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To Keep Silence: Magical Stealth in the Age of Public Performance

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DR. JEFF HOWARD

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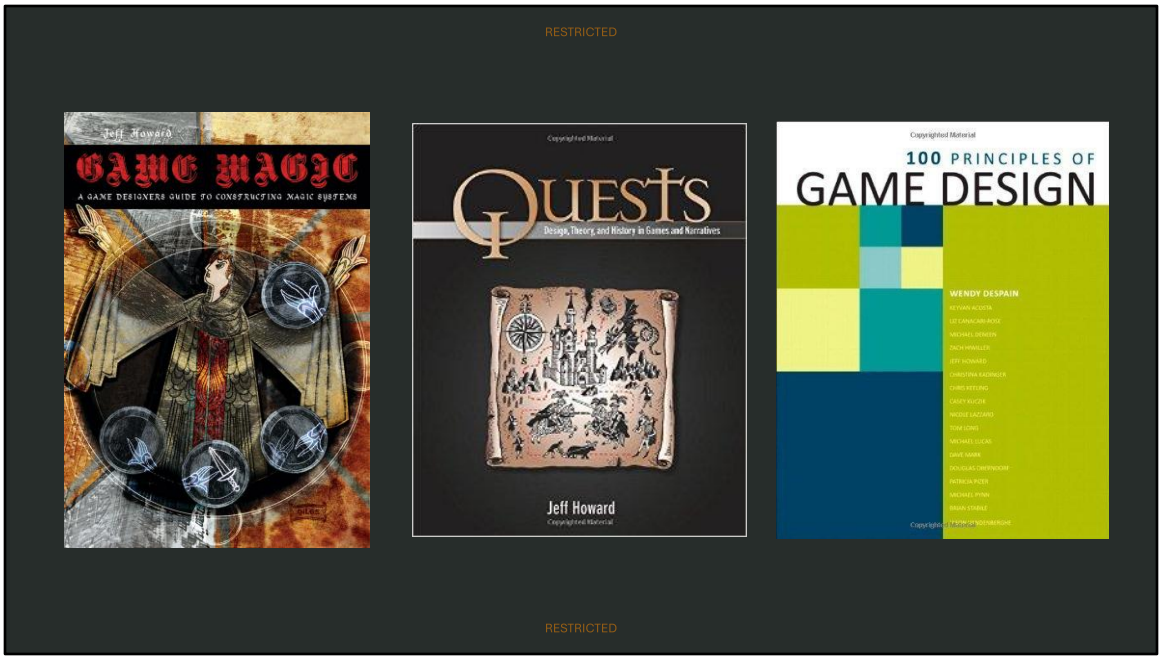
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GAMES AND OCCULTURE

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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I've written these books on game design and have my own law "Howard's Law of Occult Design." The 2nd edition of my book on Quest design was published this April.

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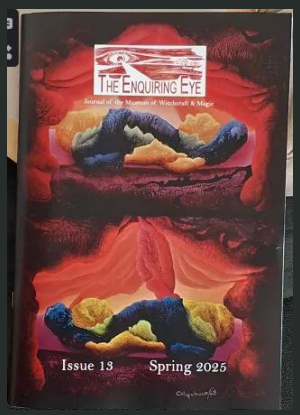
CORE TEAM MEMBER: APOCALYPSE STUDIOS

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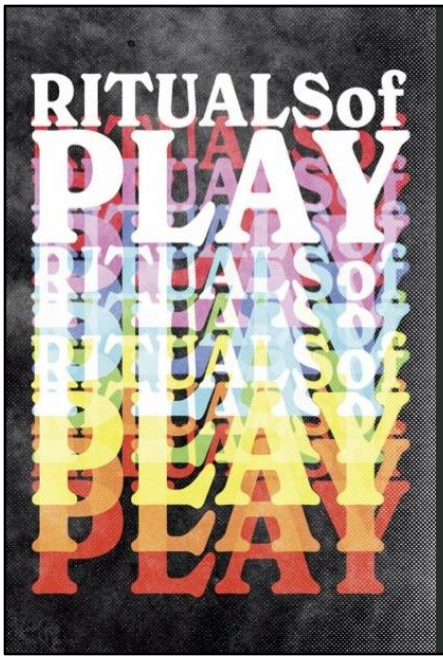
RECENT **OCCULT** PUBLICATIONS ON **ANDREW CHUMBLEY** AND **KENNETH GRANT**





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Consider adding MMU rituals of play



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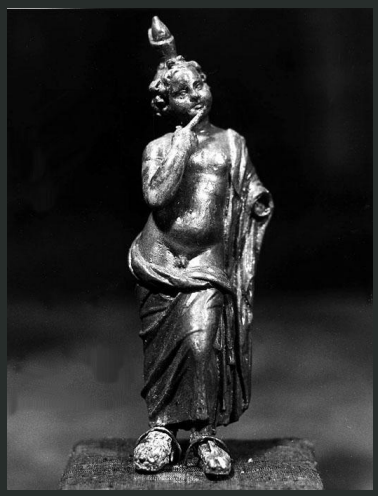
My article “Playful Occultism”

- Is in the Rituals of Play zine
- Based on my keynote at the MMU Rituals of Play Conference

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Harpocrates, syncretic Hellenistic god of **silence**

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Image source: https://benedante.blogspot.com/2010/07/harpocrates.html
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/jul/16/egyptian-god-relic-identified-silchester

Today, I'm engaged in asking the paradoxical task of talking publicly about magical silence and secrecy.

