

MAGICAL MATERIALISM: A FORMULATION AND DEFENSE OF RATIONAL
MAGICAL THOUGHT

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of Craig Eugene Leo “Destinova” Pierce, who never got to see this theory come to light, but who surely would have had much to say on its subject matter, as well as the memory of Patsy Joyce Payne, who would have loved the fact that ever wrote down anything at all, and demanded a copy for her coffee table. I must, additionally, extend dedication to the memory of Anthea “Breeze” Howser, a pillar of the community which shaped my childhood, and to whom I owe a debt of deepest gratitude.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The work which follows may confuse a few people, because there are only certain contexts within academia wherein the subject of “magic” can be talked about, and surely, a number of readers will feel that my core claim, which is that *magic exists, and is not supernatural*, is simply not appropriate for academia. Even if that first hurdle proves surmountable, the reader may have a difficult time deciding whether this work, whether this set of ideas belongs in the field of philosophy or in religious studies. That said, there are at least three reasons why it the following, and other works like it, are relevant.

What must first be gotten out of the way is my cultural backdrop, and with it, the first on my list of reasons for producing this work. I was raised within the complex culture of the Occult. More specifically, I was raised in the United States of America, largely within a culture of Neopaganism in various forms, heavily dominated by Wicca. When and where I grew up, Neopagan culture mixed heavily with the folk practices of the area (primarily Latin American), as well as several styles of Native American practice, with varying degrees of authenticity. There were also varied levels of intermixing with small pockets of Afro-Caribbean tradition, as well as various practices of magic and mysticism where religion was less tied to the equation, such spiritualism and Hermeticism. My mother is a Wiccan High Priestess and my father a practitioner of various Shamanic art forms. Both had made their rebellion against Christianity in their teens to their early twenties, and during my formative years had all but eliminated the impact of many Christian and Christian-eliminativist views and cultural fixtures from my rearing. As a result, I have come into my own with a very different set of assumptions and cultural fixtures than most academics.

What I do note within academia is that people such as myself have little to no voice. It is less that we cannot speak, but more that we have to present an acceptable version of ourselves in a world that makes us uncomfortable. We cannot rely on our own culture's thought. Even here, for the sake of academic credibility, my arguments are backed by sources which, for the most part, have been run through the test of a culture which presupposes our ignorance of the world, assumes a poor connection to the basic laws of reality, when the truth of the matter is that most of our philosophies, at least in theory, attempt to gain *deeper understanding* of the basic principles of reality, often to the point of gaining the ability (at least, this is the goal,) to participate in natural processes on a deeper level. These philosophies and the application thereof, have been relegated to "magic," in the layperson's understanding, and have been assumed baseless superstition. Within this work, I will argue for a *naturalistic, materialistic, and monistic* reality in which *magic* is not only naturalistic, but *a baseline operating principle of reality* on the basis of various conceptions of magic, drawing upon both emic and etic perspectives.

In this attempt to generate a theory of magic which may be palatable to the understanding of those outside the culture, I also have attempted to *generate new definitions of spirituality, religion, and magic*, as a means of separating magic from religion, so that it may be talked about independently of religion where necessary, as well as in reference to religion when necessary. These definitions are mechanical in nature, and are designed to fix in place the moving goalposts that tend to exist for the identity conditions of these terms, and as such, *make the academic study of magic, religion, and spirituality a more practical endeavor*.

In addition to rendering the emic perspective intelligible to my academic peers, and reforming the definitions of magic, religion and spirituality so that their study is more sensible, I also wish to address a lack of intellectualism within the culture. While it is true that the philosophies of the occult ought not be immediately dismissed, there is a resistance to growth and expansion among the community, in my experience. Those of us who contemplate the metaphysical realities of magic, or even bother to investigate the efficacy of magic, are few and far between. There is a tendency to assume that everything just works, or even argue that things are no more complicated than “just working.” I have no doubt that I will receive protest from some members of the community for proposing any sort of objectivity between systems and methodology of magic. The fact of the matter is that *the act of magic must have some mechanic to it, if it is to be effective, as I explain near the end of the work*, if we assume a naturalistic reality, which, as I discuss, would seem to be a logical assumption. It is my hope that this work will enlighten some of my peers within the culture.

