork—hitherto believed to be lost—is a detailed rendering of a 1679 bilingual Christological work from the pen of a Capuchin monk, *Esprit Sabbathier*, under the title *Idealis Umbra Sapientiæ Generalis / L'Ombre Idéale de la Sagesse Universelle*. The large print presents the summary of universal knowledge in a systematic way through hundreds of symbols and tiny narrative scenes, arranged in a mandala-like concentric diagram. At the visual and conceptual centre of the meticulously structured lithograph we find Christ on the cross. Such a work from the hands of a rabbi is not simply surprising but even astonishing considering the fact that only two years earlier Rosenberg published a Jewish Kabbalistic work in order to propagate and bolster his conservative views in a polemic over Jewish religious reform. In my talk, I will show that Freemasonry holds the key to this intriguing riddle. Namely, the originator of the idea for the artwork was none other than the Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex.

## Art, literature and esotericism: Gabriele Rossetti and his discovery of Dante's esotericism

Mr Piero Latino<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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The aim of this paper is to propose new and unexplored horizons of research concerning the relations between art, literature and esotericism, whose linking thread is the esoteric dimension of Dante's work. It was a forgotten man of letters of the nineteenth century, Gabriele Rossetti - father of the more famous Pre-Raphaelite poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti -, who spoke for the first time of the esotericism in the *Divine Comedy*, but his discoveries have been marginalised and relegated at the fringes of the academic debate. According to Gabriele Rossetti, the topos of love was not a feeling expressed in poetic verses but it hid a secret doctrine. Thus, the beloved girl or the rose, flower of love, were symbols of an occult wisdom. This conception of a mysterious love reminds what William Butler Yeats wrote in the *Secret Rose*, where he affirmed that Eros has a hidden face "because no man or woman from the beginning of the world has ever known what love is". This paper shows that the esoteric symbolism of Dante is present in the artistic works by William Blake or Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the same esoteric dimension can also be found in the literary works of poets and writers, such as William Butler Yeats, Joséphin Péladan or Ezra Pound. All these poets and artists were profoundly influenced by Dante who, in his *Divine Comedy*, warned the reader about an initiatory doctrine protected by the law of the secret: "O you who have sane intellects, / Look at the doctrine which is hidden / Under the veil of strange verses".

# William Butler Yeats's Anatomy of a Stage

Miss Héloïse Lazreg-visentin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *None, Auvers Sur Oise, France*

Pioneer of an alternative spiritual performance from within the Irish theatrical landscape of his time, W.B Yeats establish a Hermetic meta-theatre speaking to the inner self and reclaims its metaphysical origins by a re-enactment of his ritual practice applied on stage.

By studying the interchangeable notions of Theatre and Ritual from Yeats's point of view, we state that this ceremonial theatre is less a representation than a transmutation into an occult vision, revealing beyond the sensitive world: The stage becomes a portal, a medium to access the "imaginal" world, attempting to invoke higher realms channeling through the thaumaturgic reinvestment of the Word. Yeats's threshold's poetic shapes the stage as a liminal space, allowing the intangible to manifest, throwing a bridge between reality and otherworldly instances accessible through the power of the symbol and its archetypes. Theatre raises the fundamental question of worldviews. In this regard, Yeats's theatre is re-questioning our perceptions as a crucible crystallizing the gnosis through an autoreferential occult symbolism.

Although some scholars view it as two separate concepts Yeats's artistic productions and the adept's ritual practice, we argue that at the core of his work, both of them come as one by embracing Art itself as a form of Magic. We'll analyze the structure of his theatre as the epicenter of his own occult system established in *A Vision* and focus on the components of the ritualistic process Yeats operates to shift from the illusion of the representation to the inner occult vision, resulting in a transgression of conventional theatrical rules as much as cosmological ones, in condensing layered times and spaces on stage. We'll use a transversal approach, at the crossroad of Performance and Religious studies, to explore the creative possibilities and eventual limits of a soul's theatre; either as an art apart or as *Anima Mundi*.

# Esotericism and literary modernism in Estonia on the example of Ernst Enno

Mr Siim Lill<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia*

Ernst Enno (1875–1934) is little-known outside Estonia where he is famed for his poetry (lately especially used by our modern composers) but even at home his esoteric interests are hardly known outside the small circle of Estonian literature connoisseurs. Yet he is the best starting point to dig into the study of esotericism and literature in Estonia, mainly because

some of his writings, letters and personal items have survived the Soviet occupation and scattering and destruction of materials that took place at that time. On a smaller scale Enno can be compared to W. B. Yeats – he was great modernist and one of the importers of free-verse poetry to Estonia, he participated actively in the birth of independent Estonia, and in his writings he produced a unique blend of old peasant religious tradition (learned from his grandma) and the struggles of the modern world. He was an avid reader of Theosophical literature and translated *Bô Yin Râ*, *Max Heindel* etc into Estonian. In this presentation I will give a short overview of the esoteric currents in the Estonian literary and artistic circles in the end of 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century. I will focus mainly on Ernst Enno,

bringing examples from his work and finding parallels with W. B. Yeats. In a way I'm trying to follow the steps of Henrik Johnsson, Tessel M. Bauduin and others who are calling for the study of different authors and artists from a new perspective, and to bring the esoteric/occult currents next to the other ones, making the historical picture of modernism more accurate and kaleidoscopic.

# Metafictional Avatars: Encounters in the Borderlands Between Magick and Literature

Mr Antti Litmanen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland*

In this presentation, I set forth some of the 'perichoretic' tendencies prevalent in the 19th and 20th century British occult fiction, encompassing notions of interpenetrating worlds and the curious literary mobility of their denizens. Especial focus is given to the way these themes permeate the work of Kenneth Grant (1924–2011). His voluminous oeuvre presents us with a compelling example of an intricately detailed magical universe, charted actively by means both heuristic and intuitive: textual and kabbalistic exegesis, controlled dreaming, and ritual. While not uncommon practices in the esoteric milieu, Grant's rationale for them is remarkable. As a lifelong student of Advaita Vedanta, Grant appears to have subsumed these activities into the overarching search for the undivided Self among its myriad projections, as outlined by Djurdjevic et al. In this intensely subjective sphere, despite being understood as ultimately unreal, characters drawn from supernatural fiction are afforded apparent existential complexity, a strategy that parallels metafictional and postmodern theories, but eschews the elements of self-parody identified by them. In this sea of meanings, historically attested figures such as Grant's associates also assume certain fluidity of representation. In Grant's terminology, they are 'siderealized' (referring to Austin Osman Spare's [1886–1956] elongated portraiture), elevated to hypostatic roles of significance and glamour in the occult dramas playing out behind the brittle facades of everyday life; as Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951) wrote, our "modern layer" is merely a "shallow crust" or "desert-film", easily eradicated to reveal far older, stranger strata.