What is magical silence? What is its function? What ethos is associated with it? Is magical silence a game? If so, what kind of game? What would be the purpose of such a game?

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I. TACERE (LEVI TO CROWLEY TO THE WITCH'S PYRAMID)
II. THE ETHOS OF MAGICAL ESPIONAGE
III. NEGATIVE THEOLOGY (NEOPLATONIC THEURGISTS)
IV. HENRIK BOGDAN AND THE GAME OF INITIATORY SECRECY
V. STEALTH GAMES
VI. GNOSIS
VII. MAGICAL SILENCE IN THE AGE OF PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

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In outline form, the talk looks like this.

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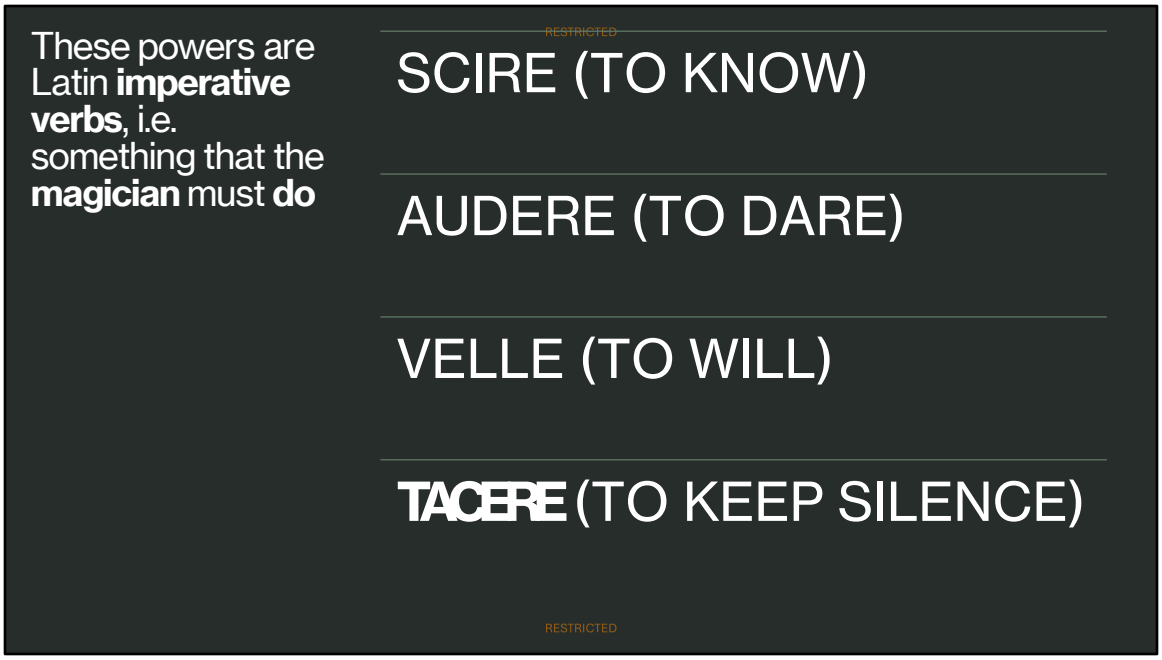
Magical silence in its modern form is formulated by **Éliphas Lévi** (who believes that the concept originates in the ancient Egyptian world)

"To attain the SANCTUM REGNUM, in other words, the knowledge and power of the Magi, there are four indispensable conditions–an intelligence illuminated by study, an intrepidity which nothing can check, a will which cannot be broken, and a prudence which nothing can corrupt and nothing intoxicate. TO KNOW, TO DARE, TO WILL, TO KEEP SILENCE–such are the four words of the Magus, inscribed upon the four symbolical forms of the sphinx" (Levi, *Transcendental Magic* 30).



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Image source: https://booknode.com/auteur/eliphas-levi
Levi operates during the French magical revival which includes figures such as Papus and directly influences both the Golden Dawn and its renegade initiate, Aleister Crowley. Keeping silent is one power of the Sphinx, that riddle-bearing guardian, antagonist of Oedipus, enshrined in unblinking stone near the pyramids. Already, Levi gives us clues. If Silence is a power of the Sphinx, then it has a relationship to speaking in riddles as well as a symbolic adjacency to pyramids.

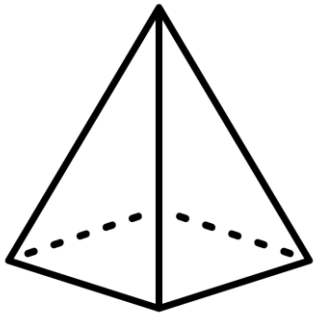


Levi was a defrocked priest, and he knew his Latin. Crucially, these are imperative verbs. They are about doing something. This creates a paradox, in that keeping silence is the only power that is about *not doing something,* i.e. refraining from something, i.e. not speaking. There is already a linkage between keeping silence and the apophatic tradition, i.e. the tradition of communicating through denial, by asserting what something is not.



This footnote from Crowley’s *Confessions* has haunted me for three decades. Why does silence rule the other three virtues?

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Paul Huson and Lady Sheba – Witches' Pyramid

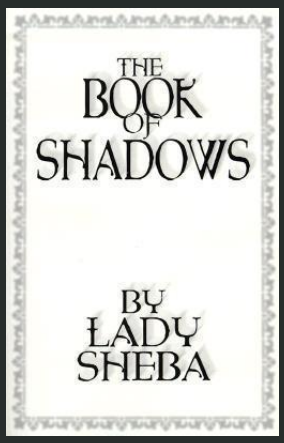


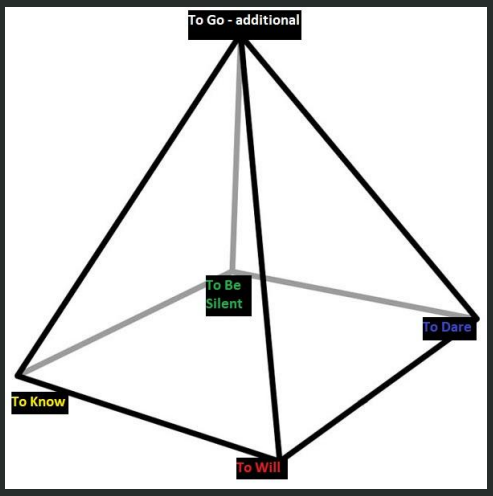
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Several online articles about this. Most mention Levi and (maybe) Huson or Sheba and leave it at that.
Note the resemblance to a D4.

Levi's Magical Silence Becomes the Witch's Pyramid

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Image Source: The Keeper's Path
Textual source in witchcraft books? The origins of this are
"The first book to feature complete Witch rituals published by a major press was *Lady Sheba's Book of Shadows*, published in 1971. In that work Sheba begins with the Witches' Pyramid, which she calls the "foundation" of Witch power. Like Huson, she doesn't use Levi's short-and-sweet phrasing but instead describes the four sides of the pyramid like this:
"The first side of the four so-called sides of the pyramid is your dynamic, controlled will; the second, your imagination or the ability to see your desire accomplished; third, unshakable and absolute faith in your ability to accomplish anything you desire; and fourth, secrecy—"power shared is power lost." ..."

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According to Mankey, Silence becomes Secrecy and is glossed as “power shared is power lost”

“The first side of the four so-called sides of the pyramid is your dynamic, controlled will; the second, your imagination or the ability to see your desire accomplished; third, unshakable and absolute faith in your ability to accomplish anything you desire; and fourth, secrecy—“power shared is power lost.” ...”
(Sheba)

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Bogdan eloquently teases out the complexities of secrecy as inherited from Freemasonry and allied sects

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"Secrecy is, however, a tricky phenomenon." (Bogdan 41).

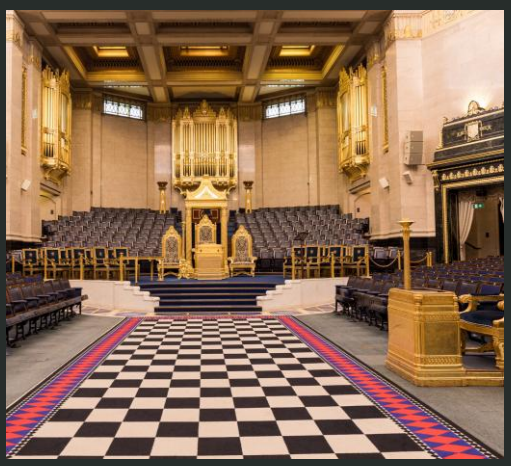
"it is **the noncommunication of what is not transmissible that constitutes the secret**." (Bogdan quoting Snoek, italics mine)

The "**allusive method**," i.e. a ritual that means one thing on the surface but alludes to a different meaning beneath this

All the Freemasonic rituals have been published, but their significance remains concealed:

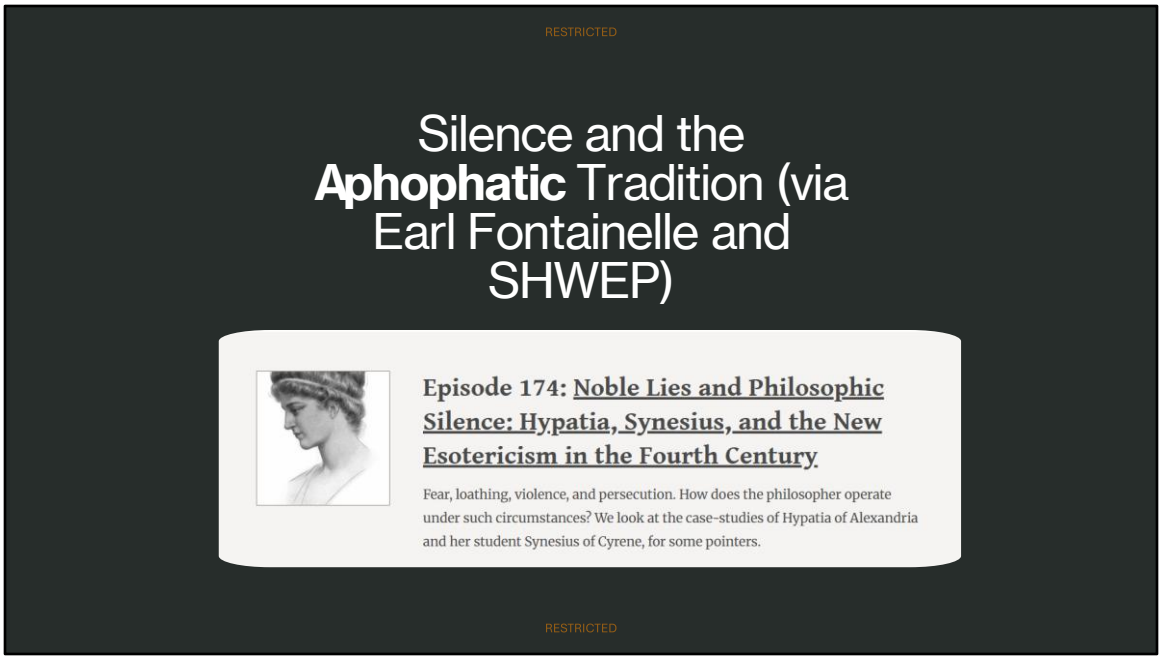
Silent while speaking, hiding in plain sight

Example: the formula of trampling on the cross in Chumbley's *Azoetia*

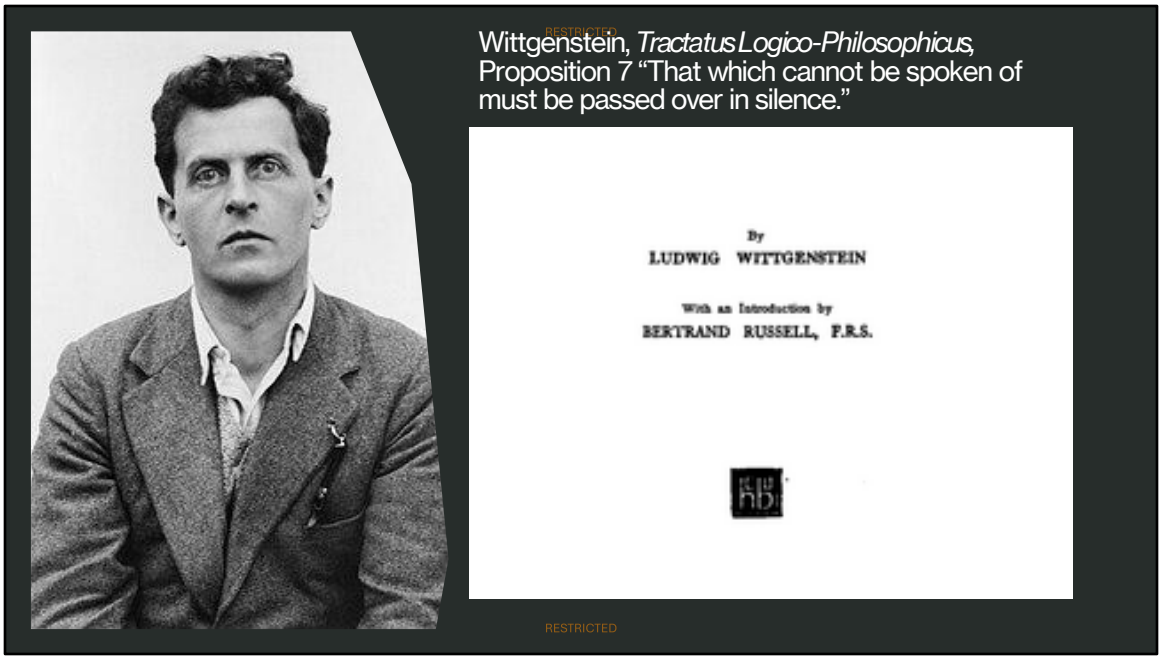


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According to Bodgan, secrecy is tricky because of the "the allusive method" (for which Bogdan cites Snoek), i.e the ritual has a surface meaning and other meanings known only to the initiated
Bogdan quotes Faivre on this "Faivre's words:
Esoteric transmission cannot, so it seems, unveil secrets. Rather, it is **the noncommunication of what is not transmissible that constitutes the secret**." (italics mine)



