

# Paroxysms of Magick

by Lionel Snell

Recently I drew a comparison between the two systems of ideas arising at the same moment in history (1904): Einstein's theories of space-time relativity, and Austin Osman Spare's theories which I described as "a relativity of belief". It was interesting that the year of the writing of the Book of the Law, i.e. the first year of Crowley's New Aeon, should have been the time when traditional ideas of "the absolute" came under attack on two fronts.

Einstein undermined the idea of absolute position. So such questions as "does the sun go round the earth or the earth go round the sun" were demoted from being questions about absolute truth to questions about human choice. The answer is that from an everyday perspective it is easiest to think of the sun as circling the earth: it allows us to go on using handy expressions as "sun rise" and "sun set". But in a scientific framework it is much simpler to work with the idea of the earth circling the sun - because the equations are easier.

Because I saw this idea as very basic to magic, the nature of belief has been a recurring theme in mine own ideas. In SSOTBME I pointed out that the question "do you REALLY believe in spirits", which is typical of the non-magician, is not very interesting to the magician. The latter is more likely to argue as Crowley did that "I perform certain actions and certain results follow"; and, as with the scientists' heliocentric equations, the spirits often provide a neater model of the phenomena than any psychological or coincidental theory of magic.

We all recognise the power of absolute belief - fanaticism can move mountains - but we see that it is a power which tends to rule the believer. Magic is more concerned with ruling over power than being ruled by it. The struggle is perhaps to "beef up" our carefully chosen beliefs by making the unconscious accept them as absolute, but without handing over our control in the first place.

It is because of this confusion about belief - the heavy associations which linger with the word - that I have wondered about finding an alternative or replacement concept. Instead of "believing in" some idea, might we not "delight in" it? or "rejoice in" it? Or perhaps it is better to kidnap a dated phrase and say "instead of believing in ideas I am going to dig them". So the answer to "do you really believe in spirits?" becomes "no, but I really dig them!"

This "digging" principle was in a sense the serious message behind the "Manifesto of the OTTO" published in Aquarian Arrow number 21. This manifesto was a send-up of "heavy heavy" New Aeon occultism, but also a justification of it. It began with the plea: "What happened to the occult loonies, the hairy mega-thelemites of the late sixties? Where are they now?"

"When was the last time you attended a festival thronging with bordello witches, warlocks with long beards and flowing cloaks, all heavy with ankhs, pentagrams and all the trappings of kitschcraft. When were you last greeted in the streets of London with cries of 'Do what thou

wilt'?

"Over-the-top occultism is dead. Long live Over-the-top occultism!"

The general theme of the argument was "When occultism disassociated itself from the worst excesses of Dennis Wheatley, it castrated itself; for the worst excesses of Dennis Wheatley are where it's at."

The manifesto ended:

"The OTTO is the order that makes the Typhonian OTO look like the Mother's Union; makes the age of Maat sound like the whisper of a politely restrained fart at a Conservative Ladies luncheon gathering; makes Chaos Magick feel like a slightly limp cucumber sandwich remaining on a plate at the end of an exceptionally dull vicarage teaparty.

"So put on your cloaks, tattoo yourselves with sigils, vibrate names of power at the Café Royale, fill braziers with incense, wave kitsch swords ... Exceed! Exceed! But ever unto me!"

The idea behind the OTTO is this. In our early days, when we first become acquainted with the occult, it is often an awe-inspiring thing. After reading "The Devil Rides Out" we see an advert for the Sorcerer's Apprentice in Exchange & Mart and send off in trepidation for a catalogue of amazing incenses and weird paraphernalia to read by torch-light beneath the bedclothes with chattering teeth - expecting hellfire to blast us at any moment. A few years later we have worked our way through W. E. Butler, Dion Fortune and plucked up courage to read Crowley and we are ready to argue the psychological validity of magical technique with anyone. What we have gained is wisdom and understanding. What we have lost is that old gut-wrenching excitement.

We know enough to steer clear of the ego-tripping looney with the piercing gaze and long black cloak. We see through his act and congratulate ourselves. But we overlook the fact that a good act can be a delight, a piece of street theatre, an art-form, an invocation in its own right.

The OTTO message is this: now we have grown up enough that we no longer are in awe of the charlatan, it means that we are now free to delight in the charlatan - to *dig* the charlatan.

Now we are mature enough to realise there aren't any ancient brotherhoods with secrets passed down from time immemorial, we are now free to *dig* those brotherhoods who put on a good act of being just that.

Now we know that all paraphernalia is just trappings with no value other than surface appearance, let us therefore maximise that residual value by making surface appearance utterly mind-blowing!

When the 70's occultist says "there's no point in using a silver censer when a coffee tin serves just as well", the OTTO initiate replies "there's no point in using a coffee tin when a 800 year old human skull looted from the ruins of a Mexican temple serves just as well."

The excitement of the OTTO is the excitement of overdoing it, and I suggest that this approach has something to offer us now. Let's consider an example of its application.

A typical problem of a hard core magical group is getting things to happen on time: after all the excitement of planning a really staggering ritual, when it comes to the day no-one turns up on time, and then they sit around chattering and smoking dope for a few hours before anything happens. If the master of rituals gets stroppy and says that late arrivals will be fined or excommunicated, then everyone protests that he is on an ego power trip - and quotations like "let there be no difference made...", "every number is infinite" and "do what thou wilt" start flying around.

Now the OTTO approach might be as follows: the master or mistress of ritual, with eyes blazing and flecks of foam at the mouth, would scream "at the first stroke of midnight the door of the temple will be NAILED SHUT, and the ritual will commence!" Instead of rebelling at this apparent power trip, the brethren of the OTTO say "Wow! NAILED SHUT! That's really over the top! We dig it! And the ritual happens on time.

Paroxysms of delight can indeed be magical. They are an expression of the affirmation that pierces clouds of doubt. I can become so entranced by the loopiest of New Age festivals that I can even end up digging the high prices...

In a sense I see the OTTO as spiritual heirs to the Fabulous Furry Phreak Brothers. Was not much of the "magic of the sixties" a product of people's willingness to cast aside doubt and indulge in paroxysms of delight? Some ageing hippies still insist that the Pentagon really did levitate when they surrounded it with linked hands...

In the terminology of Crowley's essay on the subject, perhaps the Hunchback (?) has now had a long enough innings, and it is time to reinstate the Soldier (!).

And now at last we are fortunate enough to have once more a real incentive to encourage our actions. When the brethren of the OTTO find their enthusiasm for blood sacrifices and desecrated churchyards to be in wane, they have learnt to sit in a circle, link hands, breathe slowly and deeply, and meditate on the image of an apoplectic Geoffrey Dickens.