## The Alchemy of Sense: Arthur Rimbaud's Visionary Poesis and Poetics

Dr Simon Magus

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This paper introduces the core theme of this panel by means of an explication of the concept of synaesthesia as the basis of both a neurological type, and a rhetorical and poetic device, and by locating its topos in the history of Romantic Aesthetics. This will provide an introduction to our discussion as it moves from the linguistic via musicality to the imagistic. To do this I shall draw on the work of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), and critically examine a number of his works, including the *Lettres du Voyant*, and the poems which he collected as the *Illuminations*. By means of this exploration the paper will proffer an elucidation of the different roles that synaesthesia assumes, from the coloured hearing of *Voyelles* to a more metaphorical meaning of the term 'alchemy of sense'. It will provide a point of access to the Rimbaldien scholarship which deals with Rimbaud's apparent occult and esoteric proclivities, notably the alchemical interpretations presented in Enid Starkie's biography of the poet. In addition, I shall consider more contemporary critical work by Seth Whidden, and the poet's idiosyncratic rapprochement of Parnassianism and Decadence. However, the paper is less concerned with literary criticism per se than with the struggle of language in general - and poetics in particular - to articulate the ineffability of mystical phenomenology. I conclude with some considerations of poetry as the language of both magic and madness - the *poète maudit* of Rimbaud's famous 'reasoned derangement of all the senses'. Here, magic is an alchemy of sense, an imaginal calculus whose equations are those of metaphor.

# Gurdjieff and Art: A Critical Examination

Dr Makhabbad Maltabarova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*the Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, Germany*

George I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866-1949) was a Greek-Armenian teacher who suggested the complex of ideas and practices aimed at spiritual perfection. He created one of the most elaborated esoteric systems in the twentieth century, which is comparable in importance with the Theosophical school of Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891). Though his system has attracted little academic attention, the influence of Gurdjieff's heritage can be found outside academia in different modern realms, including art. Despite this important legacy, Gurdjieff's own reflections about art have been almost entirely neglected, and there is no sufficient survey of his texts and a complex approach to art topic. This presentation analyzes the place of art in Gurdjieff's magnum opus *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950). The critical examination of source material allows us to systematize his approach to art within the framework of his spiritual method and take a fresh look at the topic.

# Bends in the Path. Albert de Pouvourville's Initiatic Novels

Mr Davide Marino<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China*

This paper intends to explore the literary output of "Matgioi" (born Albert de Pouvourville, 1861-1939). This individual, almost unknown today, was a prominent figure of French fin de siècle intellectual life.

Born into an aristocratic military family, de Pouvourville was sent to French Indochina (modern Vietnam) as a soldier in the context of France's colonial wars. There, in 1890, he joined a local branch of the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui 天地會, Thiên Đạ Hi in Vietnamese), described by de Pouvourville as his "Daoist Initiation". On his return to France, he was active in the Occultist milieu, where he intended to describe to his audience the heights of the "Chinese tradition" he had encountered in Asia. In polemic with most of the interpretations of Daoism offered by the scholars of his time, de Pouvourville claimed that his personal initiation had given him direct access to a kind of knowledge inaccessible to non-initiates.

Interestingly, the tale of de Pouvourville's initiation, crucial for the legitimation of his philosophy, can only be found in literary form. In novellas such *Aux tournants de la voie*, and *De l'autre côté du mur* de Pouvourville describes his apprenticeship with the master Luat, "Tang-Sang of the Great Taoist Rite" and his initiation into a Vietnamese Triad. A character inspired by de Pouvourville's "Daoist" experiences is also the protagonist of the short novella *Les adieux du Sage* and the novel *Le Maître des sentences*.

This paper intends to explore how literature occupies a central place in de Pouvourville's output, serving both as an aesthetic exercise and a powerful tool of legitimation of de Pouvourville's religious ideas.

# Physical Graffiti: Arthur Edward Waite's Trinick-Pippet Tarot

Mr Richard Mason<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands*

The Anglo-American poet and mystic Arthur Edward Waite's "Roses & Lilies" Tarot created c.1909-10 in collaboration with Pamela Colman Smith is perhaps the most popular tarot deck in the English-speaking world, its illustrations having notably adorned the album covers of 1970s rock group Led Zeppelin. Yet Waite's second tarot "deck" designed approximately a century ago alongside John B. Trinick and Wilfrid Pippet remains relatively unknown. As the guiding focus for ESSWE8 is Art, Performance and Innovation, this paper

shall examine how members of A. E. Waite's group Fellowship of the Rosy Cross recreated tarot images for use as ritual objects to pursue Unio Mystica, making brief commentary on his relationship with three famous Celticists W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, and William Sharpe – who were once all fellow members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Stresses of artistic departure from the earlier 1909 deck shall be made and permission for fair usage of displaying these images shall be sought from extant members of Waite's order prior to the event.

## Hilma af Klint and the Problem of Abstract Art

**Hedvig Martin**

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When the Finnish art historian Sixten Ringbom (1935-1992) published his book *The Sounding Cosmos* (1970) – which showed the occult roots of pioneering abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky – the study was met with cold scepticism from the scientific community. Fifty years later, the extraordinary visibility of mediumistic painter Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) has confirmed the key role occultism played in the development of abstract art. Because Hilma af Klint produced her first abstract paintings five years before Kandinsky, she is now praised as a pioneer of abstract art and is exhibited all over the western world. However, the success of af Klint and the consequent shift in the canon of art history has generated a debate that divides scholars into two sides: those who claim that the history of abstract art needs to be rewritten to include af Klint, and those who assert that af Klint was never an abstract artist, since her paintings depict a higher, spiritual dimension – therefore not meeting the prerequisites for abstraction. Such an objection also affects other mediumistic artists who painted in an 'abstract' style. In this paper, I will offer a serious reflection on this question while exploring the boundaries of abstract art. By going back into the history of the 'abstract' image – beginning with Robert Fludd's black square in *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* (1617) – the paper will outline the problem of abstract art while situating af Klint and her peers within the art historical context. This will lay the ground for critically assessing the artworks and written sources of both conventional abstract artists and marginalised mediumistic painters, to ultimately challenge the formalist definition of abstract art. As such, this paper will not only bring new material to the case of Hilma af Klint, but also offer novel perspectives to the discourse of art and Western esotericism as a whole.

