

RESTRICTED

INTERFACING WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD: THE OUIJA BOARD AND PLAYFUL OCCULTISM

Dr Jeff Howard

Dark Economies: Haunted Modernities

Thursday July 17 11:15-12:45

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- I. Brief History of the Ouija Board
- II. Ouija Board as Toy or Game
- III. Ouija Board as Interface
- IV. History of the Interface
- V. Interfacing with the Spirit World
- VI. A Profusion of Spirit Voices

DR. JEFF HOWARD

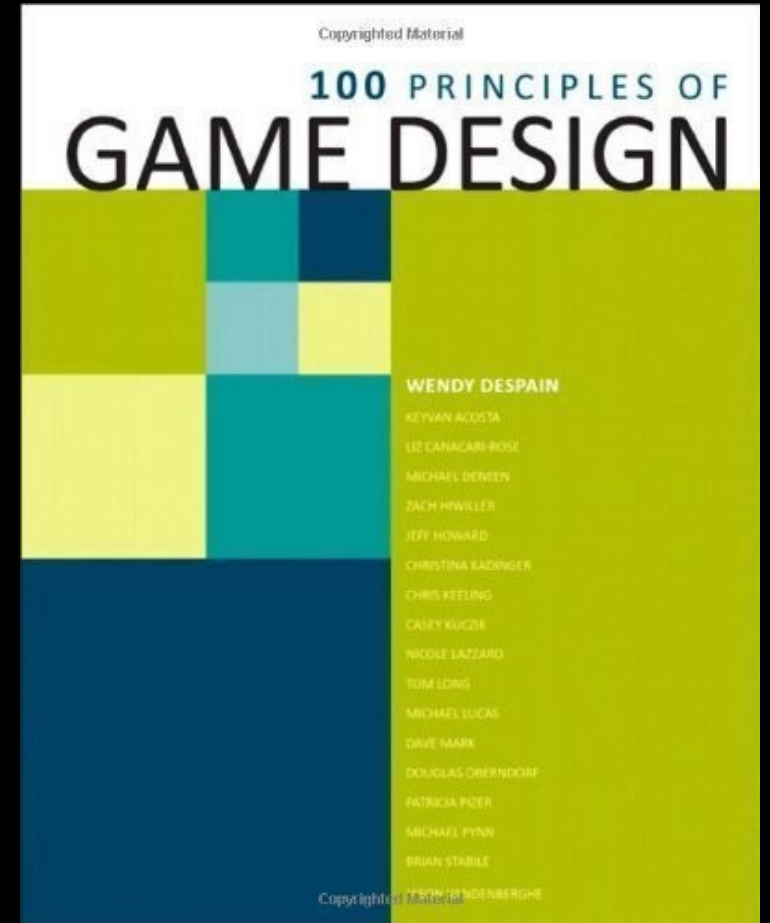
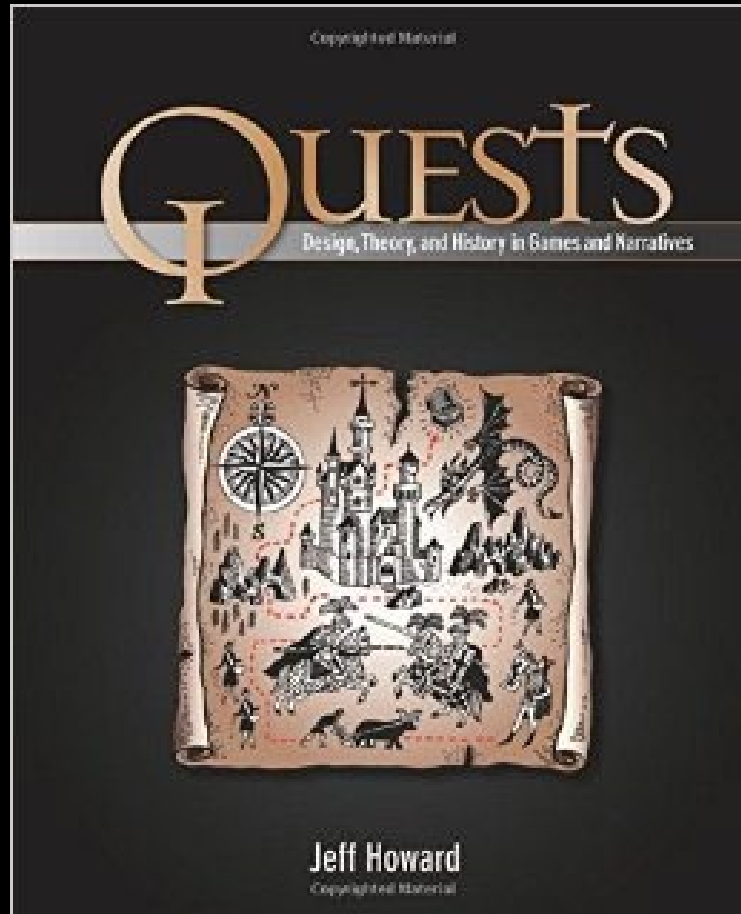
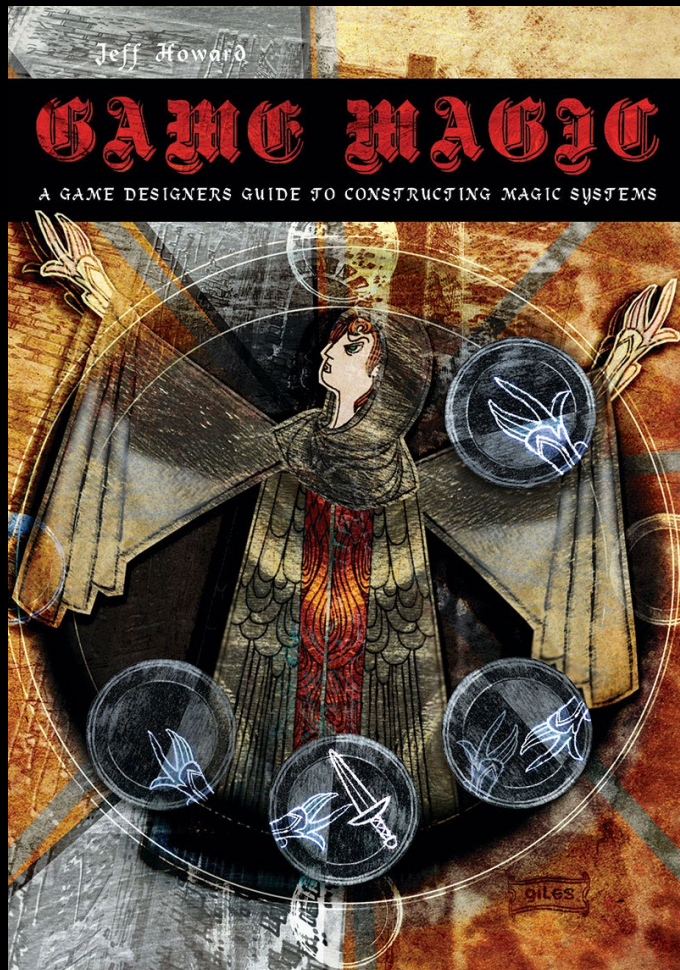
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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GAMES AND OCCULTURE

Howard has presented on games and the occult at a variety of international conferences, including Berlin Occulture, Trans-States, and ESSWE9. Howard studies Sabbatic Craft at the intersection of the Left Hand Path and the Typhonian current. Through his scholarship and creative practice, Howard is an ambassador for the power of play as a transformative and transcendent practice.



