

spells and charms would seem to have been in pursuit of individual comfort, peace of mind, prosperity or other personal advancement, rather than advancement in our human understanding of the field itself.

Compare this with the largely British Chaos Magic movement that was its contemporary. Based upon a popularised version of the sigil techniques which had been devised by Austin Osman Spare (and which would ultimately be degraded to the television host Noel Edmonds' practice of writing instructions to the Universe upon his hand), Chaos Magic offered a fast-food results-based magic system that, like the New Age movement, was chiefly concerned with material benefits to the practitioner. Furthermore, in its insistence that fictional entities such as the tentacle-faced deities of H.P. Lovecraft can be just as easily invoked as ancient Greek or Roman gods—although as Joel Biroco has asked, why would anybody want to?—Chaos Magic seems as indiscriminating as its transatlantic cousin, but with Shoggoths and the Colour out of Space as substitutes for unicorns and rainbows. Indeed, with its foremost practitioners more recently suggesting that Chaos Magic might be used to interact with characters from the humorous fantasy novels of Terry Pratchett, it does not appear to be as distant from the New Age movement as one might have previously supposed, with both more properly seen as extensions of the currently enormous audience for escapist fantasy. Chaos Magic's only claim to any differentiation from New Age philosophy might be thought to reside in its affected Punk Rock trappings, although it should be observed that this merely amounts to borrowing the youth and music culture iconography of ten years earlier, rather than twenty. Perhaps with both the Chaos Magic and New Age approaches to the magical, both seeking the immediate gratification of material demands, it should be said that the abiding strength and durability of any form of magic lies in its ability to not be made redundant by the advent of a more reliable delivery system, such as Amazon.

With the millennium's end, we shall not be surprised to find that the most useful insights into and extensions of the magic world-view would arise from individual artists, many of whom did not publicly or even privately identify as occultists. Nor shall we raise our eyebrows to discover that late-20th-century magic orders, other than in claims to have enriched

a vanishingly small minority of their practitioners who've utilised magic's notorious supernatural power as a publicity device, appear to have made little or no contribution to the subject that is quantifiable or concrete. Following a process of dismemberment that it had endured for more than two thousand years, denuded of its final inner territory by Freud and Jung almost a century before, reduced from an ecstatic and enlightening union with the transcendental to a kind of astral credit card, it seems apparent that in the 21st century the magical has reached the end of a long process of dismantlement, with its component pieces requisitioned as foundations for our non-transformative and non-ecstatic social institutions. Magic in the world at present only exists in complete solution, and as such is very difficult to see.

Given that much of our unfolding thesis is concerned with the peculiar meta-life and the development of symbols, it will be apparent that throughout the many centuries we have investigated, magic's major signs and signifiers were of course evolving, gradually accreting meaning and complexity, and that in among these steadily accumulating symbols were the Serpent and the Moon. This begs the question as to what these two conceptual icons mean today, and by extension asks what magic means today, if it means anything of substance. To provide an answer to these questions will require a shift of emphasis in our meandering discourse, moving from the theoretical and the historical to the contemporary and in many instances the personal; the inescapably subjective. This approach is necessary if we are to properly explain the concepts and the processes that have resulted in this at least half-fictitious magic order, in this system of ideas, and ultimately in the book that you are holding. We must next examine the essential core of our perhaps precarious conceptual edifice, cut to the heart of our elaborate enterprise and hopefully in so doing expose the vital spirit of the magical endeavour and its ongoing importance to the human animal.

