H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Christopher I. Lehrich. *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. xv + 246 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4538-5.

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Published on H-HRE (November, 2007)

Thinking with Magic

The title and especially the subtitle of this book promise a broad sweep. It is therefore perhaps good to begin by clarifying what the book is not. It is not a general study of all forms of magic. Instead, it scrupulously limits the concept of magic to mean the complex intellectual systems of early modern European mages and occult philosopher/scientists such as Giordano Bruno and John Dee. The book gestures also toward magical systems in non-European "primitive" societies. Theory, and the attempt to relate magical thought to modern sociological and literary theory, is the main focus, but here too for the most part theory is understood quite narrowly to mean structuralism, particularly as developed by LÃ©vi-Strauss. Of magic in practice there is no trace, unless practice is understood to mean the academic practice of theoretical interpretation, and magic is transmuted into a metaphor. Lehrich explains that he took his subtitle from Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929), but this seems a strange borrowing, since Lehrich deals almost not at all with modern occultism, except for a (in my judgment extraneous) discussion of tarot card decks, and as he himself states, "I have ultimately devoted minimal space to his [Crowley's] thought" (p. xiv).

Readers should also not expect this book to read like a fully developed monograph; neither, however, is it a collection of only loosely associated essays. As Lehrich notes, his "chapters build on one another, both argumentatively and thematically" (p. xiii). But throughout, Lehrich follows an essayist's approach, dipping into subjects, making tentative suggestions, but then quickly withdrawing, claiming lack of space to advance full arguments. Virtually every chapter, and indeed the book as a whole, is presented as an introductory foray, seeking only to raise questions and frame issues. Such question-raising can of course be useful, but ultimately one grows weary of the constant failure to press ideas to some clear conclusion. If these pieces were, in fact, independent essays printed separately, one could easily understand the repeated complaints over lack of space. But this is a book, and by no means an overly long one. One imagines some expansion would have been possible, if the author had sought to make it.

Yet space is not the real issue here, for while this is not a long book, it is bloated in a particular way. One of Lehrich's central points is the need for "comparativism"

in the study of magic, and he inserts wide-ranging comparisons into virtually every chapter. Thus, in chapter 2, "The Ley of the Land," Lehrich first introduces a long excursus on ley lines, the faulty scholarship behind them, and the (to his mind) still valuable intellectual structures to which they gesture (pp. 18-25). The point of this is to help illustrate aspects of Francis Yates's method of approaching early modern magical texts. Yates, of course, never used ley lines as part of her intellectual repertoire, and so for the comparison to work, Lehrich must construct a heavy-handed analogy. A direct analysis of Yates's methods would certainly have been more concise. Likewise in the next chapter, John Dee's obsessions with angelic communications and writing systems are explicated, in part, by means of Japanese N? theater, which requires not only a discussion of N?, but also Zen, and the nineteenth-century Japanese nativism with which both came to be imbued (pp. 67-78). Upon turning back to Dee, Lehrich admits that "it is stretching a point to compare the transformed magician to a warrior-shite [of N? drama] and the monad to a wig role, infinitely pregnant with *y?gen*" (p. 79). One naturally wonders whether a point requiring so much stretching should be made at all.

This comparative approach is most starkly evident in Lehrich's penultimate chapter, "Tarocco and Fugue." Here he aims to analyze aspects of LÃ©vi-Strauss's thinking in terms of musicological systems. According to his web page, such comparisons between musicology and theory comprise Lerhich's current research project, and this chapter appears to derive from this work-in-progress. Here, more than anywhere else in *The Occult Mind*, Lehrich's defensive claims that his analysis is but a prolegomena come fast and furious. As there is nothing to directly connect a musicologically informed analysis of a modern theorist to early modern occult thinking, in order to frame the chapter and make it fit in this book rather than in a forthcoming one, Lehrich introduces tarot cards–and once again, the introduction is lengthy (pp. 134-147). Near the end, we are informed that "it should already be clear that a structuralist analysis of tarot is, in a sense, pointless" (p. 146). Nevertheless, he asserts that the tarot system will be useful for understanding LÃ©vi-Strauss, to whom he then turns. In fact, however, he only brings tarot back into his analysis extremely briefly, and then mainly to tell us that such comparison results in a tautology (p. 154).