My end goal, is threefold: to argue academically for a rational magicalism (and argue that it is of interest), to reform the understanding of the key concepts of the study of magic, and encourage philosophical reform within the culture of magicalism (this goal to be attempted by presenting an emic perspective in rational fashion, as will be done in the paper). I will do this by *establishing a naturalistic, materialistic, and monistic reality, establishing magicalism within this framework, and building upon that metaphysics, argue for the act of magic, thereafter analyzing a presented act of magic’s mechanics*

II. MATERIALISM

The *materialism* I will be defending has two core facets: *assumed naturalism, and the tangibility of occurrences in referenced to a psyche*. While naturalism and materialism, in this scheme, assume that there is some sort of objectivity to the world, the two establish very different mechanics within the system. Naturalism *poses that there is a descriptive, principled explanation to all occurrences, without exception, and that each principle is governed by super-principles eventually leading to a singular super-principle upon which all occurrences ultimately supervene*. Materialism, as formulated here, *speaks to whether or not something is objectively effective in reference to a psyche that experiences it, versus being ineffective to the same psyche*. One may define an occurrence as *any object, force, or property/combination thereof, or any given partitioning of reality which acts as a singular unit*. The measure of materiality truly lies in the effectiveness of an occurrence upon other occurrences, including psyches. However, when judging what is material through an apparatus that is inherently psychical (being that that apparatus *is* the psyche), and in judging the materiality of psychical affairs, we must resort to a discussion of *tangibility*. That which is tangible is thought to be something which can be touched, and can be experienced by way of touch, or something which is clearly real. Here, in discussing tangibility, I would like to combine these two possible uses of the concept of tangibility, in large part by expanding the notion of *something which can be experienced by way of touch to an occurrence that generates effects which can be experienced*. If an occurrence has effects which can be experienced, it is clearly real in some way; something about it is producing an effect, which is the stimulus which generates the experience that effect. That occurrence has, then, met the criteria for tangibility.

It would seem, then, that the distinction between naturalism and materialism only truly becomes perceptible when psychical elements are introduced. One may also notice that the above formulations of materiality and tangibility are rather inclusive, in sharp contrast to the typical exclusivity in the formulations of these terms, which is all fine and good, but would seem to lead to some potential problems. These will be addressed in the following, more in-depth explanation of these two core facets of materiality.

Establishing Naturalism

The essential claim of naturalism is that all occurrences happen according to descriptive, inviolable principles, or, *everything uniformly happens and/or exists according to inescapable, natural laws*. To specify the claim that I make when I claim that reality is naturalistic: Whatever happens, whatever *it* is, happens within a certain range of possibility, because a given occurrence may only behave in certain ways. While the range of possibility for a particular occurrence may be very broad, it is still a *range*, and any behavior that falls outside of that range is not possible. There are *inherent, descriptive principles* which govern all occurrences, *regardless of whether or not they are referred to as physical, natural, or material by traditional thinking*.¹

One cannot simply claim that all things are reducible to what is traditionally thought of as the physical, without any modification, becomes akin to the proclamation that events whose workings are not understood in full are simply the “will of God,” an argument whose incoherence Spinoza asserts along similar lines to the way I wish to. Spinoza uses the example of a stone falling from a roof, resulting in a man’s death.

“...If a stone has fallen from a roof onto someone’s head and killed him, they will show, in the following way, that the stone fell in order

¹ The idea of the traditionally physical versus those occurrences which fall outside of this category will be addressed later.

*to kill the man. For if it did not fall to that end, God willing it, how could so many circumstances have concurred by chance (for often many circumstances do concur at once)? Perhaps you will answer that it happened because the wind was blowing hard and the man was walking that way. But they will persist: why was the wind blowing hard at that time? Why was the man walking that way at the same time? If you answer again ...they will press on – for there is no end to the questions which can be asked...And so they will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance."*²

The “will of God” is attributed as a complete explanation for an occurrence which the attributor has no reasonable explanation, an occurrence whose explanation the attributor is ignorant. One may understand Spinoza’s position as one which treats God’s will as a trivially presupposed *causa efficiens* behind all matters, as God’s “will”³ is equivalent to the natural order of things.⁴ The God of Spinoza is *Deus sive Natura, God Identical to Nature*. While the “will” of God as *causa efficiens* of all occurrences, including the rock falling on the man’s head, is technically presupposed by Spinoza’s system, simply saying that the event is explained by God’s “will” is to show ignorance of what has actually taken place, as to say that the “will of God” is its cause is identical to saying that the rock falling on the man’s head was caused by “the laws of nature,” a claim which explains absolutely nothing. Simply indebteding all occurrences to a catch all authority in one’s explanation of the world does nothing to explain that authority’s domain or its working, and especially does nothing to explain those occurrences which are meant to be indebted to that domain.

² Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 28.

³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 15. It is important to understand that by “will,” I do not mean to allude to anything similar to the human will. Spinoza points out that terms such as “intellect” and “will” may only be applied to the God he speaks of as loose analogues, and in fact the “intellect” and “will” of God would only be analogous to their human counterparts in any other way than “the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal.”

⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 15.

Another issue which must be addressed is the reaction to those things which are ill understood, or simply not understood, which *excludes* them from any debt to a baser principle. That *something is not described, or, more accurately, thought of, as physical or natural according to traditional modalities of thought, has no bearing on whether or not it is principled*. To assume so is to fall into a similar trap to the one falls into when blindly indebteding all things to an unexplored “physical,” however, the claim that what is misunderstood is unprincipled is even less defensible, for the simple reason that anything which happens is happening in a certain way. If something *happens*, there is necessarily a *way in which it happens*, and therefore there must be, within the state of affairs, *a way for it to happen*. This is to say that that which happens is necessarily indebted to the properties of occurrences which allow it to happen, and possesses its own properties, as an occurrence, which restrict the range of possible ways for it to interact with reality. If a hypothetical occurrence lacks a means by which to occur, it is not possible. It is in this way that all occurrences which, for lack of better terms, occur, are necessarily natural.

