



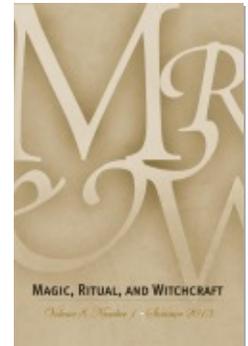
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Magicians of the Twenty-First Century

An Attempt at Dimensioning the Magician's Personality

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INTRODUCTION

Magic always has been a fascinating subject of research, but one mostly studied against the background of perceived “false” or atavistic thinking—historically or culturally distant in primitive cultures. The lines of tradition within theories on magic that are still influential, such as those begun by Edward B. Tylor and James Frazer (evolutionary), Marcel Mauss and Émile Durkheim (functionalist), and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (participatory), are based on this distance.¹ It was not until more recent approaches that interpret magic within the framework of the history of ideas as an element of an esoteric field of discourse that the perspective widened and became more unprejudiced.² Nevertheless, these developments did not result in a widely accepted academic definition. The problems of determining the relationship of magic to religion, science, and other fields of social action still persist. One reason may be that such definitions often depend on the individual worldviews and the cultural

1. Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (New York: Harper, 1958); James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged ed. (London: Macmillan, 1959); Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen Fields (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976); Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1928). See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Magic I: Introduction,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 716–19, for a concise introduction to the subject; also Graham Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

2. Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 6–11.

backgrounds of the scholars who formulate them. Another lies in the almost omnipresent assumption that magic does not work, in a literal sense. If a magical practice shows effects, this can be explained by numerous well-known psychological and sociological mechanisms that do not challenge the rationalistic ideology of science (i.e., overgeneralization, autosuggestion, errors in estimating chance, confirmatory bias, and the Barnum effect). Another perspective exists, however, derived from the personal (subjective) evidence of contemporary magicians in Western societies, who often know the discourses of academic rationality quite well and nevertheless do not conform to those explications.³

This perspective raises the question of how complex magical practices (as opposed to minor, superstitious everyday actions) on which a lot of time is spent, which often require extensive technical and theoretic training, and which are taken seriously, can successfully be integrated into a modern culture with a dominant scientific, rationalistic worldview. Many studies of magic and modernity use cultural-historical approaches and tend to deal with magic as an intellectual construct or to see it as a relatively homogenous set of beliefs and practices related to those beliefs.⁴ Is such a view appropriate, or do we have to assume a larger heterogeneity of the approaches to magic not only in a historical sense, or by comparing different forms of societies, but even from an interindividual perspective? Many studies on superstition, magical thinking, and paranormal beliefs from a psychological and, to a large extent, psychopathological perspective exist.⁵ Several surveys on beliefs and attitudes of people inter-

3. Ariel Glucklich, *The End of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13, says: “In the case of magic, no serious theory has ever taken into account, in a detailed and explicit way, the contours of the magical experience, the awareness of magicians and their clients as they perceive the effects of their ritual.”

4. E.g., Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

5. Cf. Kaczynski, who gives a critical overview of such approaches, and who also carried out a questionnaire study on metaphysical beliefs: Richard Kaczynski, *The Structure and Correlates of Metaphysical Beliefs Among a Sample of Behaviorally Committed Participants* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). See also Heather R. Auton, Jacquelin Pope, and Guz Seegar, “It isn’t that Strange: Paranormal Belief and Personality Traits,” *Social Behavior and Personality* 31 (2003): 711–20, for a short and more recent overview on studies on paranormal beliefs and personality traits.

ested or involved in occult practices have also been carried out.⁶ But the questions above concern a very much underexamined field of research, and only a few studies have been carried out that contribute to the understanding of magic and of the personality of magicians by taking the *biographies* and the *experiences* of the practitioners into account.⁷ What kind of people are magicians of the twenty-first century? How can we characterize their motivations? What conclusions must we draw about understandings of magic as an empirical practice in modern societies?

In the following I will present some of the main results of my own field study on these questions, placing them within the context of existing studies with comparable aims and structure of findings. At this point, it is important to stress that in my designation a “contemporary magician” means a person who performs magical practices individually or in the context of a magical order, drawing on established Western magical traditions. People who mainly perform magical rituals in religious ceremonies, such as many neopagans, are not the focus.⁸ Investigating neopa-

6. Two of them did not differentiate the sometimes extremely disparate forms of interest in, and involvement with, “the occult” and “Western esotericism,” respectively: Patricia A. Hartman, “Social Dimensions of Occult Participation: The Gnostica Study,” *British Journal of Sociology* 27 (1976): 196–83; Sorcerer’s Apprentice, *The Occult Census* (Leeds: Sorcerer’s Apprentice Press, 1989). Neither survey’s sample is representative, and the structure of the collected data allow only some general insights into the field of occult involvement and interests, and therefore were not of particular interest for my purpose here. The more recently published “pagan census” focuses on neopaganism and provides detailed information about beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and practices gathered from over two thousand completed questionnaires: Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh F. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

7. Pioneer work was done in this respect by Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). See also Claudia Kowalchuk, “A Study of Two ‘Deviant’ Religious Groups: The Assemblies of God and the Ordo Templi Orientis” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1994); and Achim Otremba, *Magie in Deutschland: Interviews* (Bergen: Schulze, 1992). Grant Potts, an American researcher, has also done much interview work with magical practitioners, but unfortunately he has not been able to publish any of his findings, and only small parts are available: see Potts, “Creativity, Exchange, and Institutionalization in a Ritual Magic Lodge” (unpublished paper, 2007); and Potts, “‘The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion’: Science and Spirituality in a Ritual Magic Lodge” (unpublished paper, 2007).

8. Typically magical and religious practice are insufficiently differentiated. Magical practice consists of magical operations based on magical beliefs. In general, religious practices contain magical operations but they can be understood as symbolic actions by the religious practitioner—for example, the ritual of Christian transubstantiation.

gans raises difficulties in adequately assessing their magical practice in relation to religious practice. In contrast, investigating contemporary magicians, who particularly perform magical operations in a conscious and volitional way to obtain concrete effects by “paranormal means,” leads to the core issues of the problem.

For the purpose of this study, I use a definition of magic taken from the *emic* tradition, strongly influenced by Aleister Crowley’s technical definition: *Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will*, and the variations arising from this.⁹ Magical practice is therefore concerned with operations that are supposed to effect changes in an *active* way by magical means. Accordingly, passive-receptive methods, such as, for example, the interpretation of horoscopes, are only to be regarded as optional elements of magical practice.

My empirical data, together with some theoretical assessments, form the basis of my attempt at dimensioning the magician’s personality. Even though my approach is psychological to a certain extent, as it deals with individuals and not social groups, the expression “dimensioning of the magician’s personality” must not be misunderstood. Whereas dimensions of personality such as the “Big Five”¹⁰ build descriptive models of the structure of personality traits applicable to every human being, the magician—in the sense of my study—is a very specific and rare person who can be described only by a complex group of biographical features, cognitive styles, beliefs, and motivations. But in spite of his rareness and marginality, the contemporary magician can show us ways and opportunities to integrate heterodox knowledge, beliefs, and worldview into a modern society’s life. In this regard, the investigation of “extreme” (marginal) subjects usually results in findings that are also relevant for the understanding of people in general.

An inductive (qualitative) research strategy conducting extensive interviews with such “expert” subjects promises deeper insights into the nature of magical practice and the motivation of practitioners than a deductive (quantitative, survey-based) approach could provide. Dimensioning the magician’s personality, therefore, has to be understood as a kind of mapping of personalities as complex constructs and structuring the field of related concepts and motivations. The result will not be a personality dimension, such as “vulnerable to magic,” but, on one hand,

9. Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, by the Master Therion (1929; reprint New York: Castle Books, 1970), xii.

10. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

a typification of motivational aspects of magicians, and, on the other, an enhanced view into different approaches to magical practice as a human activity itself that shed light on their heterogeneity.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEWS WITH MAGICIANS

The study was carried out on behalf of the *Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene e.V.* in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.¹¹ The main aim of the series of guided interviews was to contribute to the understanding of contemporary forms of Western magic and the understanding of the “personality” of the magician by means of a biographical-reconstructive approach. Therefore the interviews began with a narrative concerning the biographical embedding of magical practice, followed by questions on different magically relevant subjects in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the “life world” (“Lebenswelt”) of contemporary magicians in German-speaking central Europe. There were six areas of focus: (1) biographical embedding, (2) adaptation of bodies of magical knowledge, (3) magical practice and forms of evaluation, (4) social milieu and magical networks, (5) world interpretation and worldview, and (6) ethics and value orientation. The sequence was the result of the natural course of conversation. The multitude of addressed themes could only be mastered in extensive, time-consuming interviews, which lasted up to four hours. Thus, the sample size had to be limited due to personal and time resources.

In order to meet selection criteria for the sample, people needed to describe (or to have described) themselves as magicians. Their forms of magical practice must be linked to elaborated magical systems and training within the general realm of Western occultism. Furthermore, subjects must have had several years of experience with magical practice. That is, their engagement in magic must have had time to become a meaningful element in their bio-

11. The IGPP was founded in 1950 by physician and psychologist Hans Bender (1907–91), one of the pioneers of parapsychological research. As a nonprofit organization it is mainly funded by a private foundation. The Institute engages in systematic and interdisciplinary research concerning insufficiently understood phenomena and anomalies at the frontiers of current scientific knowledge. It cooperates with numerous German and international universities and research institutions, and contributes to the education of undergraduate and graduate students (see <http://www.igpp.de>). The comprehensive results of the “magicians study” are published as volume six of the IGPP “Grenzüberschreitungen” monograph series. There one can find more details on the questions and aims, the method, and the procedure of the study: Gerhard Mayer, *Arkane Welten: Biografien, Erfahrungen und Praktiken zeitgenössischer Magier* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2008).

graphies. Young people practicing in the context of juvenile occultism were excluded. Magical operations in the broadest sense are an inherent part of almost every religious ceremony, and conversely, most magicians combine magical practice with religious/spiritual aims in the broadest sense. Although membership in a “new religion movements” group was not a criterion for exclusion, individuals who perform magical operations *almost exclusively* in the context of religious practices of a religious group (e.g., many neopagan groups) were not chosen.¹² Clear assignment and differentiation was, however, sometimes not possible. A case in point is the *Ordo Templis Orientis* (O.T.O.), which can be seen more as a classical magical order or as a religious group, depending on one’s point of view, and on national/geographic differences that I consider below. A last important criterion was willingness and openness to talk about personal aspects and experiences of magical practice, and not to limit responses to bookish knowledge. In this particular field, this cannot be taken for granted because many individuals and groups value secrecy for a variety of reasons. Some of these are inherent to the system, while others depend on the social taboos that still exist regarding magic and occultism.¹³ Many factors can limit willingness to participate in an extensive interview with a scientist:

- Fear of unworthy motivations on the part of the scientist (What will happen to the data? Will the statements be distorted and misused?)
- Displeasure of disputing with a (supposedly) skeptical scientist
- Fear of the occult community (disapproval of cooperation with science; suspicion of betraying group secrets)
- Fear of “magical attacks” (the interviewer himself may be a magician who will exploit the situation’s opportunity)
- Fear of disenchantment (talking about esoteric or occult knowledge could destroy secrecy and therefore efficacy)
- Worldview beliefs could be disillusioned by critical scrutiny
- Motivation problem (How will I benefit by participating in such a conversation?)

12. Some have multiple memberships, e.g., one of my interviewees is a Wiccan priest, and another one calls himself a Satanist, but both practiced magic for some years as members of traditional magical orders and therefore fit into the sample.

13. See Gerhard Mayer, “Die Bedeutung von Tradition und Geheimnis für praktizierende Magier des 21. Jahrhunderts: Ergebnisse eine Interviewstudie,” *Aries* 8 (2008): 117–38, on the different functions of secrecy for contemporary magicians.

Thus, the acquisition of interview partners was not particularly easy. As an outsider to the “scene,” I needed two gate keepers who provided access and helped to gain confidence. Eleven discussion partners aged between thirty-two and fifty-two years of age (mean thirty-eight) who practiced magic could be recruited. Unfortunately there were only two women in the sample. This proportion does not reflect the true gender ratio of the “scene,” as my interviewees told me. The reason for the reluctance of many women to participate in the study may lie in the fact that the interviewer was male and/or that female magicians avoid verbalizing and verifying magical practice to a larger extent than male practitioners. The interviews were carried out between May 2004 and April 2005 in Germany and Austria.

These difficulties in acquiring subjects may reflect some geographic or national properties. First, the relation between the occult scene and the scientific community seems to be much better in the Anglophone countries, partly due to the fact that there are a considerable number of academic researchers who are themselves practitioners in neopagan or occult groups. In German-speaking countries, a more rigid attitude toward the insider-outsider divide in academic research can be observed.¹⁴ Also, attitudes toward new religion movements are less tolerant in Germany, and probably in most continental European countries, than in Anglophone countries, despite the fact that religious freedom is a constitutionally guaranteed right in Germany.¹⁵ While the

14. For example, in Germany it would be barely conceivable that an academic author such as Richard Kaczynski, who has also published numerous articles in well-respected medical journals, could give lectures to occult groups and writes papers for occult magazines under his real name. Kaczynski, who also wrote a prominent monograph on Aleister Crowley (see Marco Pasi, “The Neverendingly Told Story: Recent Biographies of Aleister Crowley,” *Aries* 3 [2003]: 224–45), divides his personal internet home page into different sections, including an “occult” and an “academic” section (<http://www.richard-kaczynski.com/>, accessed 9/16/2008). A discussion of the insider-outsider divide in pagan studies is provided by the anthology *Researching Paganism: Religious Experiences and Academic Methodologies*, ed. Jenny Blain, Douglas Ezzy, and Graham Harvey (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2004). A summary can be found in Barbara Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2006), 203–17.

15. To my knowledge, a public opinion poll on the attitudes toward New Religious Movements in different countries does not exist. Some information on the situation in Germany can be found in Brigitte Schoen, “New Religions in Germany: The Publicity of the Public Square,” in *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, ed. Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 85–95. See also the other contributions in this anthology. Elisabeth Arweck provides a comparison of the situation of New Religious Movements in Great Britain and Germany in her monograph

American Web site of the O.T.O., for example, stresses the self-characterization as a religious group, this aspect is edged into the background on the German site.¹⁶ Such geographically based differences notwithstanding, however, the main aim of my study, to investigate individual differences in approaches to magical practice in modern Western societies and dimensioning the “magician’s personality,” goes beyond national or regional limitations.

The eleven people interviewed represent a wide spectrum of magical groups, from the “white” magic of Western mystery schools (Servants of the Light, Builders of the Adytum), to Thelemic and magical Gnostic groups (O.T.O., *Fraternitas Saturni*, *Communitas Saturni*), to chaos magic orders (Illuminates of Thanateros), to satanic groups (Church of Satan, Current of Set, *In Nomine Satanis*).¹⁷ The majority of interview partners were people

Researching New Religious Movements: Responses and Redefinitions (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

16. The American site states: “Ordo Templi Orientis U.S.A. is the U.S. Grand Lodge (National Section) of Ordo Templi Orientis, a *hierarchical, religious membership organization*. Our mission is to effect and promote the doctrines and practices of the philosophical and *religious system known as Thelema*, with particular emphasis on cultivating the ideals of individual liberty, self-discipline, self-knowledge, and universal brotherhood. To this end, we conduct sacramental and initiatory rites, offer guidance and instruction to our members, organize social events, and engage in educational and community service activities at locations throughout the United States” (<http://oto-usa.org/mission.html>, accessed 9/16/2008, emphasis added). The German site reads: “The O.T.O. attends to the protection of the liberty of the individual and his or her mental development in light, wisdom, comprehension, knowledge, and power. . . . Many people who are striving for the Great Work are searching for information, guidance, exchange with like-minded people, or the opportunity to help other aspirants in their social environment, and to serve humankind. All such aspirants are welcome to the O.T.O. The structure of the O.T.O. is based, like that of the Freemasonry and of the old mystery schools, on a step-by-step sequence of initiations and degrees. In these degrees it is the aim of the O.T.O. to show the deep mysteries of existence by means of allegory and symbol, and, in so doing, to help everyone to discover his, or her, true nature” (<http://www.oto.de/>, accessed 9/16/2008, my translation).