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CORE TEAM MEMBER: APOCALYPSE STUDIOS

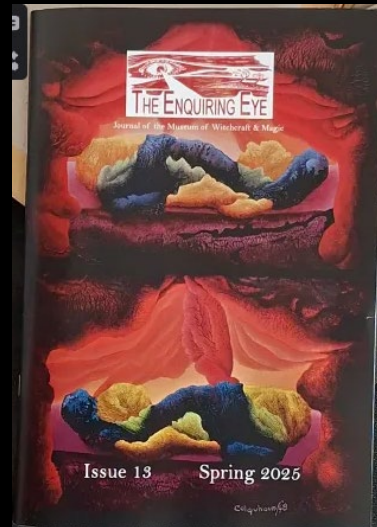
TAROT SKILL SYSTEM
OVERVIEW

RECENT OCCULT PUBLICATIONS ON ANDREW CHUMBLEY AND KENNETH GRANT; AND *REVENANT* SPECIAL ISSUE



NEW RESEARCH ARTICLE
Dr. Jeff Howard and Steve Patterson
To Reveal the Hidden Kingdom of Eld: Andrew Chumbley, the Cultus Sabbati, and Imaginal Space in Cornwall

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ISSUE 12: THE OCCULT – EDITED BY JEFF HOWARD AND SIMON POOLE



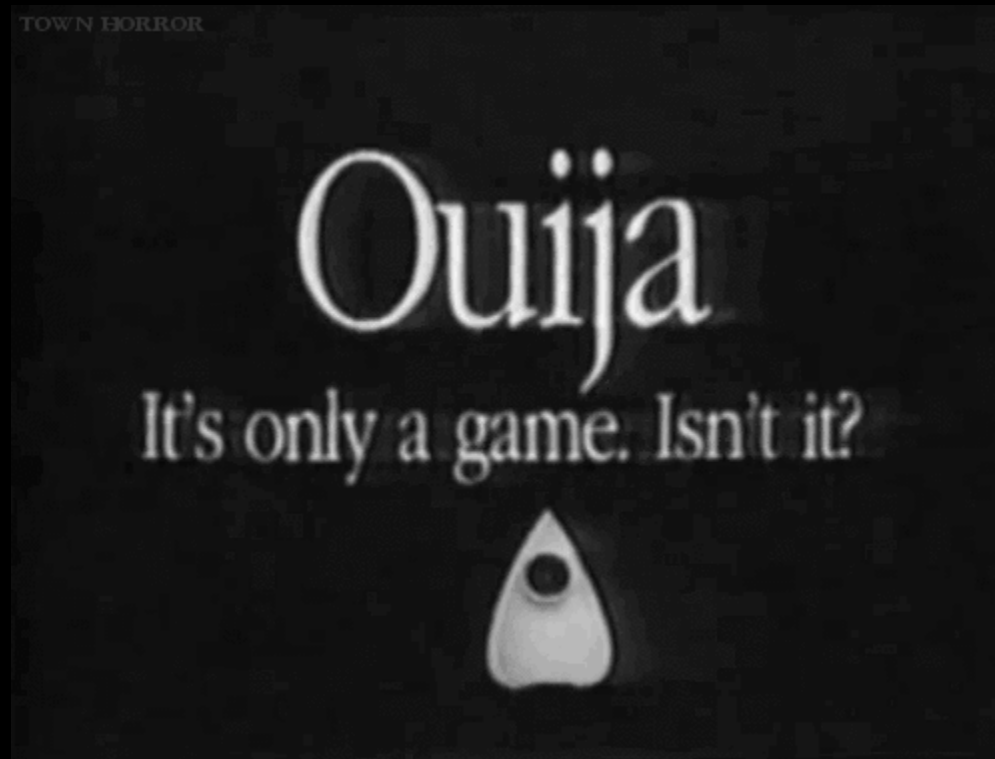
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"It's only a game— isn't it?"



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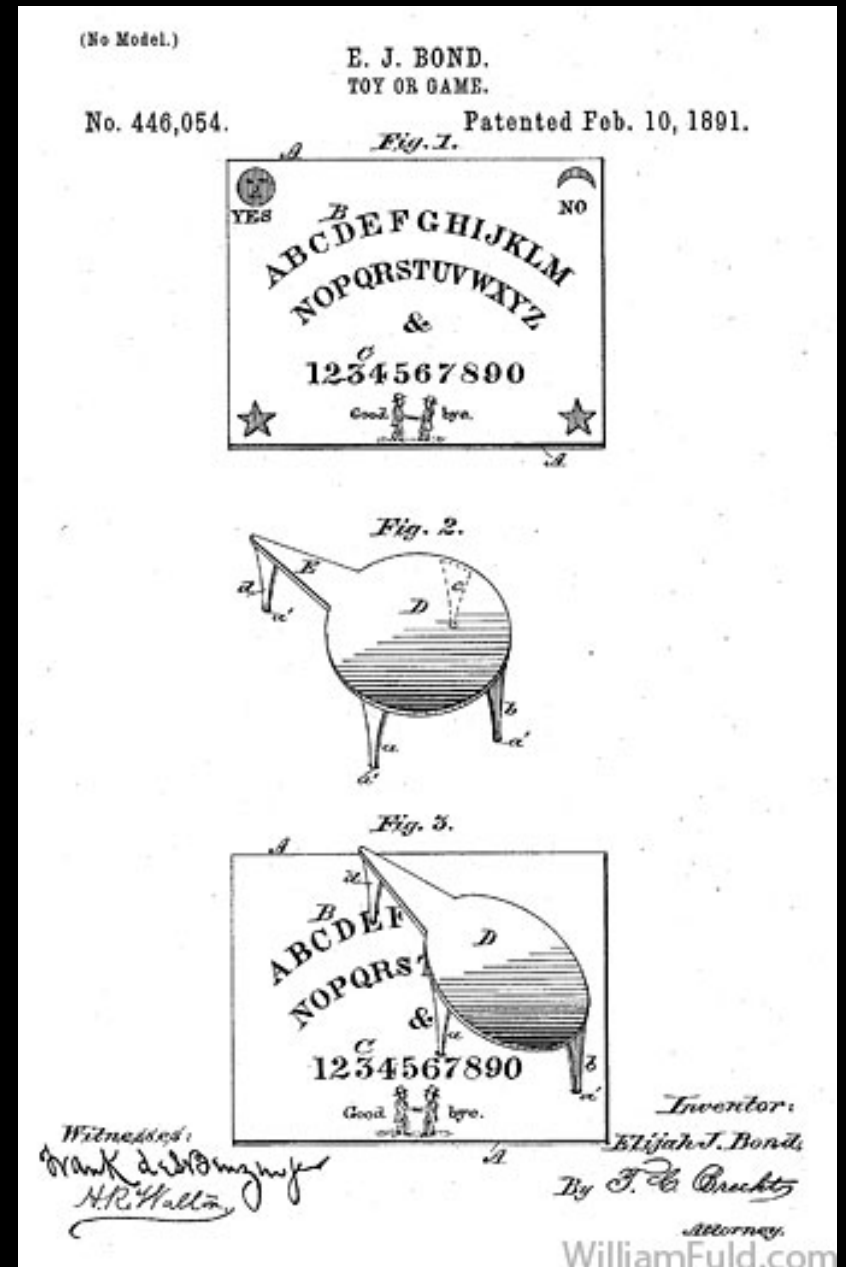


BUT IS IT A GAME AT ALL?

- No win state
- No rules
- No conflict
- Does not fit Jesper Juul's definitional framework for a game
- Then again, games are notoriously elusive to define
- Wittgenstein, the most famous logical positivist, could not define them (and built his entire theory of language around not being able to define them)

SO IS IT A TOY INSTEAD?