Establishing Tangibility

As previously stated, the distinction between *nature* and *materiality* become relevant when a psyche is introduced, because materiality may then be measured through tangibility. Tangibility has, however, been granted a very broad definition, which must be unpacked if its functionality is to be properly utilized, and its implications understood.

An occurrence that is tangible, as stated previously, is *an occurrence that generates effects which can be experienced*. If an *occurrence is an object, force, event, or combined system comprised thereof*, and occurrences are *tangible if they produce effects which can*

be experienced, then we have allowed into the realm of tangibility a class of occurrence which the layperson would, perhaps, label as intangible.

The class of occurrence I speak of is that of those occurrences who fall into the realm of subjectivity. A subjectivity fits the criteria for an occurrence, in that it may be considered an event, if not a combined system of events and forces. Additionally, a subjectivity, (its status as an occurrence established,) fits the criteria for tangibility in two ways. Firstly, there are, undeniably, effects of subjectivity are experienced *by the psyche which houses that subjectivity*. This is, I anticipate, is where the most issue will be taken with my definition of tangibility and, I would argue, a major reason for the role of the psyche in materiality to be examined. Secondly, a subjectivity housed in a particular psyche generates effects upon its body in the form of behavioral responses and somatic effects, and those effects are in the realm of the objective for any other given psyche, i.e. those effects may be *experienced* by a psyche external to the one housing the subjectivity.

While I do defend then, that there is no categorical distinction between material occurrences and psychological occurrences, it must be pointed out that there is a distinction between what is material and what is psychological; in the same way that one would be remiss to say that one's stomach is indistinct from the rest of one's body. However, the nature of the distinction between materiality and psychologicality would seem to be complex. It is less so, as perhaps is clear from the above, that psychologicality enjoys the position of a smaller sphere within the larger sphere of materiality, merely being "technically" material, and more so that psychologicality is a roughly spherical mass with a fuzzy border, which mixes with the rest of materiality. It is this relationship which I wish to explore in the following. Before a scheme for the organization of materiality and psychologicality is

offered, there are terms which must be defined; so that the reader suffers no confusion as to what it is being explained.

- **Simplicity:** The concept of simplicity, here, is employed to help mediate the two concepts of *materiality* and *psychicality*, which, as it has already been presented, are not mutually exclusive of each other. Simplicity, in this context, grants materiality or psychicality freedom from effects originating with its counterpart. For example, to say that something is *simply material* is to say that it owes no debt to psychical elements. Similarly, what is *simply psychical* can be examined in a self-contained context, as it owes no debt to any non-psychical element. This does not mean that the *simply psychical* is immaterial; in fact, the *simply psychical* is a subset of the *psychical material*. What defines the “simple” forms of both materiality and psychicality is that they can be spoken of without reference to each other, not that they are separate from one another or exist in a vacuum.
- **Material:** Materiality is, in this framework, extended to all things which are extant, one may think of it as a modified form of the concept of the “natural.” *A principled occurrence (or a principle itself) which is external to a psyche is material.* Two things must be said about this formulation of materiality, the first of which is, perhaps, the most intuitive, that those objects and natural forces which are typically not understood to have a mental component are material, or, those things which are most typically

held to be material, are in fact material. What is perhaps less intuitive, is that the mental components of reality, those things which are psychical in nature, are also material. What is material meets the criteria for tangibility. That is, if an occurrence generates effects which are capable of being experienced, it is tangible. Between two psyches, an occurrence is external to at least one of them. The phenomenology and psychology of one individual may be said to be *internal* to that individual, to a second individual, that phenomenology and psychology will be an external reality, about which any statement made has a truth value attached to it, as the subjectivity of a particular individual is *not subjective* to a second individual, because *that* the first individual *experiences* their subjectivity is an *objective fact*.

- **Psychical:** Those occurrences which are contributed to by one or more psyches have a psychical component. That which is indebted to both psychical and material occurrences is *psychical-material*, whereas those indebted to “only” psychical occurrences are *simply psychical*.⁵ To address the *simply psychical*, one may return to the previous description of the material, wherein the role of the psyche in materiality is addressed briefly. *What is subjective to an individual is not subjective to a second individual, in that the subjective experience of the first individual is objective in the*

⁵ The intricacies of psychical-materiality make concepts such as “pure” psychicality dubious. Pure psychicality may really only be spoken of as an organizational tool, applied to specific instances, and nothing may really be said to be purely psychical, given the earlier established definition of materiality. Psychical-materiality will be explored in greater detail in this section.

world of the second individual. This fact renders the subjective experience of the first individual material, as it is not strictly internal to the first individual's psyche, and external to the psyche of the second individual.