Keywords: Hilma af Klint, occultism, abstract art, mediumistic art

## The Art of Esotericism in Theory and Practice

**Mr Cavan McLaughlin**<sup>1,2</sup>

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In the academic study of esotericism there is a long-standing debate regarding the legitimacy of the insider-as-researcher and whether there is a methodologically viable place for practitioner-scholars. Heavy criticisms have been levelled at adjacent fields, such as Pagan Studies, concerning unobjective insider biases and 'religionist' approaches. Leading scholars within the study of esotericism argue for a clear delineation between the emic and etic, with work that focuses on historicising and analysing the objects, actors and discourses of esotericism from an objectively safe distance. Within the arts, scholars also examine, contextualise and analyse the socio-cultural implications of various creative works, retrospectively, as an act

of post-mortem. However, the approach is accompanied and complemented by artist-scholars that “push this examination into a more direct and intimate sphere, observing and analysing themselves as they engage in the act of creation, rather than relying solely on dissection of the art after the fact” (Skains 2018). This presentation will draw from the speaker’s own experience as an artist-scholar, finalising a practice-led PhD research project into esoterically-informed creative practice, to explore and unpack these issues of legitimacy, authenticity, and disciplinary discrepancies as to the role of the ‘practitioner’.

## 'Theological Treatise': Czesław Miłosz’s Summa Theologica

Dr Jan Miklas-Frankowski<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland*

Esoteric thread in particular including references to the Gnostic concepts appears in Czesław Miłosz’s work (1911-2004) from an early, catastrophic ‘Three winters’ (1935) to the last summa - ‘Theological Treatise’ (2001). The experience of the world’s cruelty and recognition that its structure is embedded with evil affected his worldview and work. Nevertheless, this influence is usually omitted or underestimated and in my opinion, it is crucial and necessary for understanding Miłosz’s discourse.

Gnostic cosmogony can be found in the ‘Theological Treatise’ chiefly in passages that refer to events preceding the Biblical account and Miłosz’s thoughts on axiological divisions that manifested themselves at that primaeval stage. His theosophical speculations are heavily influenced by Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), who was also one of the spiritual guides of Adam Mickiewicz. Three poems included in the Treatise ('According to Mickiewicz', 'So It's Eve', and 'No wonder') look almost like a hermeneutical commentary to Böhme’s 'Regeneration'. It seems that Miłosz finds Böhme’s anthropocentrism so appealing because of its rationality. The speculations of 'De Regeneratione' throw light on the dogmatic mystery of the Fall and Original Sin by linking them to man's lust for power and his Promethean pride, which sought to rid Creation of death. Miłosz tries to combine the heterodox, paragnostical ideas with the Christian doctrine and, having considered the depressing state of the world, wants to deflect the charge of cruelty by absolving God from the responsibility of creation, while at the same time he wants to believe in the Incarnation, Resurrection and Redemption. On the whole, however, ‘Theological Treatise’ seems to be the work of a sceptic who 'is a believer one day, an unbeliever the next’.

## Depictions of the Horned God in Current Esoteric and Popular Western Art

Miss Anna Milon<sup>1</sup>

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The Horned God, an amalgam of horned and antlered anthropomorphic male deities and legendary figures coined by Margaret Murray, has become over the past century the iconic God of the Witches. Though his textual influences are numerous, his visual representation largely remains inspired by four key images:

- The parietal image known as The Sorcerer in the Cave of Three Brothers in the French Pyrenees (dated 130 century BCE, discovered 1916)
- The horned figure on The Pillar of the Boatmen (dated 1st century CE, discovered 1710)
- The seated antlered figure on the Gundestrup Cauldron (dated 2nd – 1st century BCE, discovered 1891)
- ‘Herne the Hunter Plunging into the Lake’, George Cruickshank’s illustration for W. H. Ainsworth’s novel Windsor Castle (1842)

The visual elements of the above characters are often used as shorthand for different aspects of the Horned God’s persona. Artists and authors combine them to highlight specific roles or attitudes of their Horned God

depictions. The paper will discuss the evolution of the Horned God's depictions in both popular and esoteric art since the publication of *The God of the Witches* in 1931. It will consider the symbolism ascribed to the four core images and investigate why other visual representations of horned divinity, such as the Classical depictions of the god Pan or Eliphas Levi's Baphomet do not exhibit as great an influence on Horned God imagery today.

## Curating the Occluded: Esotericism and Exhibition Making

Mr Pádraic E. Moore

Recent decades have seen a renaissance of esotericism in the sphere of contemporary art. This 'esoteric turn' is evident not only in the work of individual artists but also the work of curators and exhibition organisers. This paper explores the role public exhibitions have played in the dissemination and revival of esoteric philosophies or practices. While some of these exhibitions have pioneered experimental curatorial strategies others have sought to recoup the work of individuals who -for whatever reason- were occluded from the canon of art history. The first part of the paper explores a lineage of particularly significant exhibitions, beginning with the seminal 1986 *The Spiritual in Art, Abstract Painting, 1890–1985* curated by Maurice Tuchman at LACMA and accompanied by an informative catalogue. The paper will also consider the recent wave of recuperative exhibitions that posthumously revisit the oeuvres of artists (such as Hilma af Klint) in order to reveal how occult activities / esoteric organisations directly shaped their work.

The second part of this paper considers the topic from a more subjective angle; examining some of my own curatorial endeavours. In particular, *A Modern Panarion* which took place at Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane in 2014. The starting point for this exhibition was a series of murals painted by George Russell (AE) at Ely Place Dublin (see image) at what had once been the HQ of the Theosophical Society. An integral aspect of this exhibition involved documenting these murals dating from 1895 which are in a private residence. The exhibition included displays of original publications produced by the Dublin Lodge alongside contemporary artworks. I will conclude the paper on an optimistic note; considering how in the second decade of the 21st century, esotericism offers us catalysts for generating community and symbols with which oppressive structures can be countered.

## Annie Besant's "Quickening of Evolution"

Dr Yves Mühlematter<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland*

I will argue that Annie Besant's concept of the "Quickening of Evolution" is at the core of Besant's Theosophy. This concept involved at least five different aspects. Three of these were 1) daily practices, 2) meditation, and 3) purification. In this paper I will present these three notions as they appear in Besant's Theosophy. In the light of initiation into Theosophy and as a second initiation into higher knowledge these practices will be discussed. I will argue that the ideas of initiation in Besant's work in particular and in the Theosophical Society in general were based on a specific reception of raja-yoga practices. Against this background I will reevaluate the influence of South Asian ideas in Theosophy in the light of initiation.

