

The Magickal Lantern:  
Transcendental Cinema as the Fifth Tool of Occult Ritual

Raymond Salvatore Harmon

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Illumination is the cornerstone metaphor for the advanced state of human conscious. In any mystical tradition the state of expanded awareness of the human mind is compared to enlightenment. Even the Luciferian tradition of Christian theology contemporizes the angel Samael as the bringer of light or "lucifer."

This comparison between knowledge and light, this parallel that is drawn in all cultural models stands as a testament to the formation of life and its dependence on the sun's light waves as a provider of the necessary energy to support all living existence. Within the framework of occult tradition one finds numerous references to light as knowledge, and it is necessary to consider that light itself plays an important role in the development of the human mind beyond the physical form. The primary text of Kabalistic tradition is the Zohar, or Book of Light. Many of the tenants of Judean mystical understanding originate within this text and it is not the first in the lineage of the tradition of light.

The use of light in ritual has until now been mainly concerned with providing an atmospheric condition for the environment of the ritual. Via various means this theatic tool is often employed to alter the perceived nature of a given environment or experience. The play of shadows, isolation and delivery of light in a cathedral, grove, or ancient temple sets the mood and alters the normal state of the mind.

In considering the delivery of light as medium for illumination one must approach it as scientifically as possible. Isolating causes and effects based on content, environment, staging, sound conditions and overall form. By creating a specific shape to the overall delivery of light to the participant one can achieve the maximum result in reordering the participants perceptual experiences.

The ancient model for light delivery within the framework of initiatory ritual began in the Grecian mysteries of the ancient world. In the west theatrical tools for ritual performance developed over a period from the ancient Mediterranean through the middle-ages on to contemporary religious models like the catholic mass. Within this framework lighting is a generalized effect, its delivery more closely associated with the staging and sound effects of the environment. But light (or its lack thereof) is in many ways the primary source of the temperament and mood of a given ritual. Even today the practitioner of any spiritual self-exploration uses lighting to set the mood, be it candles, lamps, or more sophisticated lighting effects.

To the mind of the ancient and pre renaissance initiate the theatrical model of ritual performance presented a very distinct and realistic portrayal of specifically chosen story forms from within their religious pantheon. Often in conjunction with some mind-altering substance (alcohol, herbs, etc) the initiate was presented with what appeared to be visions of the mythological representations of their then contemporary deities. In fact a

theatrical staging of such events was occurring, providing a backdrop for the initiates passage through the levels of the experience. Although this early thetic model of ritual form has evolved in the past several thousand years, often in conjunction with architectural advances in the presentation of the religious environment, its basic structure is rooted in a theatrical stage play form.

The mind of the modern individual experiencing the 21st century is much more complex and able to handle a much wider and higher resolution area of information than that of its forbearers. The advent of visual effects in film and constant exposure to incoming data from various media has pushed the mind of the average person beyond its ability to be enveloped in the illusion and effect of the staged ritual. Suspension of disbelief is a much harder thing to come by in an advancing information based society.

Cinema as a model of human expression both artistically and scientifically has presented a form with the maximum of integration with the contemporary human mind. It's form a play of light, illusion of motion, reproductions of sound, gives the filmmaker an expansive palette with which to approach the conscious and subconscious mind of the viewer.

The mind is not only receptive to the illusion that is cinema, but the modern human mind actually works with the principals of cinema (frame rate, cut editing, point of view) to an astounding degree. The human mind often filters out data it deems unnecessary (excessive reverb in a sound environment will be reduced by the mind regardless of the input sound at the ear level; a quick movement of the head will result in the mind visually holding a frame of the last image the eye saw before movement so as not to cause disorientation during the quick movement.) Between the mind's self-editing process and the flicker rate of a cinematic experience we find a tool in the search for a comparative experience for the contemporary initiate.

From its inception cinema has dealt with the illusion of motion and the representation of the fantastical within the ordinary. The first men to present cinema to the public were spiritualists and stage mediums whose utilization of technological breakthroughs in order to heighten there performances created the original term "magic lantern."

But merely representing what seem to be magical, miraculous or illuminating events will not push the contemporary initiate into a state of advanced spiritual awareness. Due to the level of sophistication we have developed in regards to filtering media in our environment we now regard such illusions as HAVING to be created by some technology, for what other means could there be?

So in order to present the initiate with a visual sensory input model that is comparable both to the level and degree of the contemporary mind's abilities we must challenge its actual perceptions of the real. Not by presenting a fictionalized version of the real (as the initiate will simply regard this as illusion and trickery) but by representing the visual field with an evolving abstract pattern of light. One which, due to its lack of representational form, allows the mind to project its own concepts onto the evolving abstractions.

Brion Gysin, contemporary of William Burroughs, created a device that worked within the principles of light as actively used in ritual meditation. The Dream Machine was a very

simple device using a record player, sheet of paper with holes and light bulb in order to created projected patterns of evolving light in a room. (The flicker rate of the light dependant on the speed of the turntable and the brightness of the lamp.) Though simple in design the Dream Machine represents the second chain of evolution in the development of the Transcendental Cinema.

Modern video technology represents a much more sophisticated variable for use in the creation of complex abstract patterns than a simple light machine. In a multiple projector environment the illusion of depth can be achieved, and with a very fine degree of control over color, form, brightness and flicker rate. Once we have approached the mind with a visual input stream beyond the ordinary we can tune this stream to the needs of a given ritual. Color, flicker rate, form, speed all can be used in order to maximize the minds wave-forms and thought patterns toward a specified ritual goal. When used in conjunction with subliminal content, isotonic audio patterns, and surround sound environments the encompassing transcendental cinematic experience becomes the modern equal to the ancient initiatory mysteries.

Transcendental cinema is the use of film or video to induce a state of the conscious mind beyond that of the ordinary. To create a cinematic experience utilizing complex content manipulated in order to achieve specific states of mental awareness. Using the sensory inputs access to the subconscious mind in order to push the participant away from the sense of self, and toward a sense of the beyond.

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Within the realm of mystical traditions (from a contemporary perspective) technology is often shunned. A yearning tends to exist in the average practitioner for a time ¶before technology¶ and a returning to what is perceived as a more pure and straight forward period in humanities ¶spiritual past.

This perception of the past is illusory. The practitioners of the spiritual methodologies of the past relied on the most complex technologies available to them. From astounding knowledge of psychochemical structures to technological advancements in architecture, language, mathematics, and altered states of the human mind. The priests, shamans, initiates and participants of any spiritual belief system have relied for countless ages on whatever technology had to offer for the presentation and exploration of the spiritual self, whether group or individual.

Aleister Crowley's Rites of Eleusis represented a breakthrough in theatrical forms of improvisation and an advancement of the form of the Greek Mystery into 20th century avant-garde theater. Parallelled in Artaud, Gombrowicz, Ionesco, and decades ahead of its time it is now a theatrical form that is a century old.

If the modern magickian or spiritual initiate seeks the farthest path away from the self, and is indeed looking to achieve illumination, the use of all the available knowledge and tools of the contemporary world need to be utilized. Only when we are prepared to travel the furthest away from ¶here¶ will we be able to begin our journey.

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Abandonment of the traditional model of ritual theater is not necessary in order to utilize transcendental cinema within a given working. The two forms, theatheric and cinematic can be brought together to create a set and setting that is ideal for the practice of ritual, in either group or individual workings.

The placement of projected light in an environment should be based on the needs of the participants in the ritual in terms of exposure to that light. Facing into the reflection of projected light from a wall, screen, or other surface will most often allow for the sense of envelopment in a films visual field. When the cinematic light is being ‘performed’ as part of the ritual it is often best to create a setup that allows for the ‘confinement’ of the projected light. Allowing the light to be the receptacle for both the projected energies of the participants and the evoked energies of the ritual. Thus the use of transcendental cinema as the Magickal Lantern within the context of the traditional ritual can bring about an astounding spiritual experience. Amplifying the rituals power and creating an all encompassing setting for the ritual to take place within.

Yet beyond its role within the context of the traditional ritual the use of transcendental cinema as a tool for the expansion and exploration of the human mind in relation to the beyond is in itself independent. Just as cinema no longer has need for the trappings of theater the Magickal Lantern of Transcendental Cinema will evolve into its own singular form of experiential ritual archetype. Once it has shed its earlier form it will be more capable of delivering the mind of mankind to the threshold of the beyond and to open the doors of perception to the light of truth.

Obviam lux Lucis.

Raymond Salvatore Harmon  
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[raymondharmon.com](http://raymondharmon.com)