The preceding places the psychical, in all forms, *within* the realm of the material. The psychical is, thus, a subset of the material. Or, to use an alternative formulation, *the material and the psychical are interrelated subsets of what is natural, with materiality extending to what is psychical, and what is psychical participating in what is material. What is simply psychical may be thought of in terms of the subjective, as it is experienced by the subject.* This is to say that what is *simply psychical* is *not* devoid of materiality, but rather speaks to the circumstances of experienced subjectivity, that part of the first individual's psychicality which the second individual is not privy to.

- **Traditionally Physical:** What is traditionally physical is, as perhaps evidenced by the term itself, what is commonly thought to comprise the physical sphere of reality. This is often what is referred to as the material, however the sphere of the traditionally physical encompasses a swath of reality which spans parts of both the simply material and the psychical-material, as what is referred to as physical tends to be that which either is composed of matter, quantified force which acts upon matter, or quantified forms of energy. A distinction is drawn between the traditionally physical and the material because the conditions for traditional physical differ from

the previously explained conditions for materiality, in that all things which are traditionally physical are material (even psychical-material, in many cases), but not all things which are material qualify as traditionally physical.

- **Psychical-Material:** What is psychical-material is that which is indebted both to material and psychical occurrences. Technically speaking, the *simply psychical* is a subset of psychical-materiality, as materiality extends to all things which are extant, by the conditions for materiality set forth previously, however, as stated in the section defining the psychical, there is merit to distinguishing between general psychical-materiality and simple psychicality, which is its subset. While simple psychicality is relegated to the realm of the lived experience of the individual (but nonetheless material, because there are psyches to which it is external,) psychical-materiality extends to *any* occurrence which owes the state of its existence to one or more psyches in addition to its material components. This will be explored further later on.

As it may be difficult for the reader to rationalize just how it is that the above concepts relate to one another, given both the general conception of current day Euro-Western culture to tend toward either some form of mind-body dualism (holding a strict and largely impermeable separation of the world of the mental and the world of the material, to the point that each is free of the implications of the other), or a mind-body eliminativism, usually tending toward what many refer to as “materialism,” but is truly

materialism (the assumption that all occurrence, even that of a mental nature, is reducible to material states, an elimination of the mind in the Cartesian sense,) the following diagram ought to be a useful visual aid.

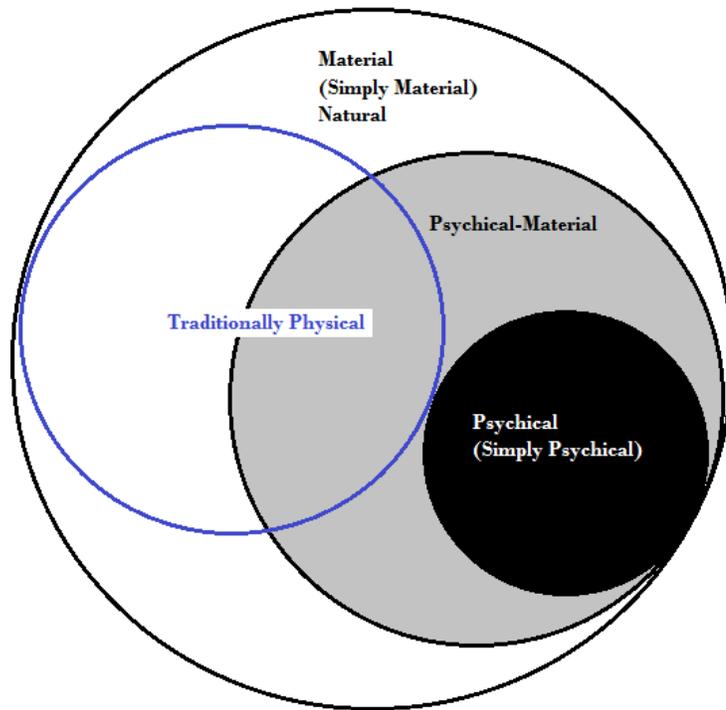


Figure 1

The relationship between materiality and psychicality.

As should be apparent from both the above definitions and diagram, the psychical is not categorically distinct from the material, or even what would traditionally be called material. To reiterate, this framework holds that *materiality extends to all things which participate in the state of affairs inherent in reality, which can be supported by the ultimate tangibility of any given extant occurrence.* Thus, when I refer to the psychical, I do not refer to something which is immaterial. Fundamental to this framework is a

unification of mind and world. Rather than a sharp separation, the mind is a *natural participant* in the world.