- AN OBJECT THAT IS FUN TO PLAY WITH (SCHELL'S LENS OF THE TOY)
- NOTE THE CAPTION "TOY OR GAME" (SO THE OBJECT'S STATUS IS AMBIGUOUS FROM ITS INCEPTION)
- ORIGINALLY MANUFACTURED BY THE KENNARD NOVELTY COMPANY



Elijah Bond's original patent (1891)

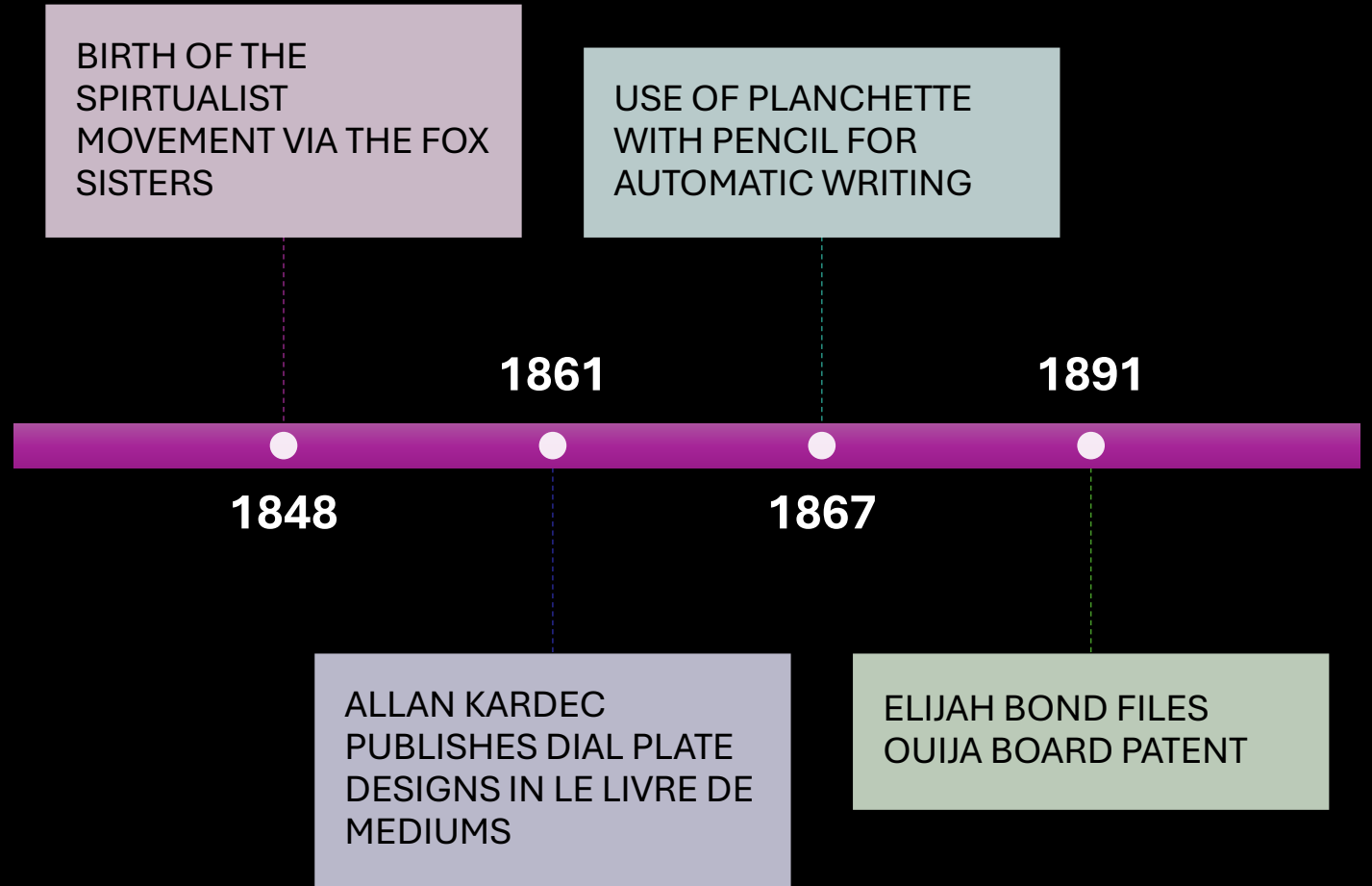
- *“My invention relates to improvements in **toys** or **games**, which I designate as an “Ouija or Egyptian luck-board;” and the objects of the invention are to produce a **toy or game** by which two or more persons can **amuse themselves** by **asking questions** of any kind and **having them answered** by the device used and operated by the touch of hand, so that the answers are designated by letters on the board. The invention consists of a board suitable thickness, having the letters of the alphabet printed, painted, engraved, or affixed upon it in any suitable manner, but flush with the surface, and also the numerals from 1-0, inclusive as well as other configurations, and in conjunction therewith of a peculiarly—shaped table having legs and a pointer, and said table operated by the hand when placed upon said board, all of which will be more fully described hereinafter, and specifically pointed out in the claims, reference being had to the accompanying drawings and the letters marked thereon.”*



The Ouija board starts as a talking board

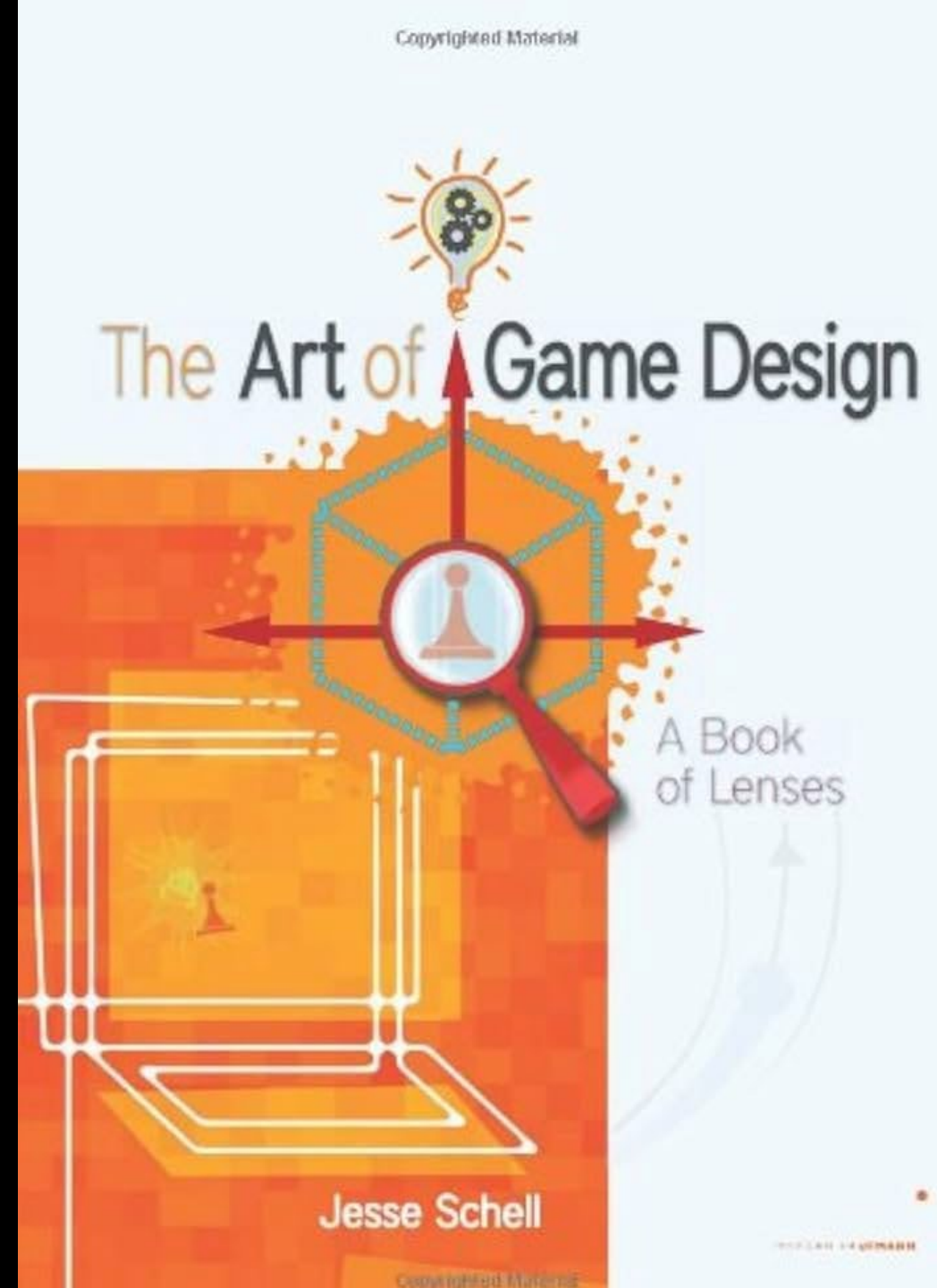
- One of several devices (see *Museum of the Talking Board*)
- Descended from table-tilting
- Part of the spiritualist movement