## Theosophy and Indian art: The networks between Theosophical Society and the Bengal School of Art

**Mr Mriganka Mukhopadhyay<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands*

This paper aims to discuss how Theosophy left an impact on Indian art. Although significant scholarly discussions have been made on Theosophy's influence on European and American art and artists, little light has been thrown on how Theosophy influenced the Indian artists—particularly the modernists. Examining the networks between the Theosophical Society and the Indian artists during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, I will analyse the dialogues that existed between the two worlds. The Theosophical Society as well as a set of Indian painters and sculptors boosted the idea of cultural revivalism and used Hindu iconographies—a common goal that united the two worlds of art and occultism. James Henry Cousins, the prominent Irish Theosophist, encouraged the conservation and promotion of Indian art and was in charge of the Theosophical Society's Museum in Adyar for several years since the second decade of the twentieth century. Cousins was in contact with E.B. Havell, the Principal of the Government Art College in Calcutta, Sir John Woodroffe, a Theosophist and one of the patrons of art in Bengal, and Stella Kramrisch, the Austrian professor of Indian art at the University of Calcutta. It was through Havell, Woodroffe and Kramrisch, the Bengali painters and sculptors such as Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij and others established contacts with the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar. Mention will be made of G. Venkatachallam, a Bangalore-based Theosophist and art collector who was closely associated to all these individuals. Examining the connections between art and occultism, this paper will discuss how these connections nurtured Theosophy, cultural revivalism and the mutual networks between India, Ireland and rest of the world.

# Hermes as a Medium of Modernist Poetry

Mr Guido Nerger<sup>1</sup>

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At the core of every hermeneutical structure lies a philosophical principle that reaches back to the foundation of modern hermeneutics in classical thought. The methodology of ‘perceiving language in correspondences’ as an approach to the different layers of understanding is derived from the Janus-faced concept of ancient rhetorical techniques that were exercised to reach philosophical truth. Unlike ‘modern’ concepts of hermeneutics ancient hermeneutics refer to a deeper understanding of the entanglements of perception and interpretation of plural realities. As emphasized by Plato, the expression ‘hermeneutic’ is derived from the Greek ἑρμηνεύειν that was associated with the god Ἑρμῆς. Hermes is the messenger of the gods. Not only does he deliver the messages of the gods, he also interprets them by representing the message. Without this interpretation, the messages would remain incomprehensible. In ancient hermeneutics the philosophical act to interpret language and voice of the gods, message, medium and interpretation are inseparably intertwined. Plato’s Socrates explicitly transfers this understanding of hermeneutics to poetry: Like Hermes, the poets are also media of the gods. Hermeneutics therefore is not only a way of interpreting a message, but also the act of delivering itself: the art of poetry. On the basis of these philological considerations the paper aims to show how Plato’s ‘Hermetic’ understanding of interpretation is adapted in the context of modern literature, especially in modernist poetry. On the basis of sketchily analyzed verses by W.B. Yeats, Aleister Crowley, Hilda Doolittle, and James Joyce the paper shall emphasize how these poets used the Platonic understanding of interpretation as a highly elaborated and condensed form of self-referential poetry in which poetry functions as a medium of the gods or as a medium to access the unconscious through an understanding of language that is based on the interference of message, medium, and interpretation.

## “Áine Chnoc Áine”, a contemporary encounter with the Otherworld in the Irish language.

Mr Crónán Ó Doibhlin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University College Cork, Cork, Ireland*

In 1981 the Irish language poem, “Áine Chnoc Áine” was published by the academic Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin in his collection of poems in Irish entitled *Briseadh na Cora* (1981). The author lived as he himself described “idir sliabh agus loch” or between mountain and lough in County Derry in the North of Ireland. As a scholar, Ó Doibhlin’s academic career was founded on an intimate understanding of the physical and spiritual connection of people with place, their folk and native traditions, and the manifestation of this tradition in their history, and in the Gaelic language and literature. This short poem is a recollection or retelling of a tradition closely associated with encounters with the Otherworld of native Irish belief. The goddess Áine also known as An, Danu, or Gráinne, and referred to by Cormac as the *mater deorum hibernensium*, has a particular association with the landscape around the hill of Cnoc Áine in Co. Limerick in the South of Ireland. A complex of archaeological sites in this territory have a central place in Munster mythology with ceremonies historically held annually on St. John’s Eve (23rd June), and which persist in modern folk memory. The traditions of Áine are also associated with lesser-known sites in Counties Donegal and County Derry in the North. This paper will analyse and connect the closely woven experience of folk tradition, a detailed knowledge of the historical and cultural landscape, and the resulting creation in this poem of a contemporary manifestation of Áine as part of a continuous native tradition. The paper will draw on additional evidence from John O’Donovan’s Ordnance Survey Letters 1834-41, as well as sources from *Comhairle Bhéaloidéas Éireann*, The Folklore of Ireland Council.

# Expressionism + Film d'Art = Occult(ure)?

Mr Colton Ochsner<sup>1</sup>

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Over the past century, the legacy of Expressionist cinema has inspired filmmakers and scholars alike with its special effects, visceral characters, and fantastic plotlines. In the Weimar Republic, the strangely stylized sets of what became known as Expressionist film captivated audiences worldwide with movies such as Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Though scholars generally agree that no such movement ever existed in cinema, I assert that the directors, screenwriters, and set designers of movies now called "Expressionist" maintained among themselves a common ideographic layout based thematically on the tropical zodiac of Western astrology, and, within the *mise-en-scènes*, the minor arcana pips from the standard tarot deck by Arthur Edward Waite (originally from 1910), while basing their characters on the sipherot of the Hermetic cabala. This layout, which they implemented in all their so-called Expressionist movies, might most aptly be called an occult blueprint. I present this material in order to set forth the argument that the subtlety, the shrewdness, and the subliminality of occult ideography in Expressionist cinema has been ignored, neglected, and downright unnoticed in the whole of film and historical scholarship. But it is a field that demands to be taken more seriously by professionals and requires the attention of those familiar with the occult publications, arcane practices, and esoteric schools of and around Weimar Germany. Every scholar agrees: movies of this genre are filled with pentagrams, puffs of smoke, and strange-looking costumes. But all that content is nominal occultism. What about the seminal – that is, the truly hermeneutical – presence of the occult in Expressionist cinema? That crucial question is addressed in my paper, which combines history, film studies, and the German language to find some complex and nuanced answers.