In order to explore this participation, which is inherently an exploration of the nature of tangibility, I will draw upon the first of the basic assumptions of the magical worldview, presented later, which is that occurrences are linked to, and/or can be made to link to other occurrences. I do this to illustrate the intersectionality between the concept of materialism and magic as far as their assumptions on the tangibility (by the definition set forth previously) of relational occurrences. I will differentiate between a *psychical linkage* which does not necessarily require a (non-psychical) material link between occurrences, but establishes links between occurrences on a *simply psychical level* and *material linkage* which requires the *interaction of material properties*. Such linkages can be made or altered under certain circumstances, when certain linkages are reformed by new occurrences interacting with established ones. Such an *alterative occurrence* produces changes in the network of linkages of an object or objects that are *external to that alterative occurrence*.

Additionally, these linkages are typically not singular linkages, but *systems of linkages*. For our purposes, a *system* is a web or cluster of linkages between occurrences which bind these occurrences together in such a way that all occurrences involved in the *system* must be treated as a unified whole, or, a system must be treated as an occurrence which is made up of several other interlinked occurrences. *Systems* may be simply psychical or material, psychical-material.

As mentioned previously, it would be inaccurate to say that the *simply psychical* is immaterial or extant in a vacuum, separate from the material world, as psychical

occurrences are generated by interaction with the material world, and are indebted to it. The psychological landscape of an individual, though capable of forming new concepts (generating largely psychological occurrences) that do not necessarily correspond to the material world, is populated by concepts and systems of concepts which have their basis in stimuli of a material (external) origin, derived from the experience of the external world.

To explain this in another way, I am perfectly capable of taking unrelated concepts and smashing them together, throwing logic to the wind, ignoring whether or not those things would fit together in the way I have conceived.

I am capable of imagining a woman with cat's eyes and purple hair, though I have not experienced this image in the external world.

I am also capable of imagining a being that materially appears to be female, but whose personality mixes my conceptions of gender identity, and who appears to *simultaneously* be someone I know from my everyday life, despite this person having none of these features, as if this being were capable of manifesting multiple identities and appearances simultaneously.

Additionally, I am capable of conceiving (partially) of a being whose method of communication is evoking emotional responses, and whose existence is only perceptible to me only by way of the emotional responses it evokes in me when it communicates.

While none of these beings of which I have conceived are beings I have had experiences with in the external world, they are now a part of my psychological landscape, as I have conceived of them for the purpose of this explanation. These, however, cannot be purely psychological because they are composed of base concepts which I have taken from

my experiences of occurrences in the external world, though these base concepts have put together into outlandish *psychical systems* that increasingly defy the logic of the external world that I have access to. It can be said, however, that these concepts may be spoken of in a way that *does not require reference to the external world beyond the base concepts which they are constructed of*. In this way they are simply psychical. The psychical systems which comprise these three beings within my psychical landscape are material in that any claim made by another person in these systems will have a value of “true” or “false,” and their effects upon my psyche produce effects within my behavior which prove tangible to myself and other individuals. However, the beings themselves as they are described cannot be said to exist tangibly, *only the systems which contain their concepts can*. This is the nature of *simple psychicality*.

A purely material, non-psychical experience is also impossible because one is present to experience it. By virtue of experiencing the material, it becomes a part of one’s psychical landscape. Thus, though it may be possible to have experiences which are more psychical or more material, experience which is *wholly* psychical or material in nature is simply not within the scope of possibility. This, however, does not mean that *simple materiality* is off the table in the grand scheme of existence. This is evident that there are occurrences which we have had no influence on, that we have not experienced. We know that we witness, experience, only a small part of the universe. We have no reason to believe that our known reality is the beginning and end of reality. It is foolish to use any example which has been observed in any manner, as then that observance definitionally relegates the example to the brackish waters of psychical-materiality, but, it should be evident that any occurrence which happens in orbit of a distant star or in the void of

space, out of range of our observance, in an environment which is devoid of any psyche (which, for the sake of argument, I will ask the reader to assume), is *simply material* in that it is not indebted to any psychological occurrence for the manner in which it exists. This is the nature of *simple materiality*

Psychical linkage happens both volitionally and, more commonly avolitionally (that is to say, passively, as a natural cognitive function.) The passive nature of psychical linkage might be understood through Tanya Luhrmann's conception of common knowledge.⁶ Luhrmann points out that common knowledge is less a body of precise facts that are known to a culture of specialists (in the case of her study, practitioners of ritualized magic in England), but a common psychical landscape inhabited by specialists of a similar field.⁷ Common knowledge is a set of categories which are common to a field, wherein any two specialists may have different specific information which falls into a given category, if one were to compare their knowledge bases. It is safe to assume that, between these two specialists, there will be a degree of overlap in specific information in a given category due to common data internalized in the process of the study undertaken by the two specialists, and similar experiences yielding similar conclusions between the two specialists, but there will be variance outside of this overlap, more than likely. This variance in the specifics of common knowledge is due to the passivity of the forging of *psychical linkages*.

But, it must be pointed out that these differences are *objective* occurrences, in that statements on the nature of said "common knowledge" have a truth value of either "true" or "false," and in tangible in that the effects of that common knowledge affect the world,

⁶ Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 145.