A OUIJA BOARD TIMELINE



MORE A TOY THAN A GAME

- SCHELL “A TOY IS AN OBJECT YOU PLAY WITH” (36)
- “A GOOD TOY IS AN OBJECT THAT IS FUN TO PLAY WITH” (36)
- OUIJA WAS PUBLISHED BY THE KENNARD NOVELTY COMPANY (LED EVENTUALLY BY WILLIAM FULD), WHICH MADE BOTH GAMES AND TOYS



OR, A PART OF A GAME: AN INTERFACE

See Jesse Schell's chapter on
Interface from *The Art of
Game Design*



BOARD AND PLANCHETTE AS INTERFACE

- CHANNELS (26 LETTERS, 10 NUMBERS, YES, NO, GOODBYE)
- DIMENSIONS
 - X, Y COORDINATES
 - PLANCHETTE TIP CAN POINT TO AN X, Y COORDINATE
 - OR PLANCHETTE WINDOW CAN HIGHLIGHT/ENCIRCLE A LETTER/NUMBER/



PLANCHETTE =
SECOND ORDER
MOTION &
JUICINESS (SCHELL)



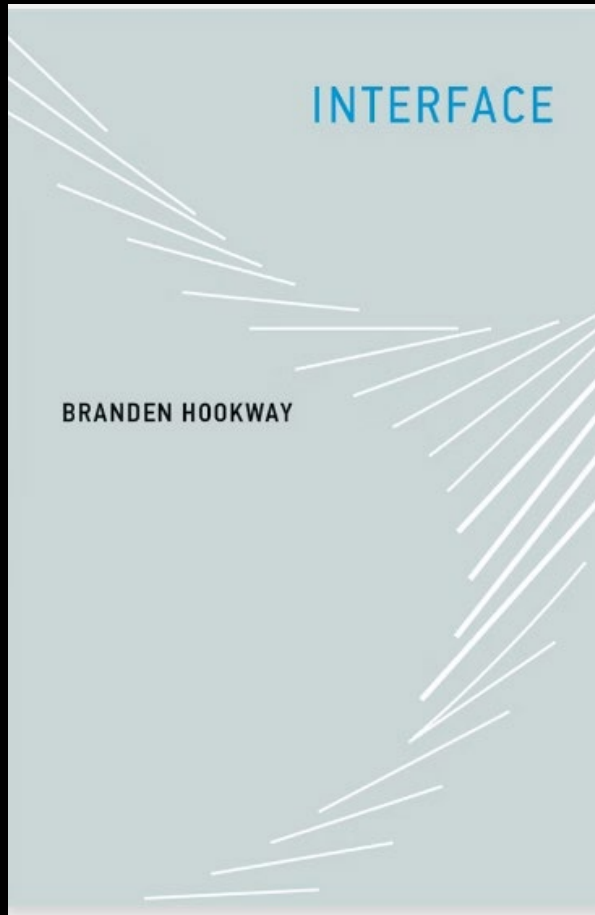
William Fuld
Design Patent No. 56,001
August 10th 1920



This talk starts here (*The 7th Guest*)



INTERFACE



“The word interface was coined in the nineteenth century by the engineer James Thomson in his influential work on fluid dynamics. It denoted a **dynamic boundary condition describing fluidity** according to its separation of one distinct fluid body from another.” Branden Hookway

“In effect, the emergence of the sciences of hydrodynamics and thermodynamics in the nineteenth century brought with it the positing of a **boundary condition as requisite to the very possibility of the fluid as a state of being**, and to that set of properties and behaviors collected under the concept of fluidity.” Branden Hookway

INTERFACE BOTH SEPARATES AND CONJOINS

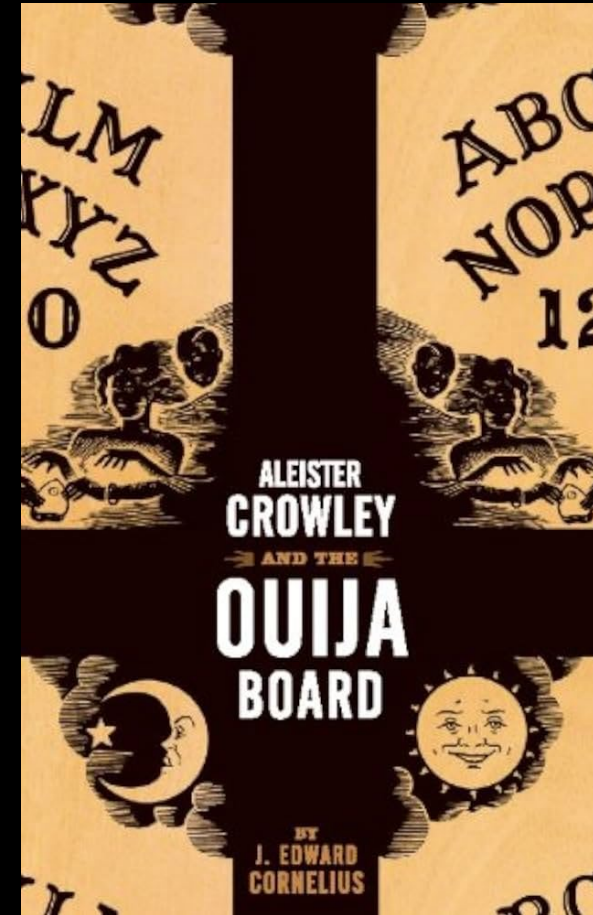
- A **BORDER** BUT ALSO A **CONNECTING LAYER** (BETWEEN AREAS OF FLUID OR HEAT)
- A **LIMINAL SPACE**, WHOSE PURPOSE IS OFTEN TO BE TRANSPARENT
- BUT SOMETIMES ALSO TO BE VISIBLE, READABLE