Apophatic is denial or negation
A more direct predecessor of this silence would be the apophatic tradition, i.e. negative theology, wherein silence is maintained deliberately as a means of acknowledging and (refusing to) express the ineffability of the divine through silence. No one has done more work on this in the occultural/esoteric space than Earl Fointanelle, who dedicates multiple episodes of his beloved Secret History of Western Esotericism podcast to the evolution of the philosophical silence, from neo-Platonist Plotinus, Hypatia, to early theologist pseudo-Dionysos. Crucially, Fointanelle associates Hypatia's silence with the pragmatic need to hide esoteric beliefs and practices from a persecuting hegemony



https://revisionsjournal.com/en/page/ludwig-wittgenstein-if-an-orange-could-speak-genius-and-other-nonsense

Moriz Nähr, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Portrait for the conferment of the Trinity College scholarship 1929, 1928/29 © Klimt Foundation, Vienna, Photo: Klimt-Foundation, Vienna

Wittgenstein is a logical positivist, but his statement borders on a kind of mysticism, bearing in mind that the etymological roots of mysticism and mystery (in the Eleusinian sense) are "to close the lips and eyes."



If a philosopher maintains a conceptual silence, a magician must act on silence (or through it or with it). How does Image source: https://tobeornottobe.org/dr_john_dee/

Mention Jack Bratich on the revelation and concealment of information as being key to occultural studies, as well as connections between modern-day tales of spy recruitment and the concept of an occult element to culture

Crowley's description of acting without causing disturbance sounds like the ethos of espionage, evoking long-standing rumours about his involvement with MI6. These rumours may, in fact, be a conflation of Cecil Williamson's documented work with MI6 (or part of a larger swirl of Thelemite, Gardnerian, and traditional witchcraft involvement in espionage)

Magical Silence as Economy of Magical Energy

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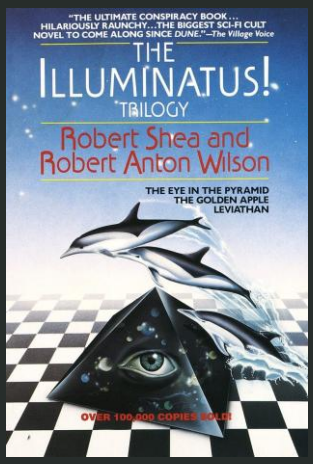
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- Maybe the reason that magicians make good spies is because spycraft is, at least in part, about playing a game of energy management. It isn't about direct confrontation, because to do so risks exhausting battle both Gary Oldman on George Smiley swiveling his neck only, like an owl: "economy of energy"
- Keeping silent (except on matters of key magical importance, or especially on those matters) is a way of retaining energy.

Concealing and Revealing is a Game

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"Today, this can be considered as, to use Snoek's words, 'part of the elegant game which Freemasonry is,' just as the 'traditional secrets' are" (Bogdan 69)



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The black and white tiles of the masonic temple reflect resemble a chessboard and reflect that which is seen and that which is unseen.

Trithemius hiding a treatise on code in plain sight, disguised as an occult treatise and therefore actually occulted (though not about the occult)



LIBER PRIMVS. 66

Habes in hoc Circulo 4. Imperatores principales & mansionis vnius cuiusq; situm, numerũ quoq; ducum, subducum & seruorum penè innumerabilium. Scias ergo, quomodo per istos sit operandum.

CAP. XVIII.

CVIVS SVPREMVS PRINCEPS EST Caspiel dictus, cuius mansio est ad Austrum, qui habet sub se multos principes, duces & famulos innumerabiles.

AD Austrum habitat magnus Caspiel princeps, qui habet sub suo dominio principes siue duces præcipuos 200. Comites vero siue subduces 400. cum ingenti multitudine seruitorum, quorum

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And what of the Voynich manuscript? Or the Codex Serifinanus? Are these texts not more occult because they are occulted, because their meanings remain multisemous and ambiguous.



If Trithemius's Steganographia keeps silence by hiding its message in plain sight, occulted beneath blinds and double blinks, then what about other texts that hide their meanings?

Stealth games are the genre of magical silence

STEALTH: A GENRE OF **ACTION GAME** IN WHICH THE PLAYER'S GOAL IS TO **ACCOMPLISH A MISSION WHILE AVOIDING DETECTION**, OFTEN WITH THE AID OF **ABILITIES** THAT BORDER ON THE **MIRACULOUS**, SOMETIMES WITH **MAGICAL THEMING**

STEALTH GAMES ARE **SIMULATIONS** OF THE CROWLEYAN INTERPRETATION OF TACERE

"WHICH LAST MEANS MANY THINGS, BUT MOST OF ALL SO TO CONTROL ONESELF THAT EVERY ACT IS DONE NOISELESSLY; ALL DISTURBANCE MEANS CLUMSINESS OR BLUNDERING." (642)

THESE ARE GAMES OF **POISE**, OF DELIBERATE ACTION, OF **CONCEALMENT: OF ASPIRING TOWARD A STATE OF GRACE**

THIS CONCEALMENT IS OFTEN CAST IN SPIRITUAL TERMS



The game of concealing and revealing at the heart of magic can be conceptualised as a stealth game: the closest commercially popular analogue to the need to keep silence. Stealth is by definition the most occulted of genres, since its mechanics are fundamentally concerned with hiding and avoiding detection and often also the most occult-themed at a narrative level.



As an example of this narrative theming, we find the art of stealth linked to monastic and magical lore. In the lore of the first Thief game (published in 1998, the year of stealth because the key titles of this genre were released in this year). Here we find Crowley's warning against noise and disturbance linked to the preservation of inner peace and balance. Garrett, the protagonist of the Thief series, is taught this art by the Keepers, a group of sorcerer-monks who wield powers of concealment, aided by sigils called glyphs, in order to intervene in history.

Metal Gear and Magical Silence

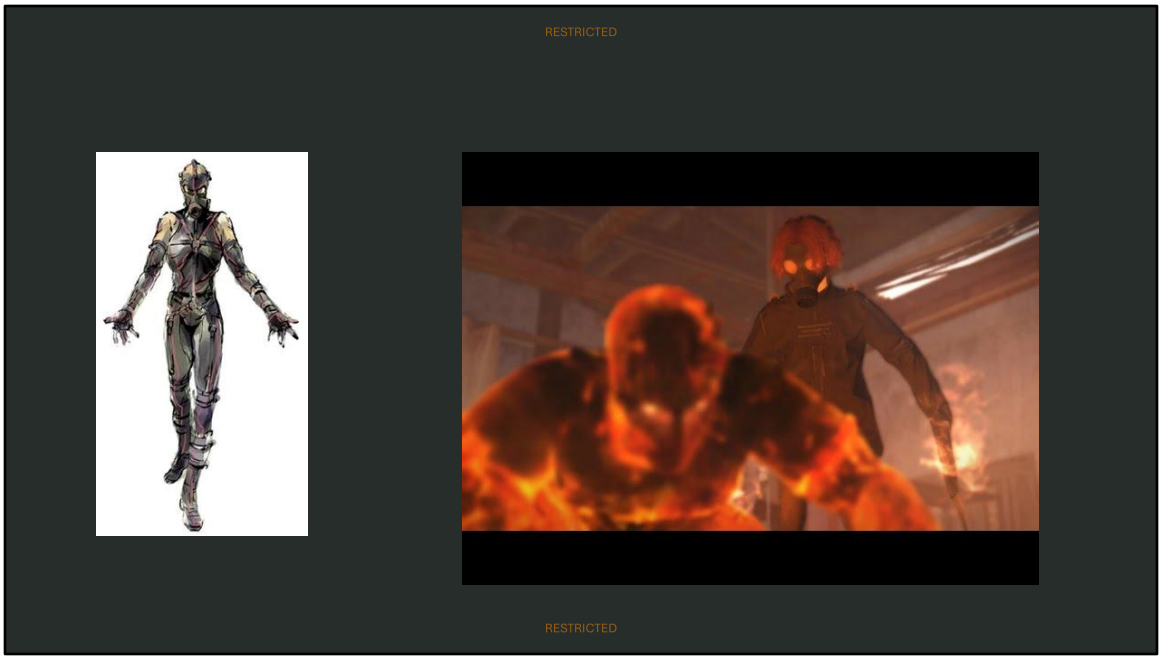
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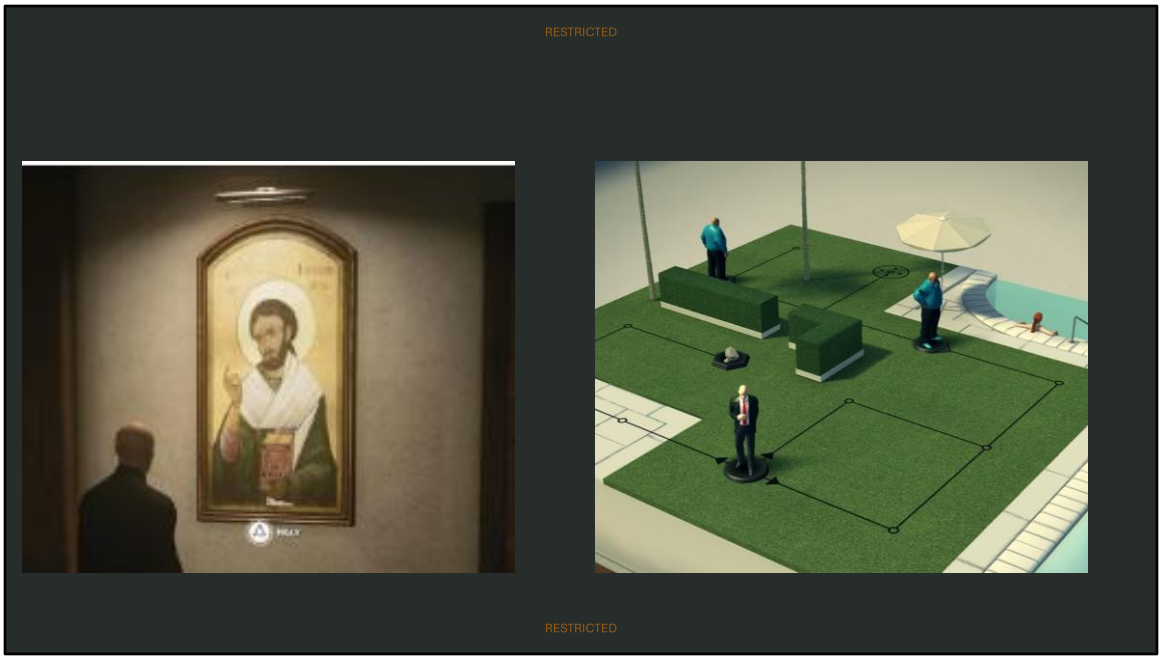


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Solid Snake and his successors/clones/protegees are not overtly magical, though certainly they exhibit the traits of someone whose practice of infiltration is highly disciplined to the point of seemingly miraculous, reminiscent of the siddhi of the Yogi. They are a different kind of character from more action-oriented or violent videogame protagonists: sleek, slender, with tactical outfits secured in such a way as to prevent “all noise or blundering.” One could say that these characters are not magicians, i.e. they don’t invoke spirits or alter the fabric of reality



Except that sometimes they do. The paranormal does manifest overtly in Psycho Mantis, a former KGB operative with psychokinetic and telepathic abilities, as well as the fourth-wall breaking, meta-ludic capacity to read the player's memory card as well as to cause their controller to vibrate. In the Phantom Pain, his abilities become overt, including pyrokinesis, but these powers pale beside his ability to read the player's secrets.



And there is a pattern across stealth games, to the point that the monastic training and imagery of Thief's Keepers. The Hitman series has its protagonist hiding out in an Eastern Orthodox monastery, living in a basement and doing chores for the monks prior to being called out of retirement, John Wick style. Even the comparatively abstract mobile version of Hitman, Hitman Go, has a minimalistic Zen aesthetic and an Ave Maria soundtrack that gives the deliberate, slow, planned action in the face of extreme pressure a feeling of holy, meditative concentration.

Fallen London and The Rites of St. Joshua, Patron Saint of Silence, Secrecy, and Spies

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"The Midnighter performs the unconfessed rites of St. Joshua; the secret ministrations of midnight, the holy transition of the owned to the unowned and the unseen to the seen. He has made the unknown known, and toppled an invisible throne.“ (Failbetter Games)

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"The Midnighter performs the unconfessed rites of St. Joshua; the secret ministrations of midnight, the holy transition of the owned to the unowned and the unseen to the seen. He has made the unknown known, and toppled an invisible throne.“ A Midnighter, in the browser-based game *Fallen London,* is an espionage-based prestige class (an advanced career adopted by a long-time player) engaged in a global campaign of spycraft known as “the Great Game.” These are the words that greet a newly initiated Midnighter. The dark thrill of these words, their frisson, comes from idea that the Midnighter is serving not just a worldly, secular agenda but executing sacred rites of a saint, whose purple-beyond-purple Irrigo robe erases memory. These rites are implied to invovle the interplay of hidden and unhidden, being and non-being. The “invisible throne,” while referring at one level to terrestrial power also can be read as alluding to the angelic hierarchies of “thrones,” and it echoes my favourite Biblical verse, the one that

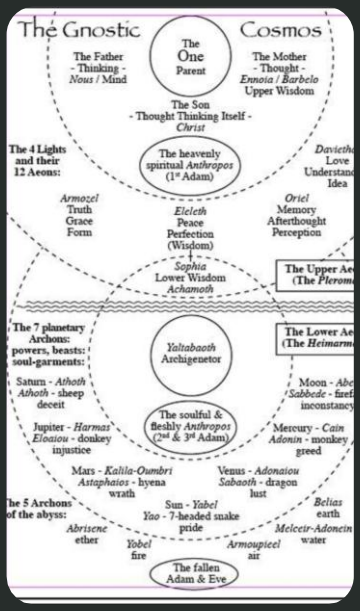
Echoing St Paul and the Gnostics “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Ephesians 6:12.

Ephesians 6:12 & “On the Hypostasis of the Archons”

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Silence is a way of **defeating the archons**, who depend on the proliferation of **careless speech** (and, perhaps, **AI slop**) to wield control

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This works if the archons are spiritual metaphors for worldly power (i.e. the Romans as typological instantiations of this power), or worldly metaphors for spiritual power. The Gnostic text “On the Hypostasis of the Archons” cites Paul Either way, power that is invisible and ubiquitous requires great discretion to evade. “Go not forth when the lictor walks by.” (Chaldean Oracles) There is a theme that defeating secular and spiritual forces of Control in the Burroughs sense requires discretion, evasion, and stealth.

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The (Gnostic or esoteric) Christ on praying in secret

- "5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6: 5-6

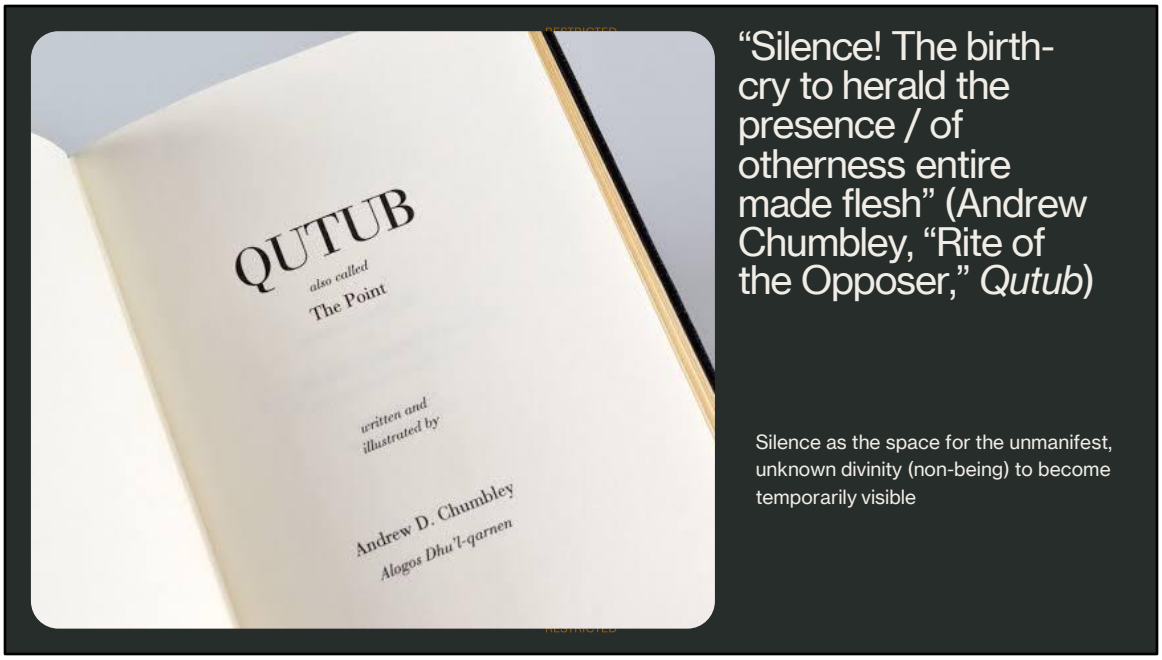


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The archons are defeated through gnosis, understood as spiritual authenticity (as opposed to the performance or simulacrum of spirituality). Image source: https://psalm91.com/2020/07/17/verse-of-the-day-pray-to-your-father-in-secret-and-he-will-reward-you-openly-matthew-66/



Quaker peace-building. I've written elsewhere (in a Peace Gaming whitepaper) about the Quaker leveraging of inner peace in order to produce outer peace, i.e. as diplomats and peace builders. A significant number of world conflicts are mediated by Quakers, though



Here, in a ritual included by Chumbley as an appendix to the mystical poem Qutub, the sorcerer speaks in the persona of the Opposer, a Luciferian and Ophidian entity associated with Non-Being. Here, silence (associated elsewhere in the ritual with "the spells of apophasis, i.e. the apophatic tradition"). Though miles away from the Quaker tradition,

“The rest is silence.”

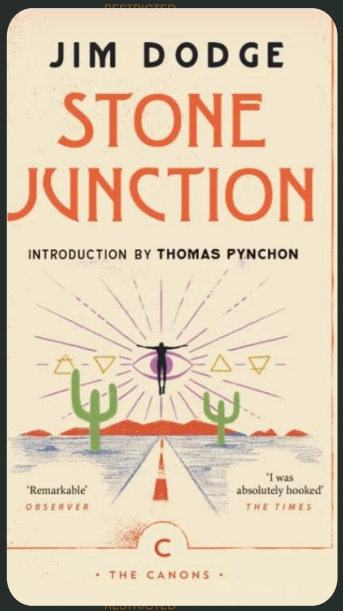
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- MAGIC SILENCE AND THE ETHOS OF ESPIONAGE IS USEFUL IN A WORLD THAT MAY BE INCREASINGLY HOSTILE TOWARD US, AS PRACITTIONERS
- WE CURRENTLY LIVE IN AN AGE OF **PUBLIC PERFORMANCE**
- IN WHICH RITUALS ARE STAGED OPENLY AND PERFORMATIVELY, AND SOMETIMES FUNDED IN THE NAME OF HERITAGE
- WOULD THERE NOT BE VALUE IN **RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS**? THOSE ROOTS ARE THE IN SECRECY, SILENCE, SECRET SOCIETIES
- THE MORE WE DECLARE OURSELVES TO BE MAGICIANS, THE MORE WE RISK OUR RHETORIC AND OUR ENERGY FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF THE ARCHONS



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Thomas Pynchon on magical silence, via Wittgenstein and Levi



- "it is for him to slip along across the last borderline, into what Wittgenstein once supposed cannot be spoken of, and upon which, as Eliphaz Levi advised us – after "To know, to will, to dare" as the last and greatest of the rules of Magic – we must keep silent" (Pynchon, foreword to *Stone Junction*)

Thomas Pynchon, the encyclopedic novelist and explorer of the space between, is back in the news because of the movie *One Battle After Another* (with its themes of the secret protocols of revolution), as well as the recently-published *Shadow Ticket*.

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