⁷ Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, 145.

and other individuals, by way of behaviors that that common knowledge generates within the first individual. These effects then, likely than not, generate additional avolitional psychological linkages within the other individuals. It is the avolitionality of these psychological linkages which shows, at the practical level, not only the tangibility of “common knowledge” and other psychological occurrences, but the malleability of the psychological.

It is the experience of material occurrences which generate these alterations in psychological linkage, which in themselves are material in that they generate effects which ripple out from the individual psyche in which they take place and produce effects which are then tangible to the first psyche. With this, it would seem to also be established that *the psyche is at the mercy of the forging and reforging of linkages extant in the world, because of its participation in the world.* Systems of linkage, through all spheres of materiality, including the psychological, will remain significant throughout the rest of this work. The groundwork has now been laid for the establishment of magicalism, which is the goal of the next section. It is my hope that it will become clear that “magic” is simply a logical conclusion arising from the malleability of these systems and, in particular, that it will become evident that many of those acts which may traditionally be considered magical, will be successfully argued for as having tangible effects on the psyche.

III. MAGICALISM WITHIN THE MATERIAL

Clarification: Magic and its relationship to Religion via Spirituality

In the pursuit of defining magic, it would seem necessary to address the relationship of magic to religion, as magic seems to, as far as common knowledge is concerned, necessarily bare some relationship to religion. An important goal, then, in my task of defining magic, is to address where it is that magic and religion would appear to be related, and how the two tend to interact. In my analysis, both magic and religion will be defined by the types of claims they make, which is to say, *what it is that each claims to do or attempts to accomplish.*

I would like to assert, first, in the name of establishing the commonalities between magic and religion, that *a claim of religion, or on the nature of religion, as well as a claim of magic, or a claim on the nature of magic, is an inherently spiritual claim, because both claims of magic and religion are claims referring to the spiritual sphere of one's existence.* While to some readers this may seem to be, at least in part, an obvious claim, it is important to determine what exactly is meant by spirituality. Thusly, I will begin here by defining what it is that I mean by spirituality, and, more specifically, the *spiritual sphere of an individual's existence.*

A Useful Definition of Spirituality

Spirituality is one's phenomenological experience of the self and the world as they interact.

It should be stated, outright, that spirituality will be defended in this work as a phenomenological aspect of the human experience, which does not *necessarily* include a belief in “supernatural” or “spiritual” entities, which are, for our purposes an entirely

different topic. In order to build the definition of spirituality that I will be using for the purposes of defining magic and religion (and, indeed the definition of spirituality that I find to be the most apt in a materialist context, which is appropriate, as these definitions will all be linked back into a system which is, by nature, a materialist one), I would like to begin with a particular dictionary definition of spirituality.

Spirituality is "*The quality or condition of being spiritual; attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interest.*"⁸ Already this definition helps us well on our way to the understanding of spirituality that is required to examine the commonalities between magic and religion, however in order to improve upon it, it is important to address two facets of this definition. First, I assert that being concerned with the spirit *as opposed* to the material assumes a false dichotomy which does not accurately portray the nature of spirituality. My reasoning for this has to do with the second facet of this dictionary definition that I would like to examine, which is the concept of "spirit."

"Spirit" may refer to a number of things, however it is clear that, in this context, it can be narrowed down to those definitions referring to the portion of a person (or potentially any entity of consciousness) that is not strictly material. Of those definitions I would like to draw attention to two of these definitions: "*The nonmaterial part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character; the soul,*" and, "*those qualities regarded as forming the definitive or typical elements in the character of a person, nation, or group in the thought and attitudes of a particular period.*"⁹ Both of these definitions refer to properties which are, by their very nature, psychical. These two

⁸ "Spirituality,"

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/spirituality?q=Spirituality

⁹ "Spirit," http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/spirit

conceptions of "spirit" differ in that the first refers to psychical properties contained to a singular individual, while the second allows its scope to range anywhere from a singular individual to an entire group of people, whose theoretical limit would be defined by the number of people capable of sharing a common characteristic powerful enough to produce common trends in thought and attitude over the given expanse of individuals.

The Self and the World

It does not seem unreasonable to think of trends in "thought and attitudes" as trends in the way that one relates (psychicalizes, thinks about, mentally responds to,) and interacts with the world. Indeed, in a truly material world (a world defined by inviolable principles, the belief in or awareness of which does not alter their truth-value), nothing can exist in a vacuum, as these principles are relational, meaning that they can only be defined by their relationship to other principles and the objects governed by them. Even the most basic of material properties can only be defined by the relationship of an object or force possessed of it to other objects and forces. Not even an individual psyche, which is often conceived of by the average dualist as being distinct from the material world, can exist in a vacuum devoid of relation to other objects and forces. One would be hard pressed to argue that one's mind is not affected by the external world, even if through the intermediary of the body.