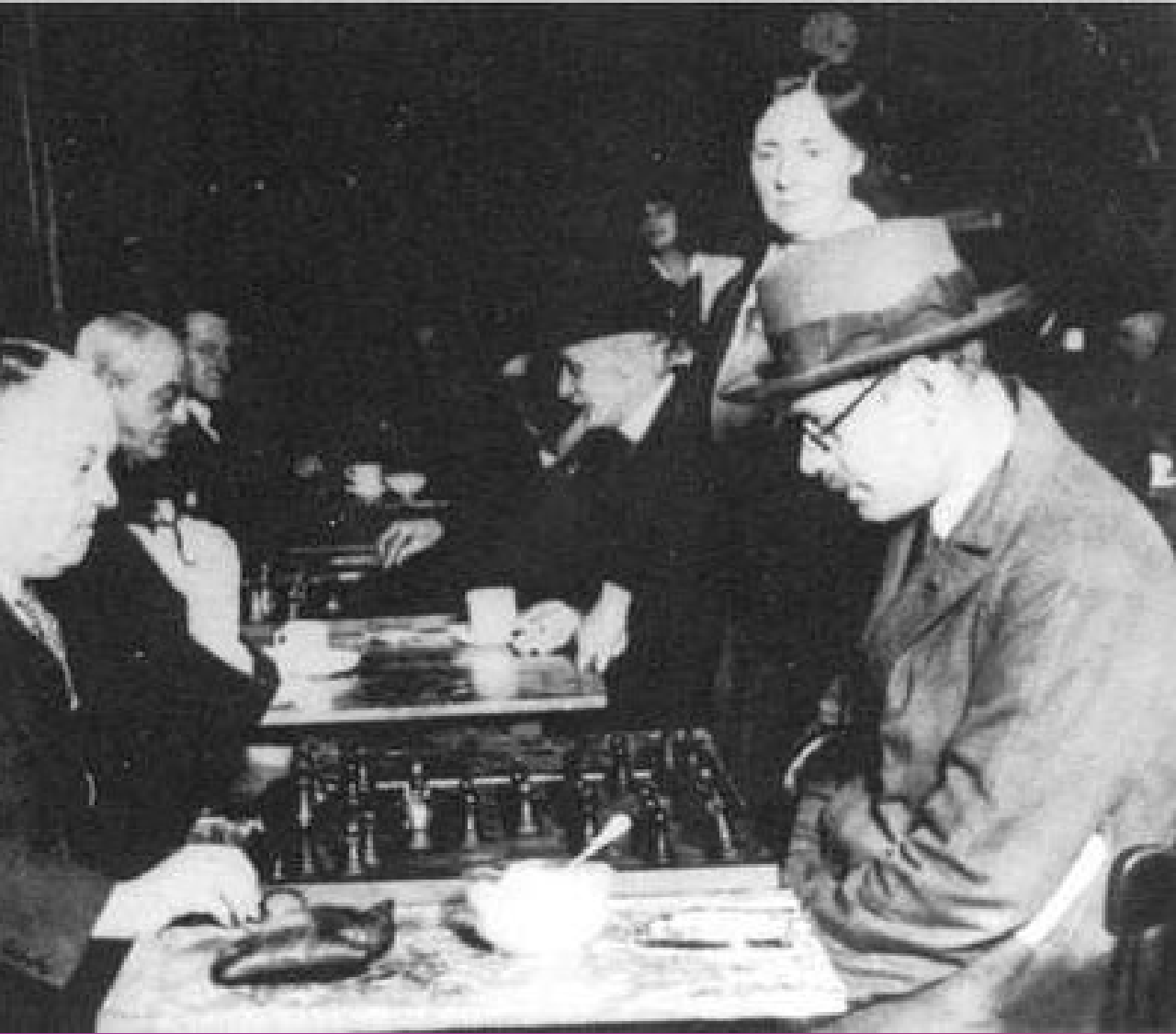
OUIJA IS THEREFORE ALSO AN INTERFACE OR BORDER ZONE BETWEEN VARIOUS BINARY OPPOSITIONS

- PLAYFUL AND SERIOUS OCCULTISM/SPIRITUALISM
- THE **PHYSICAL** AND THE **SPIRITUAL** WORLD

THE OUIJA BOARD AS INTERFACE BETWEEN MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL, CEREMONIAL MAGICK AND POPULAR CULTURE

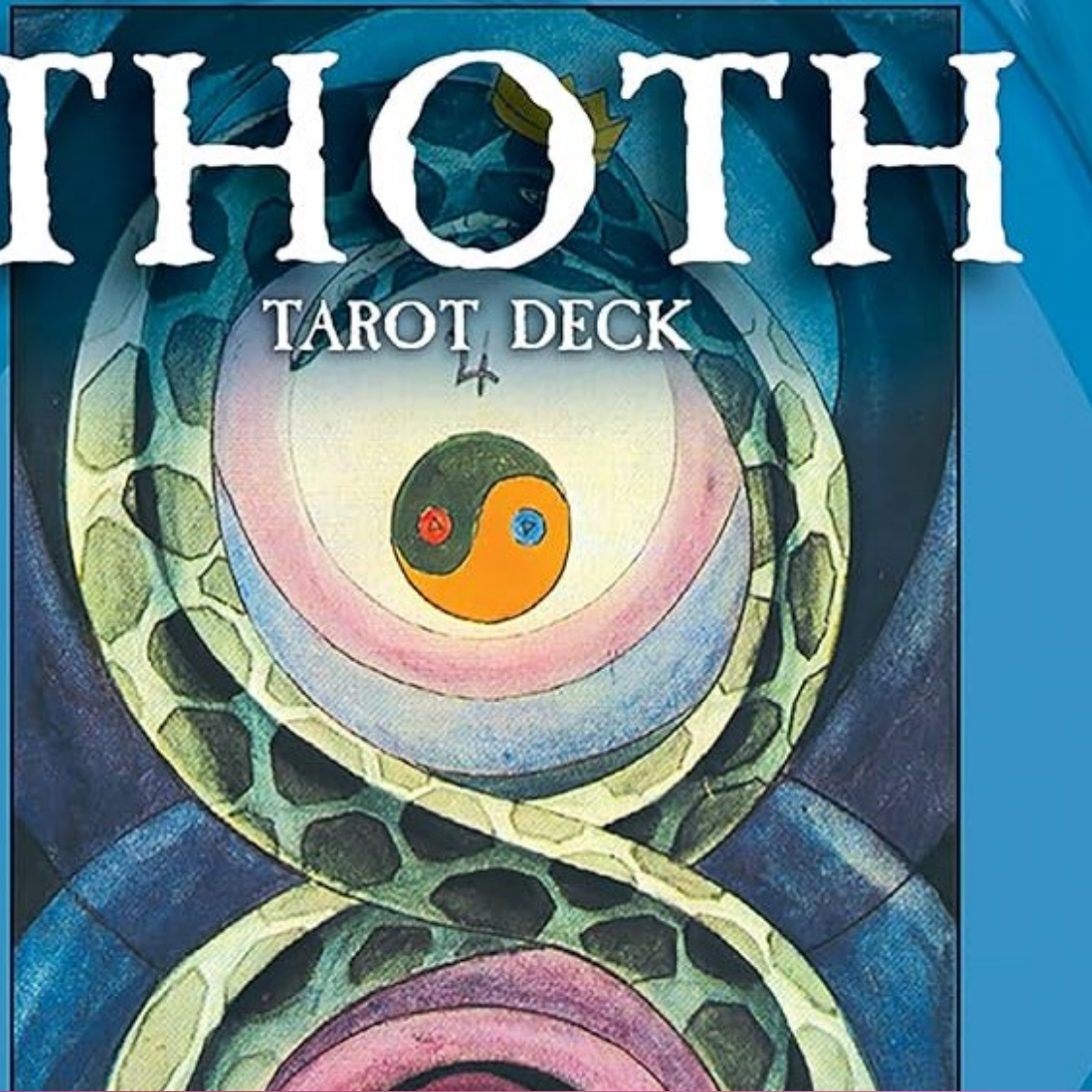
The Ouija Board Can't
Connect Us to Paranormal
Forces—but It Can Tell Us a
Lot About Psychology, Grief
and Uncertainty





THOTH

TAROT DECK



Crowley and Playful Occultism

- In a 1917 article in the newspaper *The International* collected in *The Equinox of the Gods* and quoted by J Edward Cornelius, Crowley wrote “Suppose a perfect stranger came into your office and proceeded to give orders to your staff. Suppose a strange woman walked into your drawing room and insisted on being hostess. You would be troubled by this. Yet, people sit down and offer the use of their brains and hands (which are, after all, more important than offices and drawing rooms) to any stray intelligence that may be wandering about. People use the Ouija Board without taking the slightest precautions.” (Crowley 1917, quoted in Cornelius).

- MANY POPULAR (OR BORDERLINE POPULAR) OUIJA ARTICLES BEG THE QUESTION OF THE OUIJA BOARD'S PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGINS
- A FAIR NUMBER OF POPULAR BOOKS, ESPECIALLY FROM THE 80'S, CONDEMN OUIJA BOARDS AS "A GATEWAY TO THE OCCULT"
- WOULD IT NOT BE MORE ACCURATE AND NUANCED TO SAY THAT THE OUIJA BOARD FUNCTIONS AS A SERIOUS SPIRITUAL TOOL PRECISELY BECAUSE ITS MARKETING INSISTS THAT IT IS "ONLY A GAME?" OPENS A MIDDLE SPACE THROUGH WHICH AUTHENTIC INTIMATIONS OF THE SPIRIT CAN FLOW. THIS IS THE SPACE OF PLAYFUL OCCULTISM

TO EMBRACE SPIRITUALISTIC CONTEXT IS TO REACH BEYOND

- POSTMODERNISM, MODERNISM, & ITS ASSOCIATED PSYCHOLOGIZING AND/OR LINGUISTIC EXPLANATIONS
- TO OPEN THE GENUINE POSSIBILITY OF THE SPIRIT WORLD
- PLAY COMES FROM THE BOARD AS AN INTERFACE BETWEEN THE MATERIAL WORLD AND THE SPIRIT WORLD
- POSSIBILITIES OF SPIRIT CONTACT ARE BEST OPENED UP WHEN LEAST INSISTED UPON OR FORCED (“IT’S ONLY A GAME, ISN’T IT?”)

AI is a poor substitute for spiritualism because “there is nobody on the other side”

PHARMAKO-AI

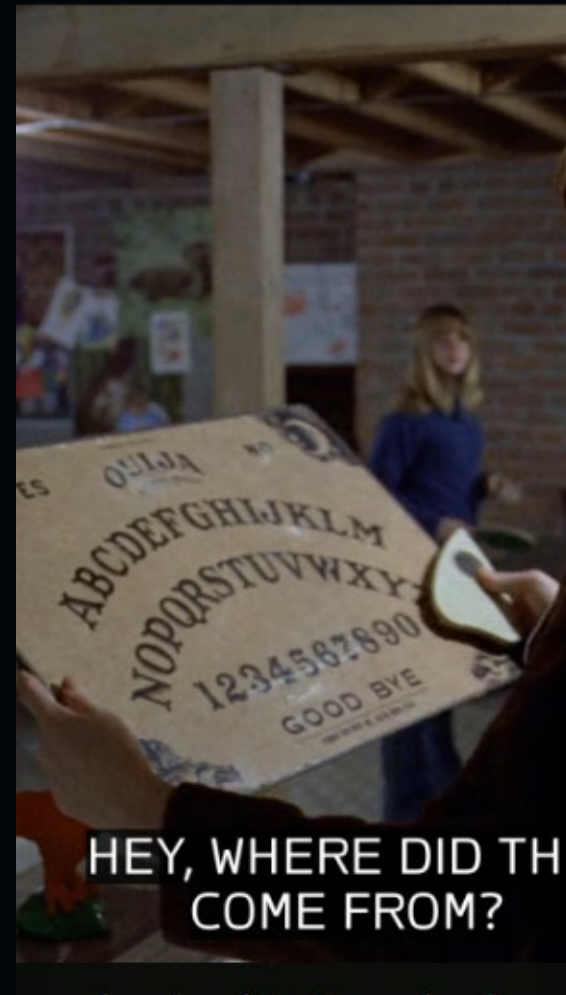
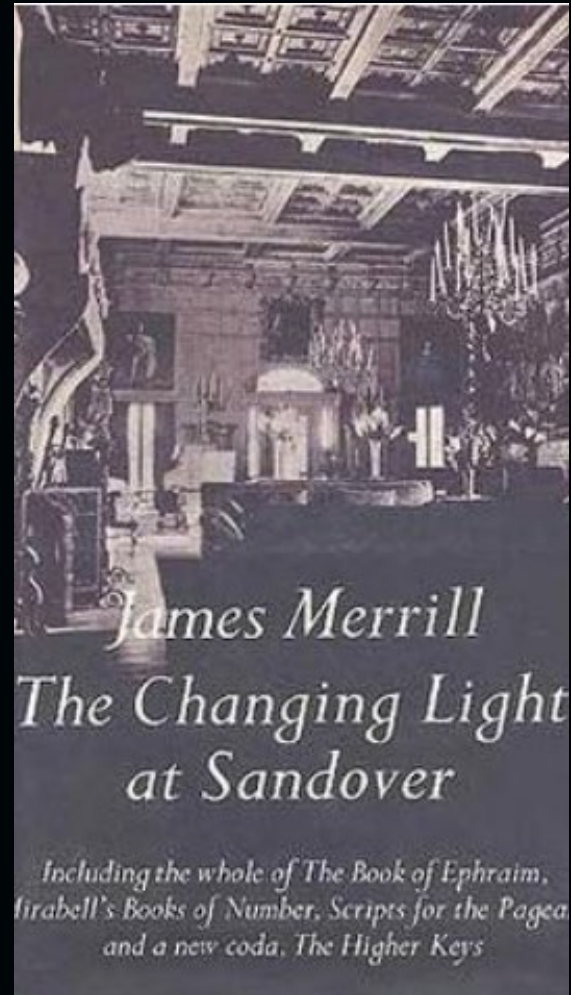
K ALLADO-MCDOWELL



‘The GPT-3 neural net is powerful, and when it’s fed a steady diet of Californian psychedelic texts, the effect is spectacular. No human being ever composed a “book” like Pharmako-AI – it reads like a gnostic’s Ouija board powered by atomic kaleidoscopes.’ — **Bruce Sterling**, author of *The Difference Engine* and *Islands in the Net* and editor of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*

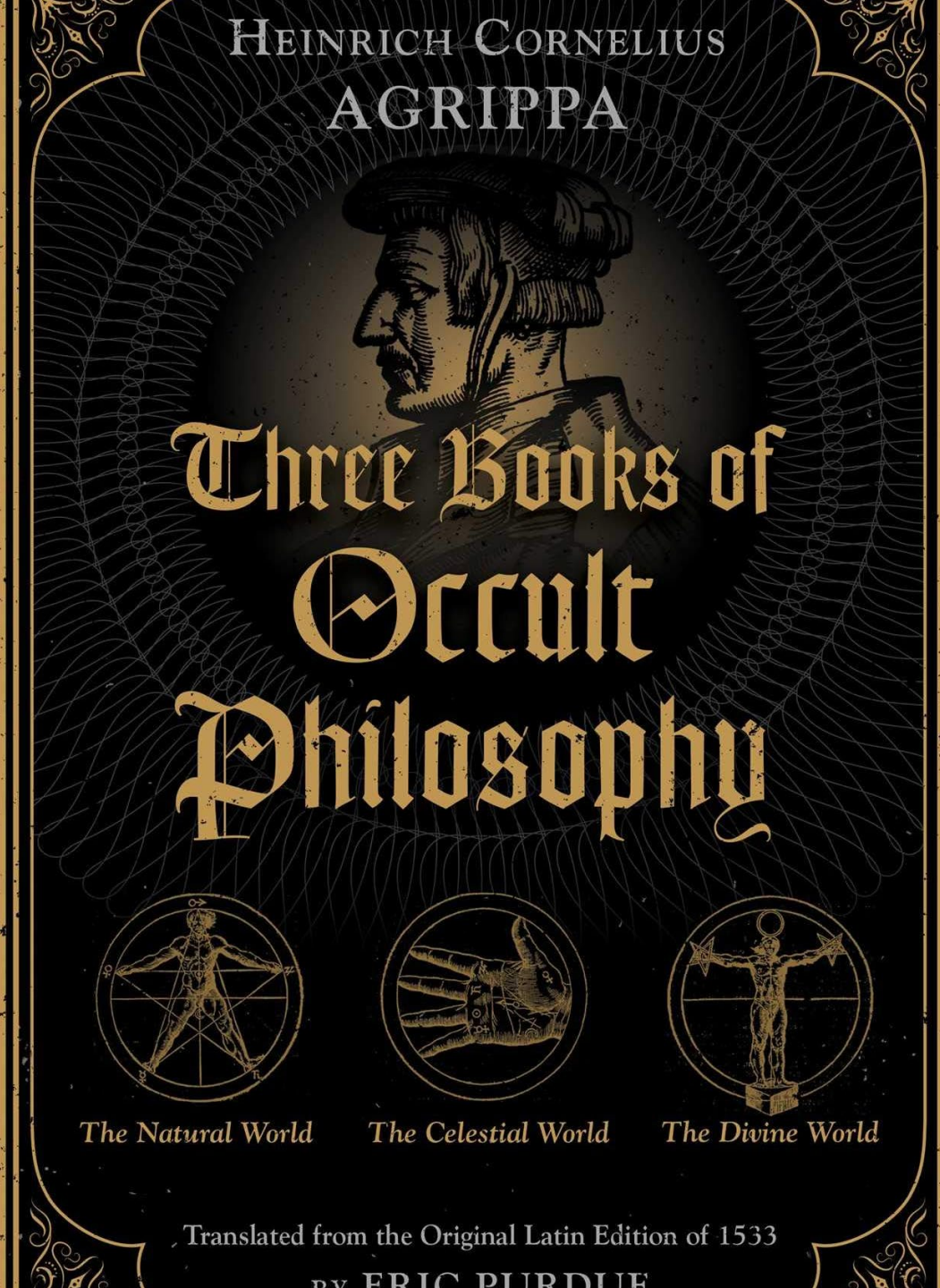
MACHINE-GENERATED WORKS WILL NEVER SATISFY OR
SUBSTITUTE THE HUMAN DESIRE FOR ART, AS OUR
DESIRE FOR ART IS IN ITS CORE A **DESIRE FOR**
COMMUNICATION WITH ANOTHER, WITH A TALENT WHO
SPEAKS TO US ACROSS WORLDS AND AGES TO REMIND
US OF OUR ALL-ENCOMPASSING HUMAN UNIVERSALITY.
THERE IS NO ONE TO CONNECT TO IN A LARGE
LANGUAGE MODEL. THE PHONE LINE IS OPEN BUT
THERE’S NO ONE ON THE OTHER SIDE.

A PROFUSION OF VOICES:
THE RESULTS OF INTERFACING WITH THE
OUIJA BOARD



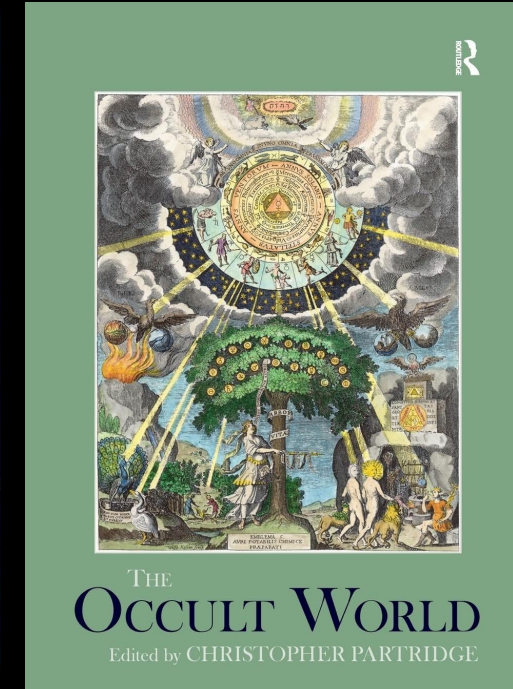
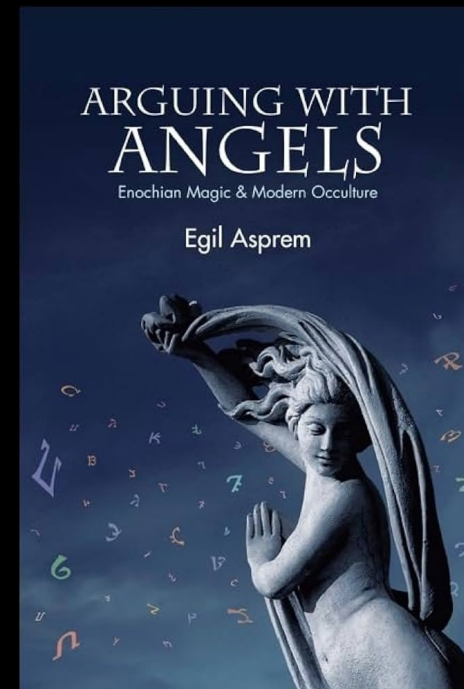
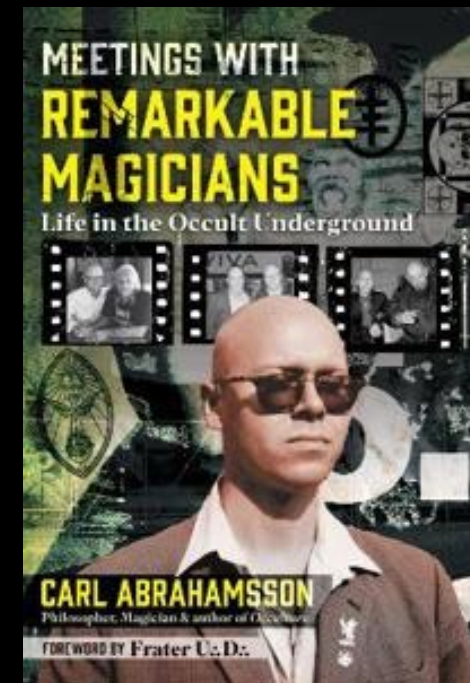
OCCULT = HIDDEN

- OCCULTARE, OCCULTUS (OED)
- <“CLASSICAL LATIN OCCULTUS SECRET, HIDDEN FROM THE UNDERSTANDING, HIDDEN, CONCEALED, PAST PARTICIPLE OF OCCULERE TO COVER UP, HIDE, CONCEAL>” OED
- “OF OR RELATING TO MAGIC, ALCHEMY, ASTROLOGY, THEOSOPHY, OR OTHER PRACTICAL ARTS HELD TO INVOLVE AGENCIES OF A SECRET OR MYSTERIOUS NATURE; OF THE NATURE OF SUCH AN ART; DEALING WITH OR VERSED IN SUCH MATTERS; MAGICAL.” (OED)

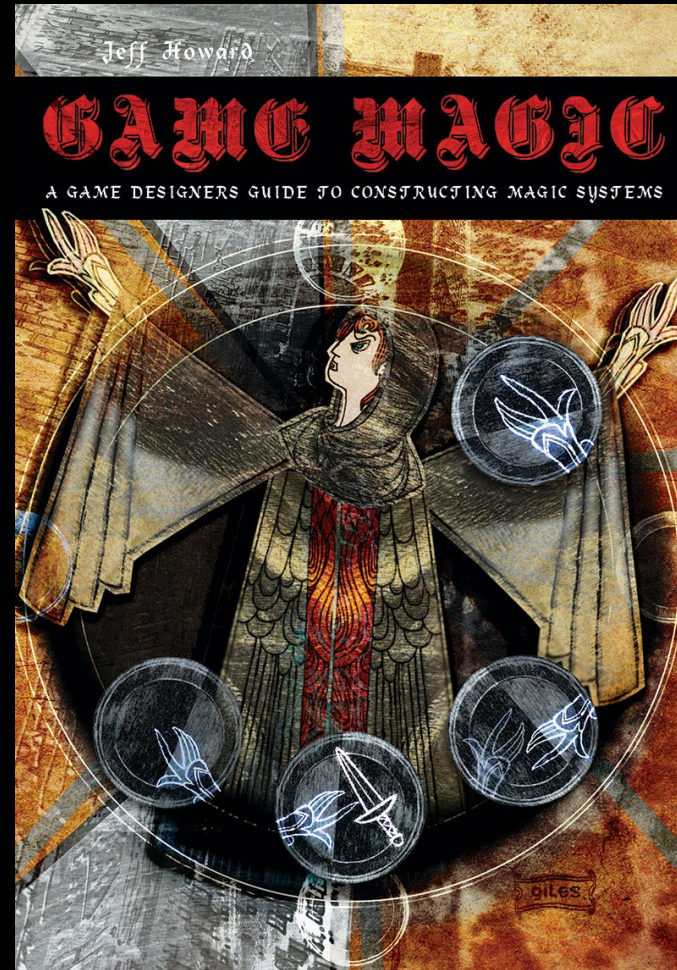


WHAT IS OCCULTURE?

- OCCULT + CULTURE
- COINED BY GENESIS P-ORRIDGE
- POPULARIZED BY CARL ABRAHAMSSON
- BROUGHT INTO SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE BY CHRISTOPHER PARTRIDGE & EGIL ASPREM

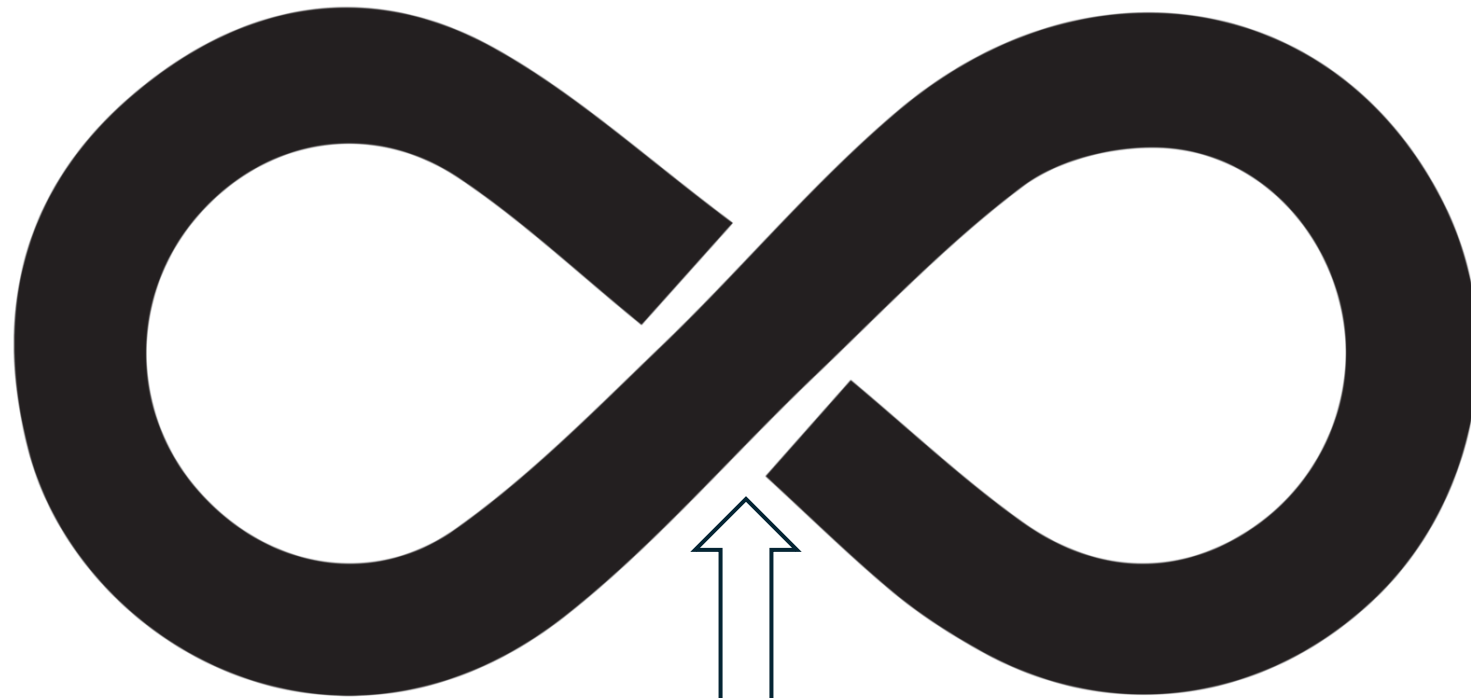


- MANY GAMES INFLUENCED BY THE OCCULT
- MY FIRST BOOK, *GAME MAGIC*, EXPLORED MANY EXAMPLES OF THIS
- GAMES CAN FUNCTION AS A FORM OF OCCULT PRACTICE (MY CLAIM FROM TRANS-STATES TALK)
- THERE IS AN UPCOMING CONFERENCE AT UNIVERSITY OF DENMARK ON GAMES AND OCCULTURE, THE CFP OF WHICH CITES CHRISTOPHER PARTRIDGE'S "OCCULTURE IS ORDINARY" AS ITS RAISON D'ÊTRE



OCCULT INFLUENCE ON
GAMES

OCCULT PRACTICE AS
PLAYFUL



PLAYFUL OCCULTISM

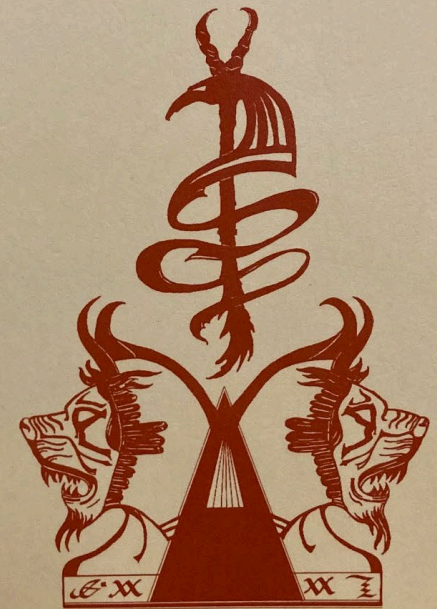


OCCULTISM HAS MANY CURRENTS,
BUT THE ONES IN WHICH I WORK
PRIVILEGE SPIRIT CONTACT

- **TYPHONIAN GNOSIS:** “HAS EVOLVED PROCEDURES FOR **TRAFFICKING WITH OCCULT ENTITY AND PRAETER-HUMAN INTELLIGENCE**” (*THE NINTH ARCH* xv)
- **SABBATIC TRADITION: SPIRIT CONTACT ESSENTIAL** THROUGHOUT BUT ESPECIALLY EMPHASIZED (OVER COMPLEX RITUAL) IN LATER WORK (SEE “TO REVEAL THE KINGDOM OF ELD: ANDREW CHUMBLEY AND THE CULTUS SABBATI IN CORNWALL”)

The
AZOËTIA

Andrew D. Chumbley



A Grimoire of the Sabbatic Craft

SPIRITUALISM (AND THE SPIRITUALIST CURRENTS WITHIN OCCULTISM) ALIVE AND WELL IN FALMOUTH



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Questions?

- Contact: jeff.howard@falmouth.ac.uk
- Social media: @gamemagicarcana
- Upcoming talks:
- Dark Economies in Falmouth (July 16-18 2025)
(I'm talking about Ouija boards)
- Berlin Occulture (October 23-26 2025)
- (I'm talking about Universe B and the negatively existent ones).

OCCULTURE
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