17. Magical orders categorized as Western mystery schools have in common (1) relation to Western esoteric traditions with a strong orientation toward Egyptian mythology and the kabbalah, (2) a strict separation from “black magic” and the “left hand path,” and (3) regarding magical practice, a focus on ritual or ceremonial magic (see Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, esp. 55–68). Occult groups strongly oriented toward Crowley’s “Thelema-religion” are subsumed under the category Thelemic and magical Gnostic groups. Their “bible” is Crowley’s *Liber Al Vel Legis* with its central tenet: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law” (Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Law—Liber Al Vel Legis* [1909; reprint York Beach, Me.: Red Wheel, 2004], 31). Although the “Thelema doctrine” has features strongly resem-

who had practiced magic for many years; some of them are key figures in the German-speaking magical community, and some of them have or have had multiple memberships. The information gained from these interviews therefore is not only relevant for revealing individual approaches, but also gives a general insight into various positions within the German-speaking magical community.

BASIC FINDINGS

I will confine this overview of results to those findings most relevant to the purpose of this article, the characterizing of the “magician’s personality” and individual conceptions of magic.¹⁸

Turning to Magical Beliefs and Practice

A first remarkable finding is the significant variance among individual (biographic) processes of turning to magical beliefs and practice. Furthermore, the ideological milieus of parental homes provide no consistent pattern from which one could deduce indications of a later inclination toward magic. Structural similarities in the psychosocial conditions in families of origin are likewise difficult to find. Practitioners come from different social classes, from complicated family constellations, or from sheltered childhood situations, and they experienced different degrees of tolerance and openness. Despite these remarkable differences, some common biographical features were also found, including strong individualism; uncommon interests during adolescence; a premature occupation with philosophical and ideological questions; a moment of rebellion and nonadjustment (in different forms and to different degrees); as well as a fascination with the “hidden sides of life,” the borderlands of life, and the “darker sides” of existence. The biographic approaches to

bling religion, whether its categorization as a “religion” is justifiable remains debatable. Often, this group is misleadingly described as Satanist. In addition, Satanism itself is often wrongly seen as a homogenous religious movement, as a reactive form of anti-Christian religion, instead of a designation of a conglomeration of different belief systems (see Joachim Schmidt, *Satanismus* [Marburg: Diagonal, 2003], 10–15). Chaos magic relates to an occult movement that began in the 1970s. Influenced by science fiction and fantasy literature, it also features references to Thelemic magick, tantra, Taoism, neoshamanism, and to the *Zos Kia* cult of the English magician Austin Osman Spare. With its denial of any claims of absolute truths, its demand for tolerance, freedom, and radical plurality, and its merging of different approaches and influences, the ideology of the chaos magic movement clearly reflects the zeitgeist of postmodernism.

18. All results are represented in detail in Mayer, *Arkane Welten*.

magical practice often came about indirectly, for instance by being concerned with alien or heterodox spiritual systems (e.g., Eastern spirituality and techniques, natural or pagan religion), or by an interest in parapsychological issues. Typical occult practices during adolescence seldom formed a pathway to later magical practice. For some of the interviewees this engagement in an intensive form of practice was limited to a temporary, but important, phase of life.

Individual Conceptions of Magic

Individual conceptions of magic are heterogeneous, despite reference to the “supernatural” or the “paranormal” as a common element. The assessment of paranormal phenomena itself, emerging in the context of magical practices, is differentiated; eliciting synchronistic events and manipulating random processes are assessed as relatively small violations of the known laws of nature, whereas sorcery and miracles lie at the other end of the scale. The idea of the existence of an “other reality” to which one can, in principle, have access, and which can be used to explain “magical” effects, is popular. Some of the interviewees showed a desire to link magic to scientific models. Chaos research, quantum physics, and Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenetic fields play crucial roles for them, as they seem to provide such links. Common popular scientific discourses are well known, there is a high degree of self-reflection, and alternative interpretations of “magical” effects are considered. Nevertheless, all interviewees have gathered strong subjective evidence consolidating belief in the effectiveness of magical practice. This does not cause a rejection of scientific models and evidence in principle, but skepticism against scientism. Some interviewees see an affinity between magic and science as methods of gaining knowledge about the world, but all of them pointed out the limitations of scientific models.

For many, magic is a neutral a priori technique, but often linked to a religious system so that it was understood and practiced within the context of a personal education or a spiritual path. Efforts to provide magical services in a commercial sense (e.g., production of love potions or charms) do not play a significant role for those in the interviewed sample. Some occasionally perform or performed such activities, but most refuse such requests. Regarding the training and initiation of novices, the attitude is slightly different, but none of the interviewees tries to make a living from providing magical services. A regularized transmission of magical knowledge is most likely to be found in Western mystery schools with a stronger tendency to institutionalization and concentration on only one magical approach. But for most of the interviewed people, relativism is a dominant methodology and worldview.

Goals of Magical Practice

The individual goals of the magical practice, aside from the general potential aim of validating personal conceptions of the world, may be categorized in three main ways:

1. The goal of magical practice is to find out whether magic “works.” It is, therefore, experimental. Various objectives, which do not reveal very much about motives, may underlie this. From an entirely pragmatic, ideologically neutral point of view this goal can represent a striving to empower oneself with an instrument to overcome everyday problems. Alternatively a strong interest in “paranormal” phenomena, and desire to create them, may lie behind this goal.
2. The goal of magical practice is self-development and the development of consciousness and “human potential.” This perspective is psychological-psychotherapeutical, taking transpersonal elements into account.
3. The goal is knowledge of transcendence. Magic is understood as a spiritual method of training.

These various main objectives determine the individual attitude to many aspects of magical practice.

Ethical Issues

Due to the negative public image of magic, often combined with accusations of egoism and self-deification, most of the interviewed magicians were sensitive to ethical issues. One interviewee commented on the matter of self-deification as follows:

For myself, self-deification is not an aim but reality. But I don't see myself as a single god, but simply as a part of a god. . . . In my opinion self-deification is to become aware of this Divinity. But not to create something. Should I create what I already am?

Later, on the question of the refusal of subordination under external (authoritarian) demands, which is an important concern for many Western magical approaches, she answered:

I think that exactly therein lies a danger for oneself, in fact. Because . . . Sure, the aim is not to, somehow, subordinate oneself in the sense of being enslaved, or no longer thinking for oneself, or no longer bearing one's own responsibility, but such a

self-deification without an external point of reference I consider very dangerous, because at some point one gets fantasies of omnipotence.

A high ethical level is demanded if magical practice is integrated as a part of a spiritual path. Most of the magical systems of the Western tradition emphasize the realization of self-will, of self-responsibility, and of a certain skepticism toward authority. This feature correlates with the strong individualism that can be found in many members of the magical community, and which often results in magical groups being short-lived.

The common elements in biographical processes of turning to magical practice should be specified once again:

- Strong individualism (individualism in opposition to conformism)
- Uncommon interests during adolescence
- Premature occupation with philosophical and ideological questions
- Fascination with, and turning toward, the “hidden sides of life” and the “darker sides” of existence
- A tendency toward the status of social outcast (particularly during adolescence)
- A moment of rebellion and nonadjustment (in different respects and form)
- Almost always, spiritual or religious interests in the broadest sense

EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

For the main purpose of this article, dimensioning of the magician’s personality, only such literature will be reflected that contributes directly to the questions being examined. As mentioned above, only a few studies have investigated the subject of this study in a similar, that is, inductive way, and have provided information on biographical features and motivations of practicing magicians. I will locate my own findings in relation to three particular studies that are most comparable as far as content and method are concerned.¹⁹ For direct comparison, Achim Otremba’s study on magicians in Germany is most appropriate, even though the question topic was considerably narrower and the approach slightly different.²⁰ Otremba interviewed eight magicians, six of whom were members of magic orders (O.T.O., Order

19. Dave Evans, *The History of British Magick After Crowley* (Hidden Publishing, 2007), provides interview data from magical practitioners (particularly chaos magicians), but the purpose of the book, and therefore the nature of the quotations, make the data unsuitable for comparison.

20. Otremba, *Magie in Deutschland*.

of Thelema, *Fraternitas Saturni*), and two of whom were practicing autonomously. The findings strongly agree in many points, especially concerning attributes of the biography and the motivational structure such as premature preoccupation with questions related to philosophy and worldview, approach to magical practice by indirect means (e.g., by being engaged in other esoteric or spiritual realms, or in parapsychology), a spiritual search as a central orientation, a fascination with the “hidden sides of life,” and strong individualism. Otremba also failed to find a universal motivational pattern for interest in magic. He observed a similar diversity in private models of magical working: “every subject, in principle, developed his own theoretical models according to certain traditions.”²¹ Other common features of importance are experiences of PSI phenomena, strong subjective evidence, and the meaning of altered states of consciousness for magical work. Otremba’s data, collected almost two decades ago under different circumstances, indicate that the situation has not changed as far as the central features are concerned, in spite of many changes within the magical community during the 1980s (particularly concerning the “postmodern” influence of chaos magic).

Tanya M. Luhrmann’s pioneering field study of magic and witchcraft carried out in England between 1983 and 1985 had a slightly different focus.²² She was not so much interested in the biographic reconstruction of individual approaches to magic—information that is provided more casually and in a nonsystematic way—but in the (gradual) process of the establishment of magical beliefs on the basis of individual experience, and of related strategies of rationalization. Therefore a comparison can be made only to some extent. Nevertheless, Luhrmann provides a series of findings relevant for this study. First of all, she also observed the interpretive drift toward belief that seemed to have taken place with most of the interviewees in my study. Witness the description of one interviewee regarding the development of her worldview:

I often observed a certain see-sawing, which simply depended on how strongly one put oneself into which world. And eventually it changed sides. . . . there were quite individual experiences through which I simply noticed that there is something, and there are also, so to speak, beings with whom one can work. . . . I think it is a decision to say at a certain point: this is now my worldview.²³

Nonetheless, the dynamics of development are not always identical, and one can suppose a strong dependence of development on previous, individual

21. Otremba, *Magie in Deutschland*, 236 (my translation).

22. Luhrmann, *Persuasions*.

23. My translation.

experiences. For many practitioners (at least the interview data leads us to this assumption), single experiences of strongly subjective evidence are very important.²⁴ They form, so to speak, “high intensity seeds of experience” that drive development. As an interviewee wrote in his diary after experiencing a ritual carried out by Grady McMurtry, the former caliph of the Californian branch of the O.T.O.: “here and now I truly realized for the first time that magic truly exists.” Another interviewee, as a young child, had some extraordinary (paranormal) experiences that, retrospectively, lastingly formed his approach to questions of existence and worldview. The practice of magic, which came up relatively late in his biography, cannot be seen independently of his previous experience with quasi-parapsychological experiments, and of this childhood experience. For a third interviewee, experiencing astonishing success formed the beginning of his pragmatically oriented magical practice.²⁵

It is beyond doubt that practical experience is extremely important: “The experiences give the magical ideas content: the magical ideas make sense of experience. Intellectual and experiential changes shift, in tandem, a ragged co-evolution of intellectual habits and phenomenological involvement.”²⁶ Luhrmann, therefore, does not see a socialization process as a primary basis of interpretive drift, but rather the phenomenological experiences arising during magical practice. This assumption is clearly supported by the findings of this current investigation.²⁷

Summarizing typical personality traits of magicians, one of Luhrmann’s important findings was that she also could not extract a typical, “average” magician, because individual structures of motivation were as different as the goals and the organizational structures of magical groups themselves.²⁸ The limitation of investigating only people who are members of Western mystery schools and of Wicca covens—Luhrmann disregarded the “darker” areas of

24. These findings correspond to many survey studies of metaphysical beliefs where personal experience, together with religious questing, turned out to be the best predictors (cf. Kaczynski, *Structure and Correlates of Metaphysical Beliefs*, 48 and 119).

25. Thus, in these cases the characterization of the dynamics of development as “the slow shift towards belief” (Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 307) seems to be inadequate.

26. Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 314–15.

27. Luhrmann is much criticized, not only regarding her approach to the field, but also for her thesis of interpretive drift (e.g., Melissa Harrington, “Psychology of Religion and the Study of Paganism: A Study of the Conversion Profiles of Thirty-Five Wiccan Men,” http://www.pucps.br/rever/rv2_2002/p_harrin.pdf, 71–84, accessed 4/28/2008).

28. Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 100–1.

the magical community (thelemic and magical-gnostic approaches)—becomes noticeable through the statement that to successfully perform a magical ritual every detail has to be perfect: “The ritual chamber should be exactly square, hermetically sealed, the altar carefully arranged. Everything must be just so.”²⁹ Such a view is advanced, if at all, only by rigorous exponents of ceremonial or ritual magic. Many contemporary magicians whose approach to magic is influenced by innovations in the field in the 1980s are not as strict with such issues. And to the adherents of pragmatic or chaos magical approaches, such dogmatic rules are obsolete anyway, unless they are used, pragmatically, as means to focus consciousness and/or to create a certain desired atmosphere. For the purpose of attribution of failures, which is also stressed by Luhrmann, those demands on perfection can be still appealing, however.

A last important point in Luhrmann’s work should also be addressed. It concerns the magician’s relation to faith, to religion, and to science. Luhrmann calls magical practice “the romantic rationalist’s religion.”³⁰ With this she expresses her idea that people who turn toward modern magic are searching for powerful religious experience, but not religion itself. Magic is “a modernist religion: it challenges the validity of religious dogmatism, authoritative symbology, and intellectual analysis, while gaining its inspiration from archaic primitive forms; and its structured ambiguity rests upon a deconstructed notion of belief.”³¹ This addresses a point that makes magic attractive for many of the interviewees in my study. Regardless of which approach they belong to, most of them see magic as a means in their search for spirituality and transcendence beyond the fixed boundaries of dogmatic religion and rationalistic philosophical systems. For many, magic thus constitutes an individualistic approach, unrelated to religion, to the realm of transcendence.

A last study to be mentioned is Claudia Kowalchuk’s doctoral dissertation investigating two “deviant” religious groups with regard to particular features of stigmatization, conversion, and ethical issues. She chose the O.T.O. as the “only viable option” of an occult group comparable as “a serious religious group” with a Christian Evangelical group, the Assemblies of God, and interviewed twenty members of each group.³² Even though she focuses strongly on religious and sociological issues, some of her findings on O.T.O. members are comparable to my own. She reported that “Thelemites [O.T.O. mem-

29. *Ibid.*, 138.

30. *Ibid.*, 337.

31. *Ibid.*, 336.