There is a reason, however, for these convolutions. Buried beneath them, this book has a relatively thin but not unimportant core. Lehrich begins with strong claims about how valuable a truly interdisciplinary approach to the study of magic would be. The interdisciplinarity he ultimately advances, however, is as highly focused as is his conception of magic. As already noted, magic, for him, entails only the occult thought of certain Renaissance mages, and even here there is tremendous selectivity. Giordano Bruno is the only magician who is treated extensively across several chapters. John Dee and Athanasius Kircher are also examined at some length in individual chapters. This sort of magic, Lehrich is able to assert, "receives treatment [only] within the narrow limits of intellectual history and the history of science" (p. xi), and he directs severe criticism at these disciplines for the supposed limitations of their approach to the topic. Most generally, Lehrich derides historians of science for failing to take magical thought seriously on its own terms. This is a point still worth making, although Lehrich focuses much of his energies against the now twenty-year-old work of Brian Vickers (esp. pp. 103-119). He asserts that his focus on Vickers is justified because his work "still undergirds a good deal of ill-informed scholarship" (p. 114). One wonders what Lehrich makes of more recent, well-informed scholarship. Lorraine Daston, William Eamon, and Katherine Park are among the names never cited in notes or bibliography. While they do not work on precisely the narrow stream of occult science Lehrich has defined, their rich and subtle approaches would surely force him to curtail some of his vitriol. He seems to revel in labeling the scholars he sets himself up as opposing not just as "mistaken" and "wrong," but as "blind" and "ignorant."

Despite the ham-fisted nature of his critique, however, Lehrich is not wrong to note that some modern scholars do not give early modern occult thought its full due, and his reading of the reasons for that failure is intriguing. He notes that intellectual historians and historians of science think (self-evidently) in terms of chronological relationships and of developments and connections progressing through time. Much occult thought, however, focuses on typological and morphological connections and relationships. This makes occult thinkers more akin to modern structuralists, rather than to scientists or, certainly, historians of science. Lehrich complicates this point, however, by asserting that early modern occult thinkers also engaged in historicist thinking. In fact, their major (and ultimately failed) efforts aimed to harmonize these two vastly divergent modes of thought (the historical and the typological). Thus Lehrich suggests not simply that modern structuralism can aid in our understanding of early modern occult thought, but that early modern magic, properly understood, can aid

in our understanding of modern structural and historical thinking, and especially can contribute toward a partial harmonization (Lehrich judges complete harmony to be impossible) between those two intellectual modes. *The Occult Mind* itself attempts this task through its wide-ranging comparisons, although as with other aspects of the book, Lehrich categorizes this effort only as a preliminary foray, so it is difficult to know whether one should criticize the weaknesses of those comparisons as inherent failures or simply as kinks yet to be worked out of the system.

Although predominantly focused on a narrow tradition of early modern magical thought, *The Occult Mind* wants to extend its speculations and its methodologies to magic in general. Lehrich at points argues that non-European "primitive" peoples also combined historical and typological (structural) thinking in their magical systems. This extension founders entirely, however, because, while Lehrich can read early modern magical thinkers' own texts closely, his ideas of "primitive" magical systems come entirely from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropologists. Although he can disagree with their readings, he cannot offer any direct evidence about non-European magical systems to support his arguments here.

Yet Lehrich's gestures toward the magic of "primitive" cultures indicate his true ambition. Like early anthropologists, he is striving for a universally applicable, structural definition of magic. This is in direct opposition to the most recent historical trends in the study of magic, which stress culturally specific and contingent definitions. While he recognizes the value of historical analysis, Lehrich rightly notes that such an approach is often at odds with how magical systems present themselves, and so there is, inevitably, a certain amount of "not taking magic seriously" built in to all historical analysis of the topic. Yet the static systems of early anthropologists have also failed. Is Lehrich's approach of attempting a reconciliation between historical and structural thought, using magic as a lynchpin, the solution? The arguments presented here are too preliminary and underdeveloped to allow any verdict. Lehrich's efforts to tentatively perform his suggested new method, rather than succinctly (and fully) explicating it, further cloud the matter. There is a great deal that is highly suggestive in this book, but very little that is conclusively established.

Citation: Michael Bailey. Review of Lehrich, Christopher I., *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice.* H-HRE, H-Net Reviews. November, 2007.

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