

Discordian Magic: Paganism, the Chaos Paradigm and the Power of Imagination

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ABSTRACT

Discordianism, founded in 1957 and generally regarded as a “parody religion,” has only recently received scholarly consideration as a valid religious expression within modern Paganism (Cusack 2010). Yet ritual practice within Discordianism remains largely unexamined; Hugh Urban’s brief discussion of Discordian magical workings as a sub-category of Chaos Magic is the extent of academic discussion of the subject to date (Urban 2006). This article elaborates on Urban’s tantalising classification of Discordian magic. A brief history of Discordianism is sketched; then ritual and magic in the Discordian tradition is explored through an examination of key texts, including Malaclypse the Younger’s Principia Discordia (1965), and Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson’s Illuminatus! Trilogy (1975). Similarities between Chaos Magic and Discordianism are noted, and an analysis of Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), a magical order founded by British performance artist Genesis P-Orridge and others in 1981, elucidates the relationship between Chaos Magic and Discordian magic. It is argued that the essentially unorganised nature of Chaos Magic and Discordianism, and the trenchant resistance of both to any form of “orthodoxy,” justifies classifying Discordian magic as a form of Chaos Magic. Chaos magicians and Discordians both have a deconstructive and monistic worldview, in which binary oppositions collapse into undifferentiated oneness, and neither conformity of belief nor unity of practice is required to be an “authentic” Discordian or Chaote.

Keywords

Discordianism, Chaos magic, fiction-based religions, Hugh B. Urban

Introduction

Discordianism, founded in 1957 by Greg Hill (aka Malaclypse the Younger or Mal-2) and Kerry Thornley (aka Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst or Lord Omar), occupies an ill-defined space in the categories of both “new religion” and “magical tradition.” Its founders explicitly stated that Discordianism began as a joke, a parody of religion that exposed the deficiencies of mainstream churches, and the conformist expectations of post-war America. Cultural commentators and the academy alike have derided it as a “fake religion,” and to date serious study of Discordianism as a new religion has been minimal (Cusack 2010, 27–52). With the publication of Discordianism’s scripture, the revolutionary ’zine entitled *Principia Discordia*, in 1965, it became clear that magic and ritual were part of the practice of Discordianism (the Turkey Curse involved ritual incantation and accompanying symbolic action, and core myths such as the “Original Snub” prescribed certain commemorative behaviours, for example the eating of hot dogs without buns, to be observed by members of the religion). To date, only Hugh B. Urban has attempted to locate Discordianism in the contemporary magical spectrum; *Magia Sexualis* (2006) contains a brief treatment of Discordian magic as a variant of Chaos Magic (Urban 2006, 233–245).

This article investigates Urban’s preliminary categorization of Discordian magic, explicating Discordianism’s place as a goddess-worshipping tradition within modern Paganism (itself a magical tradition, in which ritual and spells, witchcraft and worship, are inextricably combined), and analyzing instances of Discordian magic from a range of Discordian texts, such as the *Principia Discordia*, and Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson’s *Illuminatus! Trilogy* (which is a work of science fiction, but nevertheless functions as an authoritative repository of Discordian mythology and theology). First, a brief history of Discordianism and description of its teachings are provided. Second, Discordianism is established as a legitimate modern Pagan religion. The difficulties of defining “magic” and “religion,” especially those forms of magic and religion that are inspired by fictions, are also important at this point. Third, Urban’s understanding of Discordianism as a form of postmodern, deconstructive Chaos Magic is examined and vindicated. This identification is strengthened through the application of Urban’s model to magical rituals within the Discordian tradition and a study of Thee Temple of Psychick Youth (TOPY). Finally, conclusions regarding the contemporary context of both new religions and magical practices, and in particular those drawing inspiration from fiction and mediated through the Internet, are drawn.

Discordianism: Founders, history and teachings

Greg Hill (1941–2000) and Kerry Thornley (1938–1998) became friends while at high school in East Whittier, California. They were freethinkers, sharing radical interests in politics and philosophy, and an affection for the whacky humour of *Mad* magazine. With like-minded friends Bob Newport and Bill Stephens, they whiled away the time drinking in all-night bowling alleys, discussing topics of interest. The *Principia Discordia* records a vision concerning the goddess Eris, the Greek patroness of strife (a deity known as Discordia to the Romans), revealed to Hill and Thornley, aged sixteen and nineteen respectively, late at night in one of these bowling alleys:

... there walked into the room a chimpanzee, shaggy and grey about the muzzle, yet upright to his full five feet and with a natural majesty. He carried a scroll and walked to the young men.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “why does Pickering’s Moon go about in reverse orbit? Gentlemen, why are there nipples on your chests; do you give milk? And what, pray tell, Gentlemen, is to be had about Heisenberg’s Law?” He paused. “SOMEBODY HAD TO PUT ALL OF THIS CONFUSION HERE!”

And with that he revealed his scroll. It was a diagram, like a yin-yang with a pentagon and an apple on the other. And then he exploded and the two lost consciousness (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 8).¹

This symbol was the “Sacred Chao” of Discordianism, an adaptation of the *yin-yang* symbol that features the pentagon (exemplifying the “Law of Fives”) and the Golden Apple of Discord, inscribed *Kallisti* (to the prettiest one). In Greek mythology, the goddess of strife Eris, out of pique at not having been invited to the wedding of Peleus to the sea-nymph Thetis, hurled this apple into the crowd. Violence broke out as the goddesses fought for possession of the apple, which was awarded to Aphrodite by the Trojan prince Paris. Her promise, that if he gave her the apple he would have the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta, was the indirect cause of the Trojan War (Littlewood 1968, 149–151).

The chimpanzee’s message implied that strife or discord pervaded everything, and that the goddess of Chaos, Eris, was therefore the most powerful force in the universe. Five nights later, according to *Principia Discordia*, Hill

1. Discordians do not copyright material (Greg Hill and Kerry Thornley advocated what they called “kopyleft,” the free reproduction of their writings by anyone who wished). The version of *Principia Discordia* that is most readily available is the 1994 edition published by Steve Jackson Games; it is important to note that this contains the text of the first 1965 version, with a few additions.

and Thornley received a vision of Eris herself. She castigated humans for having lost all knowledge of her, and for having incarcerated themselves in meaningless bonds. She proclaimed: “I am chaos. I am the substance from which your artists and scientists build rhythms. I am the spirit with which your children and clowns laugh in happy anarchy. I am chaos. I am alive and I tell you that you are free” (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 2–3). At this, Hill and Thornley allegedly fell about laughing and resolved to found the Discordian Society. In keeping with its patron deity’s unreliable nature, “the Discordian Society has no definition” (Malaclypse the Younger and Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst 2006, 93). It was divided into the Paratheo-Anametamystikhood of Eris Esoteric (POEE), which was led by Mal-2, and the Erisian Liberation Front (ELF), which was “Omar’s sect.”

In the 1960s Hill and Thornley developed their religious identities, Malaclypse the Younger and Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst, and Discordianism gradually took on the lineaments of a modern Pagan religion. Although unorganized (a popular motto was “We Discordians Shall Stick Apart”), members did form cabals in order to meet, discuss doctrine and practice the faith (Adler 1986, 332). Despite the fact that it lacked a coherent narrative or formal doctrines, the philosophy expounded in *Principia Discordia* was consistent: Chaos is the true reality, and apparent order (the Aneristic Principle) and apparent disorder (the Eristic Principle) are mere mental constructs, which humans develop to assist them in coping with reality. Humanity’s miserable existence, in thrall to convention, wage-slavery, sexual repression and a myriad other restrictions, is the result of the Curse of Greyface. Greyface was a “malcontented hunchbrain” who, according to Discordian mythology, in 1166 BCE asserted that the true nature of reality was Serious Order, and, assisted by his followers, stamped out those who believed in play and humour (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 42). Modern Discordians are encouraged to consult their pineal glands, as a more reliable source of knowledge than either the brain or the heart.

Another major teaching is the Law of Fives, which states that “all things happen in fives, or are divisible by or are multiples of five ... [and] the Law of Fives is never wrong” (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 16). The Pentabarf, a five-principle statement of faith (“catma,” which is flexible and provisional, as opposed to “dogma,” which is rigid and unchanging), is as follows:

- I. There is no Goddess but Goddess and She is Your Goddess. There is no Erisian Movement but The Erisian Movement and it is The Erisian Movement. And every Golden Apple Corps is the beloved home of a Golden Worm.

- II. A Discordian Shall Always use the Official Discordian Document Numbering System.
- III. A Discordian is required to, the first Friday after his illumination, Go Off Alone & Partake Joyously of a Hot Dog; this Devotive Ceremony to Remonstrate against the popular Paganisms of the Day: of Roman Catholic Christendom (no meat on Friday), of Judaism (no meat of Pork), of Hindic Peoples (no meat of Beef), of Buddhists (no meat of animal), and of Discordians (no Hot Dog Buns).
- IV. A Discordian shall Partake of No Hot Dog Buns, for Such was the Solace of Our Goddess when She was Confronted with The Original Snub.
- V. A Discordian is Prohibited of Believing What he reads (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 4).

This “creed” plays with the forms of the core doctrines of certain religions: the first principle evokes the Islamic *shahada*, or profession of faith; the third principle mocks religious dietary requirements; and the fifth principle requires skepticism where religious texts usually demand blind faith, and religious institutions unquestioning obedience.

Eris is the goddess of liberation, and Discordianism advocated anarchic play and unlimited freedom to experiment. The counter-culture of the late 1960s was the perfect backdrop for such a new religion, fuelled by fiction and the imagination, and Kerry Thornley, in particular, took advantage of the smorgasbord of spirituality and sex on offer. He joined Kerista, a polyamorous community founded by John Presmont (1923–2009), known as “Brother Jud,” and in 1966 used the term “pagan” to describe the movement in an article for the *Kerista Swinger*:

Kerista is a religion and the mood of Kerista is one of holiness, Do not, however, look for a profusion of rituals, dogmas, doctrines and scriptures. Kerista is too sacred for that. It is more akin to the religions of the East and, also, the so-called pagan religions of the pre-Christian West. Its fount of being is the religious experience and ... Kerista, like those religions of olden times, is life-affirming.
(Adler 1986, 294)

Margot Adler credits Thornley with the first use of “pagan” to refer to nature religions, both in the ancient world but also in modern forms. Kerista attracted the attention of a number of fringe journalists in the mid-1960s, including Robert Anton (Bob) Wilson (1932–2007), who wrote “The Religion of Kerista and its 69 Positions” for *Fact* magazine in 1965. This piece focused on the message of sexual liberation preached by Brother Jud. Wilson also noted that Jud had founded the commune after a mysterious “voice” had commanded him to, and the issue of whether Kerista was more properly a

religious or a social movement was addressed.

Wilson, an agnostic with a commitment to science, was also passionate about occult and esoteric matters. He met Greg Hill and Kerry Thornley in 1967, a meeting that marked the second phase of development in Discordianism. Wilson's fascination with mysticism, conspiracy theories, alternative realities, and eccentric thinkers, such as psychologists Wilhelm Reich and Timothy Leary, architect Buckminster Fuller, occultist Aleister Crowley, and researcher into unexplained phenomena Charles Fort, was congruent with the Discordian worldview. He became deeply involved with the religion and his *Illuminatus! Trilogy* (1975), published as three separate novels; *The Eye in the Pyramid*, *The Golden Apple* and *Leviathan*, co-authored with Robert Shea, embedded Discordian theology in a work of speculative fiction that was a bestseller and the single most effective method of Discordian evangelism prior to the advent of the Internet. Discordianism had flirted with conspiracy theories; there are references to initiatory brotherhoods like the Bavarian Illuminati and the Assassins in *Principia Discordia*, and Kerry Thornley had been friendly with Lee Harvey Oswald in 1959, when both men were in the Marines. Oswald briefly converted Thornley to Marxism, before he became inspired by the novels of Ayn Rand and became an Objectivist, which he later abandoned for anarchism (Gorightly 2003, 32, 43). This acquaintance involved Thornley in the investigation into Oswald by Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney, in the wake of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Principia Discordia also introduced a key term, “fnord,” which referred to disinformation distributed by the global conspiracy. In the *Illuminatus! Trilogy*, “seeing the fnords” is a quality of the enlightened characters (Wagner 2004, 68–69). Wilson and Thornley developed “Operation Mindfuck” (OM) in 1968. Adam Gorightly argues that Thornley deliberately issued statements claiming he was an agent of the Bavarian Illuminati during Jim Garrison's investigation, simply to “mindfuck” Garrison (Gorightly 2003, 136). OM became a collaborative project described as a “Marx Brothers version of Zen.” Discordians carried business cards with “There is no Friend Anywhere” and “There is no Enemy Anywhere,” on either side, to distribute to the unaware (Wagner 2004, 14). Thornley began to develop Zenarchy, which he defined as the state of government that results from meditation, Wilson started the John Dillinger Died For You Society, and the seeds of the *Illuminatus! Trilogy* germinated.

Wilson and Shea's 800-page trilogy boasts a labyrinthine plot in which New York policeman Saul Goodman investigates the disappearance of a journalist, Joe Malik, who was investigating the Bavarian Illuminati. Goodman finds Malik working with John Dillinger and the Justified Ancients of Mummu

(JAMs), Discordians working against the Illuminati. In a parallel plot that eventually converges, George Dorn is rescued by the Legion of Dynamic Discord, led by double-agent Hagbard Celine, who is also one of the five leaders of the Illuminati (the other four are a rock band known as the American Medical Association, Wolfgang, Winifred, Werner and Wilhelm Saure). The pages bristle with esoteric references; Shea and Wilson name-check Eliphas Levi, Nazi occultists, Atlantis, Satanism, the Kabbalistic *Sefirot*, the *Necronomicon*, H.P. Lovecraft's deity Yog Sothoth, and the Knights Templar, to name but a few. Marcus LiBrizzi argues that while it begins as a detective story, it "becomes science fiction, and finally a love story between a supercomputer and a sea monster," the Leviathan (LiBrizzi 2003, 241). The Illuminati are defeated by the incarnate Eris at a rock concert, Woodstock Europa, at Ingolstadt in 1976. Quotations from *Principia Discordia* appear throughout the novels, and the Discordian suspicion of everything is acknowledged when Malik says to Celine "I've got it! We're in a book" (Shea and Wilson 1998 [1975], 722). The trilogy also reflects the counter-culture of the 1960s (*Ewige Blumenkraft*, the slogan of the Illuminati, translates as "flower power forever"), and positions Discordianism as a form of polytheistic Paganism, in that deities from other pantheons, including those from fictional sources like Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, feature alongside the great goddess Eris.

The trilogy, dedicated to Hill and Thornley, was a runaway bestseller and brought a new audience to Discordianism. *Illuminatus!* was adapted for the stage in a marathon ten-hour production, and alternative musicians Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty formed a band, the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu (the JAMs, later the "Copyright Liberation Front" or KLF), in homage to Shea and Wilson. After the World Wide Web was developed in 1989, Discordianism flourished online among the varied subcultures of computer scientists, anarchists, indie musicians and artists. Cabals moved online and Discordian sites multiplied. Greg Hill had retreated from the religion in the late 1970s and Kerry Thornley was consumed by paranoid fantasies concerning the Kennedy assassination. However, the uninterrupted distribution of the never-copyrighted *Principia Discordia* and the liberating message of Eris continue to attract new adherents. More than a decade after the deaths of Mal-2 and Lord Omar, Discordianism is a small but established and influential member of the family of new Pagan religions, and a venerable elder in the tiny but growing family of invented or fiction-based religions.²

2. "Fiction-based religions" is a term coined by Markus Davidsen, of the Universities of Aarhus and Leiden.

Discordianism: Paganism, magic and fiction-based religion

The modern revival of Paganism and the revival of interest in magical practices are closely related phenomena. The Enlightenment championed human reason and devalued both religious revelation and esoteric initiation, rather advocating a model of knowledge that was both public and democratic. However, the eighteenth century was also the century of Romanticism, in which affect and experience were exalted above the intellect, and initiatory bodies such as the Rosicrucians and Masons, each with persuasive mythologies of enlightened spiritual leaders, secret rituals, and perennial wisdom gained popularity (Drury 2009, 27–30). Until the late nineteenth century religion and magic in the West were broadly separate, because Christianity was regarded as the normative, indeed the only, religion, and the Christian scriptures and tradition warned against activities that were usually defined as “magical” (spells, séances, necromancy, divination, astrology and so on). Such activities were therefore deemed irreligious, and were prohibited. Stoddard Martin notes that the situation was rarely so clear-cut, because “magic” could also encompass acts done in the service of God, and the Christian concepts of miracle and mysticism (Martin 1989, 1–6).

However, by the turn of the twentieth century secularisation, which Berger defines as “the process whereby sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Berger 1969, 107), had progressed to the extent that the churches no longer had power to prevent individuals or groups from engaging in esoteric practices, converting to Buddhism or becoming a Theosophist, or otherwise choosing a spiritual path apart from that of Christianity. In 1888 the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (HOGD) was founded by William Wynn Westcott, William Robert Woodman and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, who were all members of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*. Ronald Hutton describes the HOGD as “the most celebrated society of magicians in British history” (Hutton 1999, 11). The HOGD established a canon of Western magical knowledge, “including studies on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Key of Solomon, Abra-Melin Magic, Enochian Magic, as well as material gleaned from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, William Blake’s Prophetic Books, and the Chaldaean Chronicles” (Pearson 2007, 98). The ritual magic practised by the Golden Dawn employed a complex range of objects and symbols (for example, sword, chalice, pentagram, wand, dagger), many of which were to become important in modern Pagan ritual.

The modern Pagan revival is now understood to be the largely the work

of Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884–1964), a retired civil servant with labyrinthine esoteric involvements (including Royal Arch Masonry, the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship, and a personal acquaintance with Aleister Crowley, of the Ordo Templi Orientis). Gardner (who used the ritual name “Scire”) claimed that Wicca, also known as “The Craft,” was an ancient Pagan tradition that survived underground during the Christian centuries. In the twenty-first century, scholars and the majority of Pagans acknowledge that Wicca is an invented tradition, with Gardner combining his personal experience of esoteric fraternities with his considerable folkloric and anthropological knowledge in an act of the creative imagination. He utilized the work of earlier scholars including Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903), author of *Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches* (1899) and Margaret Murray (1863–1963), author of *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (1921). Gardnerian Wicca rehabilitated the previously negative stereotype of the witch, and melded revived Paganism with ceremonial magic. Gardnerian Wicca worshipped the Goddess, and her consort the Horned God, and inaugurated ritual activity in covens led by a High Priestess High Priest, who were thrice initiated and practised sex magic in the form of the Wiccan Great Rite. Wicca is also the “parent” religion of the majority of forms of Paganism, in terms of being both historically antecedent to and an influence on later Pagan founders and leaders. However, the formal magical practices of Gardnerian Wicca are not part of many Pagan traditions, which favour “earth-based Pagan magic” over “stellar-based occultist magic” (Pearson 2007, 101). The broad Pagan tendency to find magic in life in general, rather than in formalised workings, is congruent with both the Discordian approach to magic, and the unstructured and non-hierarchical magic of Chaos magicians.

The modern Pagan understanding of itself as an invented tradition also brings it closer to the explicit uses of fictions by Discordians and Chaotes. It is here argued that Discordianism is a form of Paganism as it is a religion devoted to Eris, a goddess who occupies the position of supreme deity. Thornley and Hill both came to believe that Eris existed and was a powerful force in the world. When Margot Adler was researching her pioneering study of American Paganism, *Drawing Down the Moon* (published in 1979), Greg Hill told her that as a teenager he had been an atheist and Discordianism began as a joke. But that had changed over time and he believed that:

Eris is an authentic goddess... In the beginning I saw myself as a cosmic clown. I characterized myself as Malaclypse the Younger. But if you do this type of thing well enough, it starts to work. In due time the polarities between atheism and theism become absurd. The engagement was transcendent. And

when you transcend one, you transcend the other. I started out with the idea that all gods are an illusion. By the end I had learned that it's *up to you* to decide whether gods exist, and if you take a goddess of confusion seriously, it will send you through as profound and valid a metaphysical trip as taking a god like Yahweh seriously. The trip will be different, but they will both be transcendental. (Adler 1986, 335)

Adler was not able to interview Thornley, but Hill said he had undergone a similar journey from doubt to faith. Hill informed Adler that Thornley had recently told him, "You know, if I had realized that all of this was going to come *true*, I would have chosen Venus" (Adler 1986, 336).

With regard to magical practices, there are tantalizing hints but no definite statements in *Principia Discordia*. One theme or phenomenon that arguably unites religion and magic is ritual, broadly "synonymous with symbolic actions" (Grimes 2000, 261). To avert the Curse of Greyface, Discordians are encouraged to perform the ritual of the Turkey Curse. The Turkey Curse summons eristic vibrations that interrupt the Curse of Greyface, which operates in an aneristic (anti-life, repressively ordered) context. Performing the Turkey Curse involves waving your arms and chanting "GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE. The results will be instantly apparent" (Malaclypse the Younger and Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst 2006, 175). To treat dancing around making turkey noises as a serious ritual may be difficult for some; however, it is certainly true that such actions would do much to undermine a repressive and overly-ordered life situation.

There are a few other examples of rituals in *Principia Discordia*. These include the "POEE Baptismal Rite," which involves nudity, dancing and the consumption of wine, and the "Sacred Erisian High Mass of the Krispy Kreme Kabal," both of which are more properly classified as religious rites than as magical practices. However, there is one passage that may profitably be investigated as an example of authentic Discordian magical thinking. This is the entry entitled "Tests by Doctors Prove it Possible to Shrink," which is tantalizingly subtitled "On Occultism." This text argues that Western magicians have been overly concerned with binary opposites, including good/evil and male/female, while ignoring the most important polarities, order/disorder and serious/humorous, the purview of the goddess Eris. The distinctive Discordian contribution to magic is then stated:

...when magicians learn to approach philosophy as a malleable art instead of an immutable truth, and learn to appreciate the absurdity of man's endeavours, then they will be able to persue [sic] their art with a lighter heart, and perhaps gain a clearer understanding of it, and therefore gain more effective

magic. CHAOS IS ENERGY. This is an essential challenge [sic] to all basic concepts of western occult thought, and POEE is humbly pleased to offer the first major breakthrough in occultism since Solomon.

(Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 61)

The statement that Chaos is energy relates closely to theorists of Chaos magic, whose random and unpredictable paradigm is in opposition to “classic” ceremonial magic in the Western esoteric tradition, where rituals are formal and initiations are hierarchical, and, as Gustavo Benavides argues, there is an emphasis on the use of language, “not to represent reality but rather to intervene upon reality,” and the “arousing, disruptive use of sexual imagery ... used to induce strength and fertility” (Benavides 2006, 301).

Religion is difficult to define and magic is similarly complex. Contemporary writers frequently take the celebrated occultist Aleister Crowley’s (1875–1947) definition as a point of departure. Crowley defined “magick” as “the art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with will” (Crowley 1929). In this view, the human will of the magician is paramount, and rituals and incantations are placed in the service of this will. In both contemporary religion and contemporary magic there are a significant percentage of practitioners who are uninterested in the ontological status of the gods and entities invoked or evoked in rituals, and venerated in hymns and prayers. The focus of late-modern or postmodern religion and spirituality tends to be on efficacy; participants are more likely to ask “Does it work?” rather than “Is it true?” This pragmatic stance is shared by Discordians, who follow the position advocated in *Principia Discordia*, in which Mal-2 dismisses the “truth question” by affirming that everything is true. When he confirms that this includes false things, he is asked how that works. His reply is “I don’t know, man. I didn’t do it” (Malaclypse the Younger and Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst 2006, 34).

The emphasis on Aristotelian logic and rational argumentation promoted by the Enlightenment has given way to a broadly chaotic paradigm that is equally comfortable with everything and nothing being “true.” Kerry Thornley came to understand Discordianism as “an American form of Zen Buddhism” (Wilson 2003, 11). Viewed this way, Discordian humour and incongruity are instruments to realize *satori*, momentary enlightenment or clarity (“seeing the fnords”). Yet this seems to make it more difficult to classify Discordianism as a magical tradition. Zen is a notably non-magical, anti-intellectual and even prosaic version of Buddhism (opposed to Shingon, Vajrayana and other more ceremonial manifestations). It could be argued that Operation Mind-

fuck's distribution of cards with "There is no Friend Anywhere" and "There is no Enemy Anywhere" (mentioned above) might possibly be interpreted as a magical working, but in the "American Zen" interpretation of Discordianism it is more like the *koan* education system found in the Rinzai school of Zen.

Discordian Magic and Chaos Magic

Post-Crowleyan magic has gradually drifted towards the Chaos paradigm, in which contemporary magical teachers and practitioners combine ideas from Crowley and other influential thinkers such as Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956) in a broadly Left-Hand Path configuration, in which sexual magic (incorporating Tantric ideas about ritual transgression and the violation of taboos) feature prominently (Sutcliffe 1996, 10–111). In the 1960s and 1970s sexual experimentation was a core part of Discordian practice for Kerry Thornley, but it is problematic to view this as Tantric discipline or as a method of working magic. However, despite the paucity of actual formal magic *per se* within the Discordian tradition, Hugh Urban tantalisingly argued that it was a manifestation of the same impulses found in Chaos magic, which he traced to Spare's quest, via the media of sex and art, to experience Kia, the primal energy and sole reality, through Zos, the "human mind and body, which is the vehicle for this primal, ineffable energy" (Urban 2006, 230).

Spare, who late in life told occultist and writer Kenneth Grant that he had been influenced in early childhood by a witch named Mrs Patterson, was the son of a London policeman and studied at the Royal College of Art (Hawkins 1996, 17). In 1916 he joined the army and was appointed an official war artist in 1919. From his mid-twenties Spare began writing philosophy, expressed in works such as *The Book of Pleasure* (1913), *The Focus of Life* (1921), and his final published work, *Anathema of Zos: Sermons to the Hypocrites* (1927). Spare became acquainted with Aleister Crowley at some time before 1910, but as early as *The Book of Pleasure* he indicated distaste for ceremonial magicians and their rigid and hierarchical workings. In the late 1940s Spare met Grant (1924–2011), who had been a member of the Ordo Templi Orientis and a protégé of Crowley and was the founder of the Typhonian Order, and his wife Steffi. At this time Spare had suffered a wartime bombing that left him homeless and disabled; he recovered from his injury and began to paint again, but Grant asserted "that Spare's memory was affected by the blast" (Hawkins 1996, 28). The Grants worked with Spare until his death on the Zos-Kia Cultus, and did much to publicize Spare's achievements as an artist and magician (Grant and Grant 1998).

Spare's *Book of Pleasure* expressed the view that erotic fulfilment and self-

pleasure was the ultimate goal of magical practice, and in Spare's own practice sexual expenditure in orgasm was crucial. However, Spare understood sex in radical terms, transcending the male-female duality of Tantric workings:

Man implies Women, I transcend these by the Hermaphrodite, this again implies a Eunuch; all these conditions I transcend by a "Neither" principle, yet although a "Neither" is vague, the fact of conceiving it proves its palpability, and again implies a different "Neither." But the "Neither-Neither" principle of those two is the state where the mind has passed beyond conception...it implies only itself. The "I" principle has reached the "Does not matter—need not be" state, and is not related to form. Save and beyond it, there is no other, therefore it alone is complete and eternal. Indestructible, it has the power to destroy—therefore it alone is true freedom and existence. Through it comes immunity from all sorrow, therefore the spirit is ecstasy. (Spare 1913)

As befitted an artist, Spare revolutionized sigil magic, a form of practice in which a powerful desire is expressed and distilled into a highly charged symbol (for example, listing the first letter of each word of the desire, and writing them on top of each other to create a design). Grant Morrison states that once the symbol is created, "[t]he desire is then forgotten. Only the symbol remains and can be charged to full potency when the magician chooses" (Morrison 2003, 18). Spare often charged sigils with his semen, though many of his sigils were simply written on card and "held to his forehead while muttering some form of incantation, leading to instant results" (Hawkins 1996, 103).

After Spare's death Kenneth Grant and Robert Ansell, among others, kept his reputation alive in both artistic circles and among occultists; Grant was also involved in preserving the legacy of Aleister Crowley (Evans 2004, 248). Spare's radical vision was taken up and extended in the late 1970s by the Illuminates of Thanateros (IOT), a group of magicians working in first in London and later in Leeds, chief among whom were Peter Carroll and Ray Sherwin. The title of this innovative magical group combined the Freudian sexual and death instincts, and the concept of an enlightened inner circle, like the Bavarian Illuminati. Carroll's *Liber Null* (1978), which uses Spare's language of Zos and Kia, was an early *grimoire* heralding this new magical practice (Sutcliffe 1996, 127–128). *Liber Null* was translated into German by Frater U.D., who "celebrated his first Chaos-Mass with Carroll in 1985" (Hawkins 1996, 34). Despite the sense of an initiatory fraternity inherent in "illuminates," Chaos magic was light-hearted and anti-elitist, with a notably eclectic range of sources. Phil Hine notes that Robert Anton Wilson's transmission of Discordianism was an important early influence, as was the

development of chaos theory in the sciences. There is also a strong connection between Chaos magic and fiction-based religions like Discordianism and the Church of All Worlds, in that Hine argues that “Chaos magic borrowed freely from Science Fiction ... Chaos magic is an approach that enables the individual to use anything that s/he thinks is suitable as a temporary belief or symbol system ... What matter is the results you get, not the ‘authenticity’ of the system you use” (Hine 1992–1997, 10).

Urban argues that Chaos Magic is ultimately postmodern and deconstructive, drawing inspiration from chaos theory and quantum physics, and Peter Carroll’s vision goes beyond any previously imagined liberation; beyond political, sexual, personal and all other forms of freedom to what he calls “the transgression of reality itself” (Urban 2006, 239). In this aim Chaos magic and Discordianism are as one; Discordian theology challenges the nature of reality as generally perceived, and its elevation of Eris to the position of supreme deity proposes that undifferentiated chaos is the underlying reality of the universe. Thus both Chaos Magic and Discordianism are monistic systems in which all binaries dissolve into cosmic unity. Interestingly, this dovetails well with the Zen-like aspects of Discordianism, in that in Mahayana Buddhism there is a tendency to argue that *nirvana* and *samsara* are one; that reality is undifferentiated. When *satori* is experienced, one can, as the Zen master Dogen (1200–1253) stated, “simply understand that birth and death is itself *nirvana*, there is nothing to reject as birth and death, nothing to seek as *nirvana*” (Lamb 2001, 177).

Genesis P-Orridge, Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth, and Discordian Magic

Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY) is an avant-garde magical group founded in 1981 by a group of underground artists and musicians, the most prominent of whom is Genesis P-Orridge (b. Neil Megson, 1950), a member of British performance art band Throbbing Gristle. Genesis P-Orridge identified as a Pagan in the 1970s and founded the Psychick TV in 1979 with ex-Throbbing Gristle members Peter Christopherson and Cossey Fanni Tutti, and new recruit, Geoff Rushton. The band’s influences included Situationist philosophy, the novelist William Burroughs (whom P-Orridge befriended), science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, and the Marquis de Sade. Psychick TV was conceived as the “mouthpiece for its own quasi-religious group” TOPY (All Media Guide 2001, 415). TOPY’s conception of “majick” was derived partly from P-Orridge’s “interest in body modification and extreme experiences” and partly from Austin Osman Spare (Greer 2004, 474). P-Orridge’s worldview is broadly Discordian in orientation, in that he has affirmed the

existence of a conspiracy, which he identified with capitalism, the class system and Christianity:

The status quo quite clearly is a feudal system. It perpetrates monotheism because it suits those in power. If you have a system where there is one almighty, all-seeing, angry God, and you have a tyrant who's a king or a president or whatever title they give themselves, who is also all-seeing, all-powerful and angry, then all aspects of authority use the concept of punishment as the motive for agreeing with them or serving them... We build the same system with technology that we have with the Judeo-Christian monotheistic system. It starts off at the bottom apparently being about service, manufacture, and consuming, and it goes to the top where it's about annihilation. It's exactly the same system. (Vale and Sulak 2001, 122–123)

TOPY employed bizarre spelling conventions and terminology (possibly a nod to the dyslexic Spare) to overcome convention and conformism, and promoted majick as a liberation that uses “implicit powers of thee human brain (neuromancy) linked with guiltless sexuality focused through thee will structure (sigils)” (Greer 2004, 474).

P-Orridge was a seminal contributor to rave culture and electronic music in general, and the term “acid house” is attributed to him. TOPY are at the forefront of Technopaganism and online occult activity. Christopher Partridge has identified TOPY as the most significant occult community operating online. The network imagery of the Internet and the World Wide Web are used to describe the members of TOPY, who are all equals (as opposed to the hierarchical structures of traditional magical bodies), share information. Partridge says that “as an occultural community, TOPY functions as a conduit for and a disseminator of gnosis. This is important, for although TOPY emphasises discipline and the ending of personal laziness, it eschews dogma and regulations, and encourages detraditionalized, eclectic, occult spirituality” (Partridge 2005, 160). Precisely the same could be said of online Discordian cabals. Further, the interconnectedness of the Internet resonates with the Pagan assertion that the earth (or the universe) is sentient and humans are carriers of consciousness. It is intriguing how members of TOPY on occasion employ terminology reminiscent of the system of G.I. Gurdjieff (for example, Partridge quotes “Our aim is wakefulness, our enemy is Dreamless Sleep” [2005, 160], P-Orridge has said “that’s probably the real reason we’re here—to build souls” [Vale and Sulak 2001, 127], and the torturous spelling employed recalls the complex neologisms of Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* [1950]), but as Mistelberger (2010) has demonstrated, there are close resemblances (and perhaps causal relations, though these are harder

to establish) between many systems of self-realization of the twentieth century, and in particular between those of Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley.

Finally, in his life Genesis P-Orridge has overcome what may be regarded as fundamental conditions. He has spoken frequently of the power of improvisation, imagination and creativity in challenging concepts of “truth,” and particularly to explode binary oppositions like either/or, good/bad and black/white. His approach to these issues is particularly Discordian; recalling Malaclypse the Younger (discussed above), in an interview he states “One of the things I realized a long time ago is that everything everybody says is true” (Vale and Sulak 2001, 124). His spiritual quest has involved Wicca, Thelemic magick, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and initiation as a priest of the Yoruba trickster deity Eshu. In recent years he has been best known for a complex, long-term artistic and spiritual project in which he has been transformed into his late second wife, Jacqueline Breyer (known first as Miss Jacqui and later as Lady Jaye), whom he met in 1993. The project is called Pandrogeny. As a ten-year anniversary present on Valentine’s Day 2003 they received “matching sets of breast implants from Dr Daniel Baker, a well-known Upper East Side cosmetic surgeon. Eye and nose jobs followed, and in subsequent years the two would receive, altogether, \$200,000 worth of cheek and chin implants, lip plumping, liposuction, a tattooed beauty mark, and hormone therapy. They dressed in identical outfits. Each mimicked the other’s mannerisms” (Orden 2009). Breyer died of cancer in 2007, but P-Orridge believes she is now within him, and that their joint art project facilitated a merging of their identities, such that Lady Jaye lives on past the demise of her body. In his life and art, which is expressed through the site of his body, P-Orridge has achieved the transcendence of male and female of which Spare wrote, he has erased the twin illusions of the Eristic and Aneristic principles, and he has completed the erasure of his false personality through the absolute abandonment of the binary divisions. He explains his position as follows:

Either/Or, Good/Bad, Male/Female, and Physical/Non-Physical... Then the whole idea intruded, of “as above, so below; the smallest is the same as the largest”—a very ancient idea. And it fits: everything is a mirror to everything else, no matter how small you get, no matter how large you get—its all absolutely and uncannily a mirror of itself. If that’s the case, then it’s one huge or minute non-physical reflection of itself. Which means we aren’t really important and we don’t really exist in the true sense of the word. We are merely blessed with a *sense* of existence! (Vale and Sulak 2001: 124)

This description of a spiritual realization calls to mind the fractals of the Mandelbrot Set, which were used by scientists to explain Chaos theory to

non-scientists, which when split are discovered to be yet smaller versions of the whole. It also echoes the interconnectedness of the cyber community, which crosses boundaries of physical space and time, facilitates existence outside the limits of the body (in Second Life and other virtual reality sites), and promises digital immortality, the uploading of human selves into circuitry, in the no-too-distant future.

Conclusion: Fiction-based religion and magic

The Discordian universe resembles a magical universe, a Pagan universe, and a Buddhist universe, but it is not Pagan, magical or Buddhist in ways that are immediately apparent. Discordians are wary of affirming that Eris is “real” or “true” in theological terms (i.e., as a Christian or Muslim would affirm that his or her God is real). Yet Eris underlies the universe; she is the universe, in that chaos is the matrix from which all is born. In terms of magic, there is little evidence that Discordians practise magic in formal ways, though the world of the *Illuminatus! Trilogy*, filled with talking porpoises and alien gods, sea monsters and strange coincidences, is definitely magical. Similarly, the Buddhist qualities of Discordianism are apparent, yet Buddhism is treated in a humorous and irreverent fashion; Operation Mindfuck aims at guerrilla enlightenment, but its tactics are far from austere Zen monastic discipline. Sri Syadasti, one of the five Discordian Apostles, has a name that means, according to *Principia Discordia*, “all affirmations are true in some sense, false in some sense, meaningless in some sense, true and false in some sense, true and meaningless in some sense, false and meaningless in some sense, and true and false and meaningless in some sense” (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 39–40). The substitution of “realities” for “affirmations” turns this statement into an encapsulation of the Discordian view of life, the universe and everything.

Religion and magic have been transformed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. When Aleister Crowley warned students of the occult not to attribute “objective reality or philosophic validity” to the entities they summoned, evoked and invoked, and celebrated the power of sex magic, he was being innovative, shocking and unconventional. Today, as Henrik Bogdan notes, “the fascination with sex can in fact be seen as an intrinsic part of modern and late modern Western culture” (Bogdan 2009, 82–83). As noted above, for Discordians philosophy is “a malleable art” (Malaclypse the Younger 1994, 61). Religions and spiritual teachings based on fiction, where the actual existence of the deities or supernatural beings is not an issue, have proliferated; Jediism, the Otherkin, Matrixism and a host of others (Kirby 2009, 141–154). What was controversial in Crowley’s lifetime is now

mainstream. Chaos magicians drew inspiration from *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* as much as from the iconoclastic magical writings of Austin Osman Spare, and Genesis P-Orridge and Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth wedded Paganism and Chaos magic to industrial music, rave culture and the Internet, in an antinomian synthesis. Like Discordianism, TOPY as a majickal order rejected all limitations: “Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth’s perception of life and its sexuality is limitless, it cannot be fixed into any gender, religion, or any other grouping but its own. Nothing is sacred in thee Temple, nothing is disregarded, ignored or ridiculed, only questioned, never doubted” (Barker 1989, 213).

Perhaps the greatest change that unites Discordians and Chaotes has been the acceptance in the West of the monistic model of the cosmos, which is generally understood to be Eastern in origin. Chaos magic and Discordianism, in their insistence that binary oppositions are illusory (whether those oppositions are male/female, order/disorder, serious/humorous), affirm the oneness of everything. Thus it is actually irrelevant to Discordians whether they are a religion, or whether they engage in magical practices (as, indeed, it is irrelevant whether they believe in the religion, or adopt a Discordian identity as a joke). Chaos magicians are similarly uninterested in whether deities invoked exist, or whether formal rituals are performed. Life is the site of magical transformation, expressed primarily through the medium of the body and sexuality. In the person of Genesis P-Orridge, life, magic, art, sexuality and Paganism are merged. His existence is testimony of all these inter-related modes of being and doing. This resonates deeply with Discordianism, in which it is sufficient to be, and to know that in being, one participates in the eternal, undifferentiated Chaos that is Eris.

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