32. Kowalchuk, “Two ‘Deviant’ Religious Groups,” 6.

bers] claim that from childhood on they had always thought that they were distinct from the average person, unique,”³³ that they displayed uncommon interests during childhood and adolescence, including a premature occupation with philosophical and ideological questions,³⁴ that “most Order members had experimented with a wide variety of religious groups before settling on the O.T.O,”³⁵ and that strongly subjective experiences, which are nevertheless perceived as true (although unverifiable) knowledge, of a strong subjective nature related to magical practice and initiation respectively play a major role.³⁶ Other findings that also support my own results are the fact of social stigmatization and a certain closeness to the artistic milieu: “the Order’s bohemian atmosphere agrees with self-styled artists much more than the conservative nature of the Assemblies.”³⁷

DIMENSIONING THE MAGICIAN’S PERSONALITY

After this short overview of relevant studies that touch on questions of the biographical embedding of magical practice and of some motivational issues, I must now address the problem of the assessment of magic in relation to religion and science. In spite of the major efforts of different academic disciplines (anthropology, theology, religious studies, sociology, and psychology), the aim of a commonly accepted definition of magic has not been agreed upon to date.³⁸ My study suggests that many problems in defining magic lie in the heterogeneity of approaches to magic. The following attempt at mapping magic will be accomplished by two means, first by summarizing a theoretical conception of magic from a practitioner’s perspective, and second by creating a mind map of key terms that are largely based on the empirical data gathered as part of the interviews during this study. Both should be seen as complementary and heuristic instruments that are sensitive to individual approaches to magical practice, and that make the problems of achieving a commonly accepted definition of magic understandable. After presenting the

33. *Ibid.*, 105.

34. *Ibid.*, 124–26.

35. *Ibid.*, 110.

36. E.g. *ibid.*, 137–40.

37. *Ibid.*, 103. The findings of Potts (see n. 7) seem to agree with my findings in some points at least, such as that for many practitioners the engagement in a magical order started by indirect means (e.g., through an active interest in Buddhism, Wicca, etc.), or their stress on individualistic and autonomous forms of spiritual practice.

38. See Cunningham, *Religion and Magic*, for an overview on different approaches and theories on magic.

two instruments, I will expand on the possibility of differentiating and comparing such individual approaches to magic on the basis of the interview data.

MAPPING MAGIC

Ramsey Dukes's Quadrant Scheme

The English chaos magician Ramsey Dukes made a remarkable attempt to localize magic from a particular perspective.³⁹ The distinctive feature of his approach, which makes it interesting and suitable for a better understanding of my own attempt at dimensioning the magician's personality, lies in defining magic without referring to concrete contents (such as magical beliefs or supernatural beings). Dukes arranged the domains of magic, art, religion, and science into Carl Jung's scheme of four different functions of consciousness, respectively his forms of psychic functions, based on his psychological types.⁴⁰

The four sectors in Dukes's scheme are characterized by specific kinds of data (irrational axis) as well as data processing (rational axis): "Two methods of input (observation and intuition) combine with two types of processing (logic and feeling) to give four kinds of thinking which I call Magical, Artistic, Religious, Scientific."⁴¹ These kinds of thinking have to be understood as specific forms of the human consciousness or psyche accessing "reality." The initially irritating classification of the attributes "rational" and "nonrational" has, according to Jung, to be understood such that "nonrational" functions deal with facts, with mere perceptions, whereas "rational" functions center on deduced or produced things. "Intuition" conveys perceptions in an unconscious way, "sensation" in a conscious way. Directed "thinking" evaluates and organizes the contents of imagination on a cognitive level, and "feeling" evaluates in the sense of accepting or rejecting certain contents (imaginings, sensations) on an emotional level.

From this individual psychological perspective, which form of access to reality dominates depends on the personality structure; whether a person reacts more consciously to internal or external data input, and whether his or her data processing is formed more by emotional or logical evaluation. However, it is important to note that every person disposes of all psychical functions, that all of these functions are permanently and simultaneously activated, and that they interfere with each other in their effects.

39. Ramsey Dukes, *S.S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised: An Essay on Magic* (2002). Ramsey Dukes is the pen name of Lionel Snell, who has published books and articles under different pseudonyms (see Evans, *History of British Magick After Crowley*, 143 n. 308).

40. Carl Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. H. G. Baynes (London: Kegan Paul, 1971).

41. Dukes, *S.S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised*, 4 (see Figure 1).

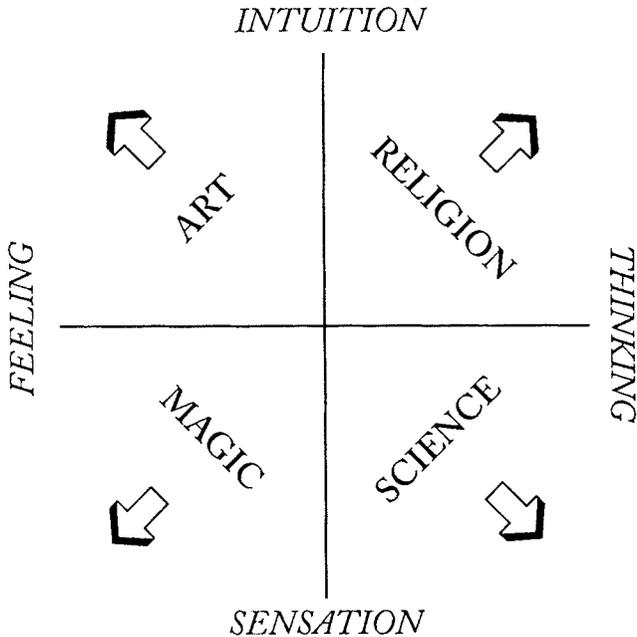


Figure 1: Ramsey Dukes’s scheme. The vertical axis contains *intuition* and *sensation*, which Jung labeled as “irrational” functions, while the horizontal axis contains the two “rational” functions of *thinking* and *feeling*.

Two forms of rationality are inherent in the system based on cognitive processing and evaluation by logical thinking, and on emotional processing and evaluation by acceptance or rejection.⁴² The psychic functions predetermine directions or forms of consciousness activity, but not any contents. If one relates the domains of art, religion, science, and magic to each other according to this scheme, one attains a categorization independent from culture, one that is value-free and free of ideological bias—thus the assumption of this model in the study.⁴³ The model in no way suggests that emotional

42. Here we can draw parallels with Tambiah’s dichotomization of “participation” versus “causality” as two orientations to the world, therefore as “two orderings of reality” (Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 105–10).

43. The risk inherent in Dukes’s scheme lies in the temptation to interpret it as an attempt at a complete description of this subject area because of its symmetrical and balanced structure. Jung’s conception of four basic functions was designed this way as two orthogonally ordered polar dimensions, whereas the contents of the four quad-

assessments or intuitive processes have no place in scientific work. The fact that science lies in the sector built on the psychic functions of “sensation” and “thinking” only describes the ideal-typical form of scientific access to reality or the world. Scientific activity as a human practice is embedded into a global process of perceptions and consciousness activity that is also codetermined by less dominant emotional evaluations and intuitive perceptions beneath the dominant aspects of observation and logic. Accordingly magic as an ideal-typical mode of access to reality is determined by “sensation” (sensual factuality of the external world), and by “feeling” (assessment or evaluation of an emotional base/participation). It is, to a certain degree, possible to objectively define which of the four sectors one has to assign particular practices or contents, but those assessments always are individually and culturally biased:

[T]he placing of specific disciplines depends upon where you are standing. A more strictly “Scientific” bias would shift the above placings [of the domains] so that economics and psychology fell into the “mumbo jumbo” Magic sector, whilst mathematics would fall with philosophy into the Religious sector. A more extreme “Religious” bias would lump a lot of Art and Science subjects in the Magic sector as “the Devil’s work.” A more “Artistic” bias would consider astrology and cabalistic philosophy, for example, to be “all too frightfully Scientific, my dear.”⁴⁴

Objections to Dukes’s model arise as soon as one attempts to directly reconcile the fields designated by the four terms with their use in the corresponding specialist language that is generally defined in terms of content.⁴⁵ This is most clearly visible in the case of religion, here portrayed as a way of accessing reality through both the functions of “intuition” and “thinking.” This means

rants in Dukes’s scheme are not specified in principle, e.g., one could try to place other domains of the sphere of “manhood” therein.

44. Dukes, *S.S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised*, 4.

45. Jung himself conceptualized magic differently than Dukes, not as a particular form of access to reality but as an activity to fulfil a specific need related to the collective unconsciousness: “A great many ritualistic performances are carried out for the sole purpose of producing at will the effect of the *numinosum* by means of certain devices of a magical nature” (Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Collected Works of C. G. Jung 11 [London: Routledge, 1958], 7). Magic itself is seen as the attempt to deal with unconscious forces that one does not have at one’s command using normal means. In this regard, Jung represents a functionalistic approach to magic. See Andrew Samuels, Bani Shorter, and Fred Plaut, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1986), 88–89.

that the classification of forms of spiritual practice, which are understood as nondogmatic religiosity and which is characterized more strongly by the aspect of participation, cannot be made in this scheme without encountering problems. Despite this limitation, the decisive element in this approach is that arguments over concrete contents are avoided. In this way, there is less risk of contradictory classifications or inconsistent categories, and dichotomous structures can be integrated.⁴⁶ Through accepting a personal as well as a cultural bias in the interpretation of what “magic” is, the difficulty of generating a generally acceptable definition becomes more easily understandable. This is true for both the etic and emic perspectives.

Here Crowley’s definition of “Magick” becomes interesting. In his definition, “Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will,” both the areas of art and science are referenced. The journal he published, *The Equinox*, was produced under the motto “the Aim of Religion, the Method of Science.”⁴⁷ Here the area of religion is also set in relation to magic. Crowley therefore conceived his conception of magic so comprehensively that it allowed him to integrate all ways of accessing reality into it. He organized his reality around magic. His propensity toward mysticism and his founding of a new religion (“aim of religion”) is just as much orientated toward this as his attitude toward scientism (“method of science”), which also reflects aspects of the spirit of the age at the beginning of the twentieth century. He saw a decisive advance for the “Art of Magic” in taking on scientific methodologies in the area of magic, although science remains in a supporting role: “The Magicians of tomorrow will be armed with mathematical theory, organized observation, and experimentally verified practice. But their Art will remain inscrutable as ever in essence; talent will never supplant genius.”⁴⁸ The goal of “magic” for Crowley lay in religion.

Just as Crowley’s individual needs and central features of his personality found expression in his definition and understanding of magic, comparable patterns can also be found in the people interviewed for this study. Original solutions do not always have to be found, of course; preexisting approaches

46. E.g., Rountree’s criticism of the dichotomizing character of many scientific theories of magic is thereby nullified. The ritual practice of feminist witches that she examined may be described by the model in their various facets which appear simultaneously: Kathryn Rountree, “How Magic Works: New Zealand Feminist Witches’ Theories of Ritual Action,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 13 (2002): 43–59.

47. Aleister Crowley, *The Equinox* 1.3 (1910): title page.

48. Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 175.

may be utilized. Individual differences appear, however, in modifications to and combinations of these approaches, which result in an impression that, in total, has little uniformity.

Mind Map—Key Terms of Magic as a Form of Practice

Against the perspective of Dukes's quadrant scheme, we can now attempt to systematize the differing relations to magic among this study's interviewees on the basis of individual motivational structures. The basic question is this: Is it possible to develop a system that allows differing approaches to be categorized, or at least better differentiated, in the face of the strong strain of individualism noted in the interview group?

From the above description of basic functions of Jungian psychology it may be clear that not every practicing occultist is necessarily a "sensation and feeling" type, in accordance with the two functions forming the "magical quadrants" in Dukes's model, as, in principle, everybody has these functions. Conversely, it is evident that not everybody with a dominant "sensation and feeling function" will become a practicing occultist. This disposition is, as far as content is concerned, largely independent. The practitioner's discernment of magic's central goals, and how he or she settles on magic as one method among many that could bring success (e.g., as Crowley maintained for "science"), is outside the explanatory capability of this model. To determine individual differences in the approach to magic, as well as similarities, we can no longer not take contents linked to the concept of magic into account, for they represent important markers for differentiation.

One possibility of systematizing the individual approaches to magic lies in the endeavor to describe the semantic field with its diverse elements. For this purpose key terms should be named and put together by means of a mind map (see Figure 2). The key terms are derived from empirically gathered material and make no claim to completeness, as the mind map is only to be understood as a heuristic instrument. The aim, despite imprecise definitions and semantic ambiguity of the key terms therein, is to allow useful differentiation. In the following we will not speak of science, religion, art, and magic as conscious ways of accessing reality that are not determined with regard to content (as above in Dukes's model), but rather of the "scientific," "religious," and "artistic" orientations of human action bound up with concrete contents and practices of action. The "social" and the "psychological" should be added to the three terms found in Dukes's four fields to allow a meaningful clustering of the key terms already there. These five orientations demarcate the fields, the center of which is magical practice. The meaning of the five terms is defined very broadly. The religious includes everything associ-

ated with the transcendental. This area can no longer be arranged in accordance with the four-field scheme. The location of the key terms in the field likewise cannot be based on exactly determined positions, but rather on assumptions (to use a metaphor from quantum physics) of their greatest probability density. Above all, complex concepts and terms loaded with diverse meanings such as “power” or “secret” do not allow themselves to be clearly placed, and their spatial division within the scheme may, because of their close inner relationships to each other, not appear logical in some respects. The worldview concept, for example, of the Thelemic religion (as a new religious movement) contains prominent social utopian aspects, so that also here the spatial distance between these terms in the scheme may appear contradictory. These examples should suffice to indicate the difficult nature of attempting to locate such terms, limited by two-dimensional representation and the necessity of compromise. Nevertheless, the scheme should be adequate enough to illuminate certain relationships and give a feel for the different approaches to magical practice.

Motivational Structures of the Interviewees

Some aspects of the motivational structures of the interviewees will now be compared against the background of this scheme. This comparison should

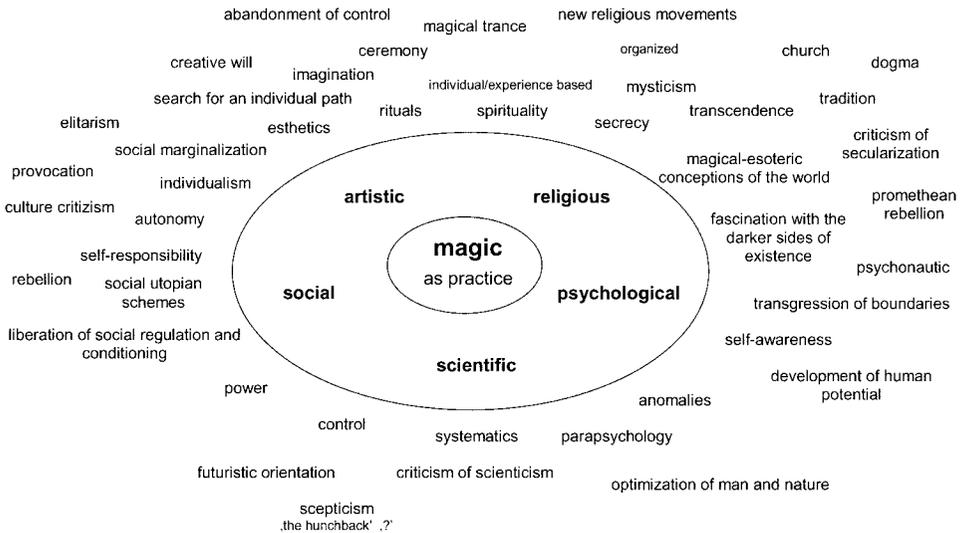


Figure 2: Mind map—key terms to magic as a form of practice (Mayer, *Arkane Welten*, 287).

show, on one hand, the need to take an accurate view of the individual composition of those concepts that are addressed by the key terms if one wants to comprehend the individual understanding of magic and the personal motivations to magical practice. On the other hand, it gives some, albeit limited, impressions of the interviewees.⁴⁹ As already mentioned, a religious worldview plays a significant role for all of the interviewed people. Differences appear in the combination with other areas and key terms, but also in the stress laid within the sphere of the religious.

*Osmund*⁵⁰ is strongly involved in the area of New Religious Movements as an alternative to traditional Christian churches, while *Willmuth*, after an initial interest in pagan religion, turned away and chose a path of individual experience-based spirituality. *Agrippa* is strongly attached to the traditional Catholic church, and aims at an open cultural attachment of magic into society, where the magician takes a social role similar to that of a priest. The link to questioning religion or worldviews is completely different for *Isbrand*, who does not fundamentally reject a turn to religion or spirituality, but regards this as “not a concern” for him anymore: “I don’t have a problem if someone thinks himself religious or spiritual or something like that. No problem. . . . For me, personally, that’s no longer an issue.” The quality of his concern in this area is a sort of “Promethean rebellion” against the gods, that is, dissatisfaction with the field of the known, that which has already been sketched out and mapped “this side of the boundary,” and further pursuit of the dream of magic (“to do the impossible”). In addition, his relation to magical practice is heavily influenced by a pragmatic and systematic methodology that values control over conditions. Therefore, for example, he does not regard using drugs as particularly necessary. This approach resembles a scientific method in that it distances itself from worldview beliefs without succumbing to the wish to give magic a base in the natural sciences. One focus of his approach to magic has developed in the area of the social. He explicitly refers to having integrated the “problem of what is social” into his magical approach. His view of contemporary civilization is critical and dystopic. In an (anticipated) social development, magic will be a means of gaining power and autonomy, and a means of decision making for those (few) who are not afraid of a demanding and radical training.

For *Osmund* the social aspect of magical practice is also important. His

49. More detailed biographical portraits can be found in Mayer, *Arkane Welten*, 65–130.

50. Pseudonyms of the interviewed magicians chosen for the monograph and taken from a dictionary of names from the Middle Ages are retained here.

attitude, both earlier in his career and currently, has been influenced by social utopian conceptions of functioning, alternative forms of society and community that turned from originally purely political approaches of the counter-culture movements in the wake of the “1968 generation” to spirituality as part of the neopagan and new religion movements. He prefers these alternative forms of society to classical magical orders such as the O.T.O., which he belonged to for a time. Important features of this preference are communal experience of spirituality in a strongly organized form and the link to handed-down esoteric patterns of thought. Magical operations are used as tool for various purposes such as healing rituals or affecting social developments, but also for further development and the growth of “human potential.”

This latter point also applies to *Willmuth*, for whom it is often difficult to differentiate between “magical” effects and those based on known psychological laws. A central aim of magic, the strengthening of will, could also be found in other psychological techniques such as motivation training. In this respect, she uses magic as a sort of psychological technique directed at self-knowledge and the development of personality, which she nevertheless links to her spiritual goals. These are, however, orientated along strongly individualistic and experience-based lines. She rejects any single “creed,” such as is often necessary for membership in many nature religion groups. She likes logical structures of thought, the complexity and systematization of which corresponds to her orientation toward the natural sciences (she studied mathematics and physics). Her inclination toward magic, however, also has something to do with a critical approach to scientism and, regarded biographically, represents an act of rebellion against the dominant portrayal of women in Christianity.

Dierolf understands magic as a kind of “inner school” that raises one’s self-awareness, and that can promote the development of human potential to an extraordinary degree. For him, the transgression of limits and the “reaching for the impossible in order to expand the possible” are primarily related to the area of personal abilities. Such developed abilities give magicians a special social position that make them stand out from average people. *Dierolf* mentions the elements of self-responsibility and autonomy also in relation to social processes in which magicians can take on the role of open-minded thinkers due to their particular experiences of, and perspectives on, “reality.”

Meinrad, like *Willmuth*, appreciates the complex systematics of many magical systems. He clearly demarcates his approach to magic as a “science of the soul and its possible effects” from neopagan forms of magical practices that he regards as simpler. *Meinrad* is strongly interested in psychology, and his

endeavor to become a better human being must be understood in a twofold sense, both with regard to “good” contact to his fellow human beings, and with regard to himself in terms of becoming a “good,” that is, a “perfect functioning tool” in terms of spiritual mission. His desire for “magic” to become a publicly accepted discipline integrated into an academic-like structure could be seen as some kind of social utopia, although this is opposed to his opinion that magic is a “path which is viable only for very few people,” indicating an elitist element to his thought.

In the case of *Osterhild*, the spiritual aspect, formed by a desire to serve the whole of creation in the best possible way, forms the center of her magical practice. She is also interested in psychology, psychotherapy, and the opportunities offered by “psycho-techniques,” but she criticizes the reductionist worldviews that can often be found in these disciplines. As a young adult she was engaged in typical forms of juvenile occultism combined with parapsychological concerns and some specific scientific issues. Her particular interests met with a lack of understanding or rejection by her parents. However, in her case it would be wrong to interpret turning toward magical practices as an act of rebellion against parental values, as she accepts the negative reaction as an unavoidable trial on her spiritual path.

As we have seen, *Willmuth*, *Balthus*, *Selge*, *Agrippa*, and *Riebold* are also interested in scientific approaches to the world. However, their focuses are different. *Balthus*'s interest in scientific anomalies and in the transgression of boundaries led him to carry out experiments in a more or less systematic way with the aim of producing paranormal phenomena. His approach is scientific in terms of openness to any possible results, and willingness to see his model of magic as a working hypothesis that he would give up, if necessary, that is, if convincing alternative explanations would arise from scientific findings.

Agrippa also carries out systematic experiments to produce paranormal phenomena, such as attempting to move a small iron ball-bearing by psychokinetic means. The experiments are designed to produce subjective evidence for the assumption that the scientific worldview is unable to fully explain certain essential aspects of “reality.” In contrast to *Balthus*, he opposes a definite religious (Christian) belief to a strictly scientific worldview. *Agrippa*, who studied theology at the Papal University in Rome among other places, regarded magical practice from early on as being closely related to Christian religious ceremonial practice. His preference for the ceremonial (“I am a little bit of a clerical fetishist”) was served both by magical ritual and church services. The aspects of social utopian thinking and concrete social commitment play a very important role for him, as reflected, on one

hand, by magical rituals with social-political aims, and on the other by the vision of a new form of social organization integrating magic and “occult” techniques. He aspires to an open, cultural anchoring of magic in society, in which magicians would take on a social, officially acknowledged role comparable with that of priests. Elements of rebellion and provocativity (in school, in the seminary, but also within the magical community) as well as a certain elitism have accompanied him throughout his life, resulting in his being repeatedly categorized as an outsider, or these elements being conditioned by this position.

With *Selge* we also find someone with a (to a certain degree self-chosen) outsider status that has a provocative element, such as at the start of his “occult career” when he made public rejection or stigmatization of a group an important selection criteria in his own efforts to join a group. For him, however, an aesthetic impulse and a connection with art plays an important role, as well as a fundamental questioning curiosity. The skepticism of the Crowleyan “hunchback,”⁵¹ someone who questions dogma and articles of faith as a matter of principle, is combined with a curious openness and a tendency to test (and go beyond) limits. This characterizes his relation to magic. Magic operates as an aid in pursuing his interest in spiritual and mystical experience as part of the investigation of his inner world (psychonautics). Magical practice as a means of coping with practical life holds only marginal interest for him. He is a member of several occult groups and is not afraid to deal in areas that other members of the magical community would rather avoid. His interest in the sciences is based on his orientation toward the future, which is fed by the latest scientific discoveries. Similarly, magical practice appears to him to be a worthwhile approach that pushes back limits.

In the case of *Riepold*, we also find an element of skepticism that is, however, strongly oriented toward self-development. Above all, his goal is not to ensconce himself in habits and opinions that would mean, to him, a kind of torpidity. In his self-characterization as a Satanist lies a priori a provocative and rebellious element, as the public image of Satanism (in Germany) has strongly negative connotations. It also stands for an individualistic and elitist attitude, linked to the desire for liberation from social constraints and conditioning. Science holds no interest for him due to its systematic approach to reality, but rather due to its potency to inspire and provoke his own mind with new findings. In spite of his “here and now” orientation, also linked to his satanic-setianic approach, he is susceptible to religious at-

51. Aleister Crowley, *The Soldier and the Hunchback: ! and ?* (1909; reprint London: Panic Press, 1984).

mospheres: “church fuss and a lot of incense—that’s what I always found somewhat fascinating.” In addition to a spiritual basic need—he tentatively calls this a “spirituality without kingdom come, but with an ‘other world’” (i.e., with a realm of alternative reality)—there is a strong aesthetic component.

This can be found more directly in the case of *Nelius*, whose discovery of magic (Crowley) und Eastern spirituality (Aurobindo) ran parallel to a practical examination of serious contemporary music. Early on he rebelled against middle-class standards and the strict Catholicism practiced in his parents’ home (where reading Crowley’s texts was regarded as very provocative). His joining the O.T.O. at eighteen was just as far removed from the average preferences of his age group as his other interests, composing avant-garde music and meditation. In the interview he spoke of his tendency to elitism (“I didn’t want mass movements. From an early age I appreciated more the very individualistic.”) as well as of the desire to free himself from social conditioning. Deep mystical experience, however, has a central significance for him, and touches him more than the unusual phenomena and experiences that appear directly related to magical practice.

Typified Aspects of the Figure of the Magician

These short descriptions, against the background of the key terms, should be enough to show that a typology of a magician’s personality according to the central five spheres of human action could hardly be applied to individual cases.⁵² Multiple areas motivate all of these magicians to pursue the practice of magic. The area of the religious, broadly conceived, is important for all of them, and this can be traced back to the definition of magic with reference to the paranormal, which served as a criterion for the choice of interviewees. Individual differences within this area should be outlined. With regard to how well the other spheres are “covered,” differences are greater. If, however, an attempt is made to describe ideal types (despite limitations), the following characterizations arise:

The magician as artist: Social marginalization is not avoided; instead, there is an uncompromising search for personal expression and an individual path. Violating taboos and behaving provocatively serve, above all, to enhance one’s personal profile and distance oneself from the “average.” Similarly, cre-

52. Artistic, religious, psychological, scientific, and social, as in Figure 2.

ative will and aesthetic impulse are mainly directed toward the personality. Imagination is not only a necessary tool for the practice of magic but also a gateway to the creative source of the unconscious.

The magician as social utopian: Magic represents part of an alternative, more balanced society. The practice of magic serves as cultural critique and protest against rationalism, materialism, dogmatism, and social conformity. Tolerance and pluralism with a simultaneous stress on self-responsibility are highly valued. For some, elitism and a personal ambition for power are also prominent.

The magician as scientist: Curiosity and a thirst for knowledge are influential factors for exploring magic. While science can fill a desire for a methodology and rational systematization, magic opens the gateway to other areas of reality and allows access to alternative forms of rationality as instruments of discovery. According to the respective focus, magical practice can be directed, irrespective of worldview, toward the production of paranormal phenomena in order to challenge the borders of what is scientifically tangible, or complex magical systems (e.g., astrology and kabbalah) can be used within a context determined by a worldview using a quasi-scientific methodology.

The magician as “fully functioning person”: Here effort is mainly to attain an optimal development of all areas of personal potential and becoming a fully functioning person (in the sense of Carl Rogers’s personality theory⁵³). Magical practice expands traditional methods of personality development by taking into account additional “levels of reality.” The approach remains, however, predominantly psychological.

The magician as a seeker of knowledge: Questions of worldview and the connection and relations to transcendence are the central focus of magical practice. Every form of pragmatic knowledge is alien, as is a systematization of magical practice. No attempt is made to gain knowledge in a quasi-scientific manner. Meaning is predetermined or directly experienced, but not derived from the results of quasi-scientific attempts at objectification.

The selection of the five ideal types is not absolute. The typology has its weaknesses and imprecision just like the other two suggested attempts at typological construction. Both Dukes’s four-quadrant model of ways of accessing “reality” and the diagram of the five orientations of human action

53. Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (London: Constable, 1961).

with its cluster of key terms represent, like the characterization of the five ideal types, a heuristic approximation for understanding magic as a form of practice. Although each model may be considered unsatisfactory, they nevertheless represent instruments in the survey that make the heterogeneous nature of individual approaches understandable and, to a certain extent, can depict them. Also apparently contradictory attitudes and the contextual embeddedness as well as dichotomizations of magical practice can be meaningfully placed: for example, connections to earth and nature found in pagan groups versus futuristic/technical “cybermagic,” avantgardism versus tradition, consciously affected distancing and elitism versus openness and social integration of magic, complex magical systems versus individual rituals with experiential focus, altruism versus hedonism, self-deification versus subordination to a divine principle, and so forth.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

Many scientific attempts to explain magic as a form of practice remain unsatisfactory because of the complexity of motivational structures in which magical practice is embedded and which are related to both the style of personality independent of content (in accordance with Jung’s model) and an affinity for certain contents. From the examples given above it should be clear that the intellectual or functionalistic perspective alone cannot offer an adequate definition of magic as a form of practice.

There are not only ideas behind magic, there are also always people who influence its forms and further its development through their motives, frameworks of need, and experience. “Magic is never an abstraction: It exists as a force only in the minds and the bodies of people. If you wish to understand it, you must meet those who live by magic.”⁵⁴ This is made clear by a psychological approach related to aspects of personality. While individual lines of tradition of esoteric systems can be reconstructed well from a historical-philological perspective and can be interpreted in an evolutionary manner with regard to their respective cultural-historical context, there are patterns to motivational structures of those people standing behind magical practice that have retained their validity over the course of centuries. There have always been people who have been drawn to the occult, who have gone against existing social pressures to conform, who did not want to limit themselves to generally accepted standards because of their scientific thirst for knowledge, who separated themselves from the “mass” to belong to an elite, who wished to provoke by openly breaking taboos, who wanted to gain power over

54. Glucklich, *The End of Magic*, 233.

themselves and others by all means, including occult ones, and who— independent of the culturally dominant system of interpreting the world— have had direct experiences that offer strong subjective evidence for the functioning of magic.

The attempt at dimensioning the magician's personality pursued here differs from previous investigations in focusing on individual approaches to magical practice, and in emphasizing magical practice more than religious practice. The three heuristic instruments presented above can help usefully differentiate individual approaches to magic, and provide a better understanding of the need for a multidimensional conceptualization of magical practice. What is clear, however, is that contemporary Western magic cannot be understood as an expression of an alienated, atavistic variety of primitive thinking and backward beliefs, even if simple forms of magical practice may exist that are rejected by most serious practitioners, just as a newspaper horoscope may be shunned by serious astrologers.

In some respects modern magicians, when they are not leading a double life, resemble artists in their particular social role. This is not only true for aspects such as social marginalization or the assumption of the role of court jester holding up a mirror to society—which one of the interviewees compared with the social role of the magician—but also regarding content. Great importance is attached to the imagination, working with the unconscious (to “make the invisible visible”), and accessing dimensions beyond everyday consciousness and everyday reality. Further elements that magicians and artists have in common are the search for their own individualistic way, a tendency to be provocative, social utopian concerns, and an understanding of discipline as a way to transcendental experience. While artists, in their attempts to show and structure the world, do not so readily run the risk of their behavior being labeled irrational and superstitious, the situation is different for people practicing magic; they operate outside of the culturally accepted conceptions of the world, they refer to heterodox systems of knowledge, and attribute a place in reality, indeed at the center of life, to that which is otherwise only tolerated in the fictional or metaphorical realms.

Modern magicians are concerned with areas of the everyday world and the other world that, for them, exist parallel to each other, the world of scientific causality and magical participation, but also the small social world of the magical community within the greater “esoteric scene.” An integration between these different “worlds” might at first appear very difficult, but it need not be so, at least on the level of the inner psyche. What Rountree expressed about the feminist witches from New Zealand she studied may also be valid

for many practitioners of contemporary Western magic: “Believing in magic and believing in science apparently presents neither a difficulty nor a contradiction for many people: if it requires switching between two worldviews, this switch is made.”⁵⁵

55. Rountree, “How Magic Works,” 56.