## Occult symbols as techniques of image magic in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

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Esoteric movements have always been fascinated by symbolic meanings expressed with visual signs - either representative images or non-representative symbols. The latter abound, for example, in the symbolic language of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and in techniques developed by Austin Osman Spare. The habit of using symbolic signs developed out of early modern and medieval occult visual culture. Varying images were utilized, for example, in genres of medieval learned magic, especially in manuals of image magic that describe preparation of talismans. According to these sources, talismans are consecrated with several rites including incense, prayers, invocations and sacrifices, and engraved with representative images and magic words. Often the items are adorned with symbolic signs, designated sometimes as sigils, but most often as "characters" (*karacteres*). This paper explores the non-representative magical signs called characters in the Latin sources of image magic in medieval and early modern Europe. The study focuses on the use, contexts, meanings and evolution (or stagnation) of the characters and groups them into families according to their appearances. The paper also discusses the reception and interpretation of characters among early modern authors, who saw these signs as revelations of the divine mind and occasionally confused them with hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt. Lastly, it briefly explores the afterlife of medieval *karacteres* in modern esoteric movements.

# Tracing the author in The Simon Iff Stories and The Secrets of Doctor Taverner

Ms Hannah O'Flanagan<sup>1</sup>

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In his somewhat fawning, yet ultimately enlightening, biography 'The Magical Life of Dion Fortune: Priestess of the 20th Century', Alan Richardson notes the various overlaps between two vast figures of British Occulture: Fortune, and Aleister Crowley. Within this work, Richardson observes that whilst Crowley 'became known to millions' and courted notoriety, 'the shade of Dion Fortune sank into relative obscurity.' Whilst this is certainly true- those moving outside the field of Occulture are certainly less likely to be familiar with Fortune than with Crowley- they both enjoyed relatively successful writing careers alongside their occult and magical practices, including forays into the psychic detective mode. It is the intention of this paper to analyse and make a close reading of a selection of Crowley's Simon Iff tales alongside- and in comparison with- Fortune's The Secrets of Doctor Taverner, in order to investigate the ways in which we can see both characters (and the narratives, theories and general plots found within the stories) as microcosmic representations of their authors' own ideologies and belief systems. Both Crowley and Fortune's moral or ethical outlooks are, I will illustrate, reflected within the moral systems promoted within their works. This includes general attitudes towards magic and psychic/astral communication, as well as wider and more controversial ideas surrounding race. With a brief look into the uncanny similarities in Crowley and Fortune's personal biographies, this paper will also seek to forge concise and clearly defined links between the two figures, showing how their personal philosophies and occult, magical systems weren't as different as they may first appear.

## Northern Lights: Torsten Hedlund and Norse Theosophy

Mr Peter Olsson<sup>1</sup>

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At the end of the 19th Century, the teachings of Mme. Blavatsky reached Sweden and inspired a small group of people in Stockholm to form a Swedish section of the Theosophical Society. One of its key members was the prominent Gothenburg publisher and photographer Torsten Hedlund (1855-1935). Hedlund's own contributions to Swedish theosophy have been largely overlooked by scholars. Hedlund is only mentioned briefly for his minor role in corresponding on the subject of theosophy with the Swedish author August Strindberg (1849-1912) during Strindberg's "occult period." Yet Hedlund's significant position within the theosophical milieu is evidenced by his close relationship with Katherine Tingley, the leader of the American section of the Theosophical Society. Hedlund was instrumental in the planning of Tingley's envisioned Raja Yoga School on the island Visingsö, Sweden. Archival manuscripts reveal Hedlund's personal theosophical vision, which contains recurring traits of Norse mythology, rooted in his Swedish background. These unpublished and largely untranslated papers and correspondence, preserved in the Manuscript Collections of the University of Gothenburg Library, demonstrate the ways that Hedlund developed a distinctively Scandinavian centered Theosophy, applying Blavatsky's theories of Aryan and Atlantean spiritual superiority to Norse mythology. This paper shows how the transnational Theosophical Society would become particularly adapted to the Swedish context. Hedlund sought to create a Scandinavian theosophical narrative emphasizing Scandinavians as most suited to esoteric religious advancement. Contextualizing Hedlund's ideas allows for a better understanding of his creative synthesis of theosophy and Norse mythology. It also sheds light on the overall development of Swedish Theosophy, and its relation to Theosophy at large.

# Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective

Dr Bernd - Christian Otto

The German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) recently approved the foundation of a Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Kollegforschungsgruppe) on the topic 'Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective' at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. The Center's main goal is to compare the interpretation, rationalisation and legitimation strategies of esoteric practices from a global perspective, and to carve out why they are successful in different cultural and regional contexts. A mid-term goal is the development of a cultural theory of esoteric practices, which seeks to explain their resilience, their typological similarities across a large number of cases, and their different, culture-bound evaluations. DFG-funded Centres for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences are interdisciplinary research groups that combine an international fellowship programme with local high-profile research, whereby a large number of leading experts have the possibility to convene and explore an innovative research topic over a long period of time. With a local staff of at least nine employees, and available funding for up to seven fellowships per year, the Center will be one of the biggest esotericism-focused research projects in academia in the years to come. The paper will present the research agenda, goals and tools of the newly established Center.

## 'Thairfoir dounwart we cast oor myndis' – Orpheus in fifteenth Century Scotland.

Ms Kirsty Pattison<sup>1</sup>

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Scots makar Robert Henryson (f.1460-1500), is considered by some scholars to be a distinctive voice in the Northern Renaissance. Little is known about the life of Henryson and there is no record of him as a court poet, although he was active during the reigns of both King James III and King James IV, both of whom had a keen interest in humanist literature. Henryson's 603-line version of the Orpheus myth written in middle Scots has divided scholarship. John MacQueen argues that Henryson's Orpheus represents Neoplatonism and Orphism in fifteenth century Scotland suggesting 'incorporated in the poem, there is ample evidence for a second level of allegory proper based on Neoplatonic doctrine, metaphor and numerology.' However, Enrico Giaccherini argues that Henryson should not be hailed as a proto-humanist and his Orpheus should be viewed as an indication of his "indisputable interest" in the classical pantheon. R.S. Jack argues that 'by the 1480s Scottish Humanism was strong' considering links between Scots travelling to Italy for educational purposes as evidence of the migration of ideas, exploring links between Henryson and Poliziano's Orfeo. Yet, R. J. Lyall has argued these links are tenuous at best. Drawing on MacQueen's acknowledgement of Neoplatonism and Orphism this paper will explore Henryson's Orpheus through an esoteric lens considering the ideas of Marsilio Ficino as the inspiration behind the makars epic. By taking this approach to Henryson's Orpheus, new questions arise regarding the engagement and reception of esoteric ideas in Renaissance Scotland.