What is psychical is not isolated from the material, and thus what is "spirit" is not isolated from the world. The purely material experience is a fiction because, if it is an experience, there is a psyche present to experience it, and it is thus no longer purely material. Additionally, a purely psychical experience is also impossible, as even if there were a point in human development where cognition was present without material

experience, it is certainly not within the scope of memory, and if there is an individual who does remember such a point, and if this is not simply a conjured “memory,” then that person is certainly not representative of the average human. Even the most outlandish, volitionally created ideas stem from base concepts derived from one’s experience of the external reality (which, it ought to be clear to the reader, is referred to interchangeably with the ‘material reality,’ or simply ‘the material,’ additionally, this may be referred to as ‘the material,’ due to the fact that such things are not wholly internal to any one psyche.)

The relationships between objects and forces, including the relationships between a psyche and the world, are material in that those relationships are not purely internal to any one psyche, as they 1) can obviously be said to be external to a psyche which does not bear those relationships, and 2) even those relationships which are psychological in nature are both external to psyches which are not identical to the psyche bearing them, and exist in reference to objects and forces external to the psyche which bears them, and thus still cannot be internal to any one psyche. Those relationships which do not entail a psychological quality, that is, those that do not exist in reference to a psyche, could be described for our purposes, as simply material. Relationships wherein a psyche relates to another material object or force are spiritual because they are in reference to a psyche.

A Phenomenological Spirituality

What is *spiritual* in the way that I have conceived of it has to do with the *spirit*, which, which some might synonymize with the psyche, as it refers to the inherently psychological aspects of a person, including where, how and why it interacts with the world, as previously examined. However, while I afford great importance to the psyche’s role in

the existence of (at the very least, human) *spirit*, what I will be referring to as the *spirit* of an individual is the *self*. What is spiritual exists *in reference to the spirit/self and its interaction with and place in the world*. Spirituality, then, refers to the way in which one is *spiritual*, which is to say that *spirituality encompasses the actions and tendencies of the psyche in reference to itself, and its interaction with and place in the world*, which, as I will discuss, *generates the self, which is the spirit in reference to which I speak*. *Spirituality is one's phenomenological experience of the psyche, self and the world as they interact*. It is also important to note, then, that *spirituality must necessarily encompass the awareness of actions and tendencies which are spiritual in the way that has been outlined*. To rephrase, *spirituality necessarily entails one's perception of one's spiritual existence, or where and how one perceives oneself to fit into the larger scope of existence*.

I would like to examine the nature of the interaction of mind and world through the concept of *self*, in order to demonstrate here that what I refer to as spirituality is simply a part of the human experience, that one does not choose to be spiritual (though one may perhaps choose to be more or less spiritually engaged with the world), but that one's spirituality, as I have defined it, is an active phenomenological process that is simply part of the mechanism of (at the very least,) human consciousness which *generates* what we refer to as the *self*.

The self must be constant. From the point that an individual begins to perceive an identity to the point which that identity ceases to exist. However, if the self must be constant, it seems problematic that various aspects of the individual identity change over time. Not only does the body change over time, but so does the psyche. Individuals

mature over time, individuals acquire information and learn over time. This would seem to contradict the idea that the self is constant. The self must be able to *remain constant* in spite of the changes undergone by the individual due to constant exposure to and experience of the world. The self that changes, then, cannot be the essential self. There must be some aspect of the self which remains constant to observe the changes within the others, which transcends those changes. Therefore there must be a strict demarcation between the *essential self* and the *ephemeral self*.¹⁰

The divide between the essential and ephemeral self can be fairly easily illustrated. The essential self observes the ephemeral self as an object. While the ephemeral self is capable of observing phenomena as objects, the fact that it can be observed within the larger, overarching self as an object makes it distinct from the essential self. To put this more simply, the essential self is the self which is always a subject. The changes within the self can be observed with a degree of coherence. One can say that they “used to be” a certain way or that their “personality changed.” This indicates that there is indeed a subject within the overarching self, which is in more or less constant observation of the ephemeral self as an object. This *is* the essential self.

There is a problem, however, with the idea of a division within the self. It is problematic to say that there is a portion of the self which transcends the self which undergoes the changes of life, because in order for there to be any coherence to this process of observation, this transcendental self, as Steinkamp refers to it, which at this point, for the sake of argument, we will assume to be the essential self, must be able to

¹⁰ Fiona Steinkamp, “Parapsychological Phenomena and the Sense of Self,” in *Parapsychology, Philosophy and the Mind*, ed. Fiona Steinkamp (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 67.

identify the ephemeral self as identical to the transcendental (essential) self,¹¹ it must be able to identify the self that it observes as itself. This, however, is problematic, because in order to be identical to the self it observes, the ephemeral self, it must be subject to change based on exposure to and experience of the world, and therefore cannot be constant. Thus, any self that must identify itself with the self that it observes as an object cannot be the essential self.¹²

Steinkamp suggests that the essential self, then, is not a constant in that it is a fixed and concrete component of a being, but rather the *process of transcending the ephemeral self*.¹³ It would seem that what is meant by this is that a “transcending self,”¹⁴ or the act of transcending the ephemeral self, assuming that it is continuous from whatever point that the “self” is said to originate, is the only thing about the self which could possibly achieve the constancy necessary to qualify as the essential self.