## THE DEVIL: IMPACT OF POP CULTURE IN RESHAPING THE ARCHETYPICAL ADVERSARY FOR CONTEMPORARY MAGIC PRACTITIONERS

Dr Angela Puca<sup>1</sup>

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From Faust and Paradise Lost to Sympathy for the Devil, the representations of the ultimate adversary within Abrahamic religions have been numerous and varied in nature. From the twentieth century and up until this day, there seems to be a trend toward romanticizing the figure of Lucifer or Satan, either by depicting him as a rebel against the status quo or as a proponent of a free agency beyond the rules imposed by Christianity or a patriarchal society. In literature, for instance, in Fernando Pessoa's *The Hour of the Devil*, the latter is also represented as the master of liminal spaces and as a source of inspiration for artists. By tackling the depiction of the Devil in those pop culture outputs which appear to be most influential within the contemporary magic-practicing community - more specifically those following left-hand paths - I will argue that the perception of this archetypical figure is getting increasingly romanticized and more detached from the Judeo-Christian framework that popularised it. I will also address how pop culture has reshaped its understanding and what role this newly reframed entity play in contemporary witchcraft.

## Durch Die Physik: Franz von Baader, and the Böhmean Hieroglyph of Nature

Mr Dale Rose<sup>1</sup>

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Franz von Baader was one of the most important German thinkers of the 19th century, and yet his significance and influence has almost been forgotten by contemporary scholarship. Baader had many interests, from social criticism to medicine and the natural sciences, and was a major influence on Hegel and Schelling. .This paper is an examination of the role that concepts from Western Esotericism, and in particular from the theosophy of Jakob Böhme played in the development of Baader's physicalism and his understanding of the natural world. Böhme's theosophy was for Baader a bridge between the discoveries of science and the Biblical account of creation, and Baader wanted Böhme's teachings to ground an entirely new system of natural philosophy that would not be hindered by religious dogmatism or scientific materialism. For Baader, the natural world was a living revelation of the will of God, and using language borrowed from correspondence theory, he proposed a spiritual hermeneutic by which scientists might be able to read the intentions of God. Baader provided one of the most comprehensive applications of a mystical thinker to the scientific paradigm, and his work would be influential in the Romantic movement's engagement with the natural world. Baader's approach to the natural sciences has been recognized as a precursor to German Vitalism and Lebensphilosophie, however within these discussions Böhme's importance to Baader's work is often unacknowledged. This paper seeks to re-center Böhme's importance for Baader, and to work for the reintegration of Baader's work in the broader discourse surrounding the development of the natural sciences in Germany.

## An Astrological Romance: Eleanor Kirk and the Popularization of Relationship Astrology

Dr Christa Shusko<sup>1</sup>

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On December 26, 1897, the *New York World Magazine* featured a story titled "Making Love by the Signs in the Heavens, New Society Formed in New York to Promote the Happiest Marriages—To Put an End to Divorce, Consult the Circle and Learn a New Idea of How to Select a Husband or a Wife." This Club's "new idea" of consulting the zodiac to determine relationship compatibility was one inspired by the Club's honorary president, the American suffragist, newspaperwoman, and author Eleanor Kirk (1831-1908). Kirk's *The*

Influence of the Zodiac Upon Human Life (1894) served as the Club's "textbook," guiding the "character readings" that helped to determine ideal relationship pairings. In the long history of astrology, emphasis on "character readings"—especially on the ways that such character readings might influence social and romantic relationships—is fairly recent. While the astrologer Alan Leo (1860-1917) is often identified as the progenitor of this transition, I argue that the largely forgotten Kirk was a major developer and popularizer of such ideas, with works pre-dating Leo's publications on the subject. Because of her long-standing (and long-thwarted) advocacy of women's divorce rights, Kirk would innovate the use of astrology to determine relationship compatibility—which continues to be an important feature aspect of popular astrology today. This presentation investigates the significance of Eleanor Kirk's unconventional astrological romance novel *Libra* (1896), arguing that Kirk saw the novel as the ideal form in which to most powerfully present and promulgate her astrological innovations—as well as her views on women's marital rights. The creative form of the novel allowed it to function as an imaginative case study by which readers could better comprehend how the inner character traits determined by the signs of the zodiac might apply to their own lives.

# Revelation and riddle: the occult cosmograms of Emma Kunz

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The epistemological problem of the occult is the attempt to aestheticize revelatory authority and knowledge. Through what concrete representations do occult cosmologies depict and construct an image of the world? This paper considers a specific aesthetic mode that artists turn to in seeking to positivise occult world-images: the cosmogram. In diverse and ambiguous ways, and with variable affect, cosmograms depict the order of the cosmos in one all-encompassing, condensed image, confined within distinctive borders. I consider the tension between communicability and impermeability in the mysterious pendulum diagrams of Swiss esotericist-artist and healer Emma Kunz (1892-1963). Her works, in colour crayon and pencil on graph paper, map her occult cosmology, healing impetus, and divinatory artistic practice. Kunz created vast, hypnotic images of “energy fields”, using them as charts to formulate diagnoses, and facilitate psychic healing in patients receiving her holistic treatments. Her abstractions suggest the supersensible, as part of the metaphysical cosmic order that she perceived, capturing her “clairvoyant channelling” of external forces through radiesthesia (pendulum divination). To produce her intricate illustrations, Kunz followed her pendulum’s movements with painstaking precision, determining the geometric mechanisms of the composition, and executing each in a trance-like, uninterrupted session lasting up to twenty-four hours. Despite the artworks left behind, many aspects of Kunz’s process as an artist-healer, and her syncretic belief system, are unexplained. Kunz’s cosmograms are abbreviated and ambiguous artworks that in their diagrammatic nature imply certainty. In this talk, I seek to understand how occult knowledge is suggested and incited through the semantics of cosmograms, approaching them as formalised modes of esotericism.

The Geometry of the New Jerusalem.

## John Michell’s Geometrical Interpretation of Glastonbury as Heavenly City

Mrs Marleen Thaler<sup>1</sup>

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The English writer and self-proclaimed radical Traditionalist John Michell (1933–2009) occupied an outstanding position within the alternative religious landscape of Britain. By means of his influential sacred place theory, he aimed to re-sanctify the English landscape, and to launch a revived Golden Age with Glastonbury as point of departure. The millenarianism promulgated by John Michell was based on various numerological elaborations and found its visual expression in the New Jerusalem Diagram. This geometrical map of the Heavenly City links Glastonbury to Atlantis and to the New Jerusalem. Michell regarded this map as the key to the re-emergence of an alleged lost Golden Age on earth, or more precisely in Britain. The New Jerusalem Diagram’s association with Glastonbury fostered Michell’s vision of the new age heralding on British ground. He held the firm belief that the secrets of creation and of heaven are manifested as sacred geometry. For this reason, he aimed throughout his life to crack sacred geometry’s subtle codes. Devoted artist as he was, Michell aimed to visualise those ‘patterns of creation’ by means of geometric formations. His artistic oeuvre has culminated in his final colourful publication (with Allan Brown) *How the World Is Made: The Story of Creation According to Sacred Geometry* (2009). Within this book he once again emphasises the pivotal role of sacred geometry for unveiling the secrets of the Heavenly City. This paper aims to expound on Michell’s concept of the New Jerusalem Diagram as well as his examination of sacred geometry as means of revealing esoteric knowledge. I argue that this geometrical interpretation of the Heavenly City constitutes the centrepiece of Michell’s theory.

# A sociological peek at paranormal (oc)culture

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What are the relations between paranormal themes and motifs in popular culture and media on the one hand, and people affirming belief in paranormal phenomena, making claims of paranormal experiences, or engaging in paranormal practices in various forms on the other? This overarching question was investigated through the mixed methods study Paranormal Sweden from fall 2018 onwards, conducted at Uppsala University. Encounters with paranormal themes and motifs in popular culture and various media were included as survey items in a questionnaire distributed to a random sample of Swedish respondents, while questions on the importance of popular culture and media were asked in semi-structured interviews with informants with engagements with/in groups or organizations with explicit paranormal interests. Some results pertaining to these relations between paranormal engagement and popular culture and media, through both the quantitative and qualitative materials, are presented. The wide-ranging umbrella term “the paranormal” was employed in a rather promiscuous way, enabling ethnographic fieldwork among groups dedicated to disparate subjects such as spiritualism and spirit communications, parapsychology, cryptozoology and ufology as well as more general forms of lay paranormal investigations and ghost hunts. The paper includes some preliminary attempts at classifying respondents’ and informants’ relations to paranormal media and popular culture, based on ascribed importance or levels of engagement, as well as a discussion in light of previous theorizations such as banal religion and (popular) occulture.

# Nihil efficientius hymnis Orphei in naturali magia: Early Modern reception of Orphic poems

Mr Lech Trzcionkowski<sup>1</sup>

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The paper aims to answer why Orphic poems, despite their enormous potential, have not resulted in a distinct tradition of Western esotericism. Hence the proposal to interpret the reaction of the first generations of readers of the Orphic Hymns as a stillborn esoteric tradition. One of the greatest paradoxes of modern scholarship is that the only wholly preserved Orphic religious text, Orphic hymns, became overshadowed by collected Orphic fragments. Hymns were composed in the 3rd century CE and probably were in use, alongside Chaldean Oracles, in Neoplatonic circles, but their reception in Late Antiquity remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is hard to overestimate their role in the rediscovery of Pagan Mysteries in Renaissance Europe. The gradual rediscovering of Orphic poems began with the arrival of a codex containing hymns of Orpheus brought to Italy by Giovanni Aurispa in the middle of December 1423. It was a collection of pagan hymns of Orpheus, Homer, Callimachus and Proclus, and Argonautica of Orpheus as an introduction. Pagan hymns, collected in one codex seem to be an excellent example of making canon by preparing a codex that assembled Greek hymns in one place. Marsilio Ficino recognised in Hymns the link in the tradition of divine knowledge and translated them into Latin for intimate performance within the circle of his friends. In early modern Europe, the reception of Orphic poetry was influenced by high expectations expressed by Florentine Platonists. In 1500 editio princeps assembled all existing poems of Orpheus. The recently published Mateo Tafuri’s Commentary to the Orphic Hymns can be read as the allegorical interpretation of the text by the lens of an Early Modern imaginary. Comparing the early reception of the poems with the reception of the texts on which the esoteric traditions were built will help answer the problem posed in this paper.

# The Theme of Ritual Death and Rebirth in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

Mr Carlo Van Oosterhout<sup>1</sup>

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The present paper takes as its point of departure lines 236a-241 of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, in which it is described how Demeter, disguised as an old nurse, places the princely infant Demophon of Eleusis in a blazing fire night after night. The paper explains how the poet of the Hymn to Demeter meant to say that Demeter killed, buried, and repeatedly restored to life the new-born prince, thus describing a lengthy ritual of death and rebirth that has ancient roots in the larger Greek world, in particular in Caria. The paper connects this passage from the Homeric Hymn to Herodotus' story of the life of Croesus (Histories I.29-87), as well as to passages from ancient Greek tragedy (e.g. Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Rhesus*), and most emphatically to the ritual descents into the Underworld (Hades) as described in lore surrounding Pythagoras and in the poem of Parmenides. Thus, the paper provides fresh insight into this famous passage from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, as well as a radical new reading of the famous description of Croesus' fate by Herodotus.

## In the Mirror of Kurt Seligmann

Mr Ewoud Van Rijn<sup>1</sup>

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Swiss American surrealist Kurt Seligmann was the surrealist's specialist on magic and the occult. From the 1940's on he amassed a large library of occult books and manuscripts and wrote essays on the subject in the surrealist magazines *View* and *VVV*. In 1948 he published 'The Mirror of Magic', a popular history of magic which has remained in print until this day. I have been researching the work of Seligmann for four years and produced work as a 'dialogue' with this artistic ancestor. As an artist I situate my practice in the emerging fields of Artistic Research and Post-secular art and I see Seligmann's artistic attitude as a precursor of these. In my paper I will elaborate on the work of Seligmann and its focus on magic and the occult as culturally formative and artistically productive terms and review this from the perspective of a current Artistic Research and Post-secular art practice. I propose that Artistic Research -which is generally taken as a development from 1960's conceptualism- had an earlier development in the context of surrealism.

## From Obsessions to Aesthetics: Comparing Artistic Creation in Fernando Pessoa and Austin Osman Spare

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During their own lifetimes, both Austin Osman Spare (1886-1956) and Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) stood largely at the fringe of the artistic world. Yet, Spare would come to be accepted as one of the forerunners of Surrealism and one of the most relevant figures in contemporary British magic and Pessoa would come to be recognized as one of the most relevant writers of the early 20th century (and a persistent footnote on the Western Esotericism map). Besides this delayed glory, there is much more which connects both these artists. Apart from them each being personally acquainted with Aleister Crowley, on analyzing their writings, parallels in ideas regarding the nature of fiction, personality and particularly artistic creation can be found which are rooted in the psychological and spiritual theories of their time. Through self-exploration they each seem to have arrived at the idea of alternative selves or modes of being within their own minds. However, while these for Spare seem to find their root in subconscious desire and emotion, which he and his commentators group under the label of 'elementals' or 'familiar', for Pessoa these seem to emerge from apparent intellectualism (or an intentional lack thereof), which are accumulated by him as his famous 'heteronyms'. This paper aims to explore the parallels that can be observed between both these artists, as they seem to have arrived at complex spiritual theories and artistic production techniques associated with personality fragmentation and the emotional or intellectual exploration of alternative selves.

## Authorial Concealment and Trans-culturally Inspired Art in the Case of Theosophy

Samanta Viziale<sup>1</sup>

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This paper aims to investigate from different points of view the phenomenon of authorial concealment as an integrative part of the artistic production inspired by Theosophy. If the author becomes an intermediary between the human kingdom and the divine one, what really matters is the message conveyed by the work of art and not the personality of its creator. In this way the artistic production assumes a new perspective:

texts and pictures become expressions of transcendental values which the artist doesn't own but can convey. Therefore, the hidden identity of the author plays a fundamental role in the idea of art as a form of spiritual service. The creative process takes the shape of a ritual, in which the artist generates a connection to another region; the result of the artist's production becomes a portal towards a deeper Truth, that makes visible an invisible reality. This paper will consider the function of authorial concealment as a fundamental element in this particular esoteric way of perceiving works of art and the process of making them; this ground-breaking artistic system creates a new perspective about the agency in creativity and the role of the artist as "medium".

## René Magritte and the Alchemy of Illusion

Dr M.E. Warlick<sup>1</sup>

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The Belgian artist René Magritte was a master of illusionism and disguise. His straightforward representations of objects camouflage his intentions to subvert and confound our expectations of reality. His frequent repetition of objects suggests there is an underlying visual code, but he always discouraged attempts to decipher it. Scholars persist in their efforts to uncover the iconographic, biographic, and psychoanalytic content in his images despite Magritte's warnings against any interpretations of his art.

Magritte joined the Surrealists in Paris for three years in the late 1920s, a time when their explorations of alchemy and other esoteric paths were intensifying. André Breton stated in his second Manifesto (1929) that the aims of the Surrealists were not unlike those of the medieval alchemists. Breton's call in that document for the "occultation of surrealism" unleashed a diversity of surrealist esoteric imagery into the 1930s and beyond. Using the recurring theme of metamorphosis from one object into another, Magritte often employed images of the traditional alchemical elements (earth, water, air, fire, metal and wood), as the building blocks of his natural world. His alchemical paintings cluster in two significant periods of his life, the first in the late 1920s while he was in Paris, and the second period beginning during the Second World War and continued into the decades that followed. This paper will investigate Magritte's alchemical imagery, comparing some of his images to traditional alchemical illustrations. Paintings by Magritte to be discussed include *The Six Elements* (1929), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1930), *The Domain of Arnheim* (1949), *Homesickness* (1951), *The Magician* (1952), *Empire of Light* (1954) and *A Sense of Reality* (1963). These paintings will be compared to traditional alchemical imagery, primarily those from the *Crowning of Nature* series, in which the elements are transformed within transparent alchemical vessels.

## Scoring the Wormwood Star

Mr Matt Wiemers<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia*

This paper serves to describe some of what transpired when esoteric ideas and practices were creatively applied to the composition of music designed to accompany Curtis Harrington's 1956 film, *The Wormwood Star*. The film features occult artist Marjorie Cameron performing a sequence of ritual gestures amidst esoteric objects d'art, as well as a montage showcasing a selection of her artworks. Responding creatively to *The Wormwood Star* involved the utilisation of a multi-modal approach, involving discursive analysis of relevant literature, reflexive creative practice, autoethnographic inquiry, and retrospective textual analysis of creative outputs. This textual analysis focuses on symbol sets appropriate to the esoteric schemas utilised by personalities relevant to the film's mythology. During creative engagement with *The Wormwood Star*, subjective interpretations of aspects of the occult cosmologies of Marjorie Cameron, Jack Parsons and Aleister Crowley were coloured by emergent awareness of discursive conflicts central to modern engagement with

Western Esotericism. In an atmosphere of immersion in these themes, creative offspring developed through the utilisation of esoteric and psychodynamic techniques allowing for the emergence of irrational and intuitive factors associated with otherworldly and unconscious agencies. These agencies commandeered much of the compositional process, whilst also heavily influencing the course of academic research shaping reflections on that process. The resultant musical and exegetic outputs strive to realise individuated forms of aesthetic subjectivity, via seeking to establish harmonious relations between conscious and unconscious psychic strata. Furthermore, through retrospective analysis, these outputs can be seen to collectively constitute a divinatory and dynamically self-reflexive symbolic field, within which esoteric essences have been constellated and alchemically transmuted via semiotic combination, so as to divine expansive insight into their occult significance and wider ontological ramifications.

## An Illumination of Nothing: Archives, Esoteric Knowledge, and Existential Doom in Thomas Ligotti's Weird Fiction

Mr Bradley Wiles<sup>2</sup>

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An underlying concept of many Western esoteric traditions is that of uncovering hidden knowledge toward some spiritual or metaphysical end. Whether the knowledge reveals the truth behind the perennial philosophy, alchemical transformation, or some other occult phenomenon, the journey of discovery offers the prospect of enlightened fulfillment that confirms humanity's central place in the universe. Throughout his career in weird literary fiction, American writer Thomas Ligotti has subverted this notion of cosmological order using storytelling informed by esotericism to advance a pessimistic, anti-natalist philosophy of modern life. Like genuine esoteric belief, Ligotti's brand of esotericism focuses on what lies behind the veil of everyday rational experience. But in his worlds there are no greater rewards awaiting those who access the ineffable, only intensified versions of the pain, horror, and insanity found on the corresponding exoteric plane of an indifferent universe. Ligotti's characters often encounter this reality through books, manuscripts, recorded media, and other archives while seeking to illuminate hidden truths or gain entry into the closed circles of the initiated. Thus, esoteric knowledge is bound to the archives that capture and transmit its secrets, which, in Ligotti's stories, often reveal a truth that humans instinctively know but are unable to confront—that there is nothing for them on the other side. This paper and presentation discusses the intersection of knowledge, archives, and pessimism in Ligotti's short stories and philosophical writing. In rejecting actual esoteric belief and questioning its knowledge systems, Ligotti's literary esotericism provides valuable insights about human memory, identity, and our relationship to the world around us, providing a crucial perspective in an era of epistemic confusion and existential uncertainty.