This, then, paints quite a different picture of the self than the one presented before. If the essential self only forms by the act of transcending the constant flux in identity of the ephemeral self, then it would seem reasonable that the essential self only arises when the ephemeral self “exists” long enough to establish some sort of continuity for itself. While the ephemeral self is in constant flux, the state that it currently inhabits is always inescapably predicated upon its previous state, and therefore there is some variety of continuity. Perhaps, then, though the ephemeral self cannot subjectively observe itself unassisted, it is able to observe this continuity, and it is the observation of this continuity that prompts metacognition, which then begins the process of transcendence, thereby

¹¹ Steinkamp, “Parapsychological Phenomena and the Sense of Self,” 68.

¹² Steinkamp, “Parapsychological Phenomena and the Sense of Self,” 68.

¹³ Steinkamp, “Parapsychological Phenomena and the Sense of Self,” 68.

¹⁴ Steinkamp, “Parapsychological Phenomena and the Sense of Self,” 68.

giving rise to the essential (transcending) self. This essential self, which *exists by way of the relationship between the psyche and the world* is the *spirit* I refer to when speaking on human spirituality.¹⁵

There are multiple ways to relate to the world psychically, or multiple ways to psychicalize one's relationship to the world. People simply are not identical to one another, and any two individuals will have a different psyches and selves, shaped not only by factors present from birth, but also shaped by experience. Additionally, different cultures will have tendencies to shape selves so that they relate to the world in different ways. A person who sees every rock and tree as a conscious entity with its own value and rights has a fundamentally different way of viewing the world than someone who sees the same rocks and trees as extensions of a single consciousness, or someone who sees nothing but a tree and a rock, with no consciousness or value. Those three people will interact with the world in different ways, *their spiritualities will be different.*

These different types come about due, in large part, to the fact that the formation of psychical systems is largely passive. Even when one volitionally attains a concept, one's experience of that concept is determined largely involuntarily. Two people may experience "boulder," and they will have a common vocabulary and vague categorical system by which to refer to "boulder," but there may be a great deal of variance in the psychical landscapes of these two people.¹⁶ The passive internalization of various other

¹⁵ It would be wise to remember that the *human* spirit exists by way of the relationship between the mind and the world, as this conception of human spirit will be important for later extrapolation.

¹⁶ Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 145. Tanya Luhrmann describes "common knowledge" among practitioners of magic in England in the 1980s. Common knowledge, she argues, is less a body of specific facts and theories of which all members of a given community are expected to know, but rather a common vocabulary that all members of a given community are expected to recognize ('recognize' not necessarily, and not usually, meaning that the terms of this vocabulary are defined consistently between possessors of this vocabulary), and a common set of

concepts will affect the way in which “boulder” is registered in the psychical landscape of both people. This passive internalization of concepts begins with one’s first experiences and continues throughout the life of the individual. It would be difficult to argue against the majority of information obtained by the psyche is volitionally obtained, much less volitionally situated into the psyche.

Spirituality may be spoken of in *degrees of engagement*, in that one can engage with or connect more to the world than another person. This is not only true of what one might conventionally consider to be spirituality, which typically has an element of religiosity to it. A secular individual can most certainly have a higher *degree* of spirituality than a religious person.

Imagine a man who is very self absorbed, is not conscious of his material environment or the happenings around him. Perhaps he is even generally ignorant to the social happenings of his community. The person in question has very little psychical linkage to, or engagement with the world. Now, picture a gardener for hire. He works for a good number of people in his community, and knows the general goings on of its social sphere. Additionally, he is very aware of the material environment, as his profession requires him to have a fair degree of spatial awareness, as well as knowledge of how to deal with particular soil conditions, and how to care for particular plants in the growing environments common to the area. This man, regardless of his religion, has a *higher degree* of spirituality because he is more *phenomenologically engaged* with the world.

Because the spiritual sphere consists of the manner in which one relates to and engages with the world, magic and religion both fall into the spiritual sphere, because

psychical categories that all members of the given community are expected to have *some sort of conception* within.

both make claims as to how it is that the psyche fits into the grand scheme of reality, and therefore establish modes of engagement and relation. That said, *though magic and religion both make spiritual claims*, the spiritual claims that they make are *fundamentally different*. In light of this, the next section will be dedicated to a brief investigation of what constitutes a religious claim, for the purpose of distinguishing it from a magical claim.

The Religious Claim in Brief

“...*A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*”¹⁷

The task of this work is to define magic and, because of this, I’ll be forming a definition of religion, which has been historically intertwined with magic, based upon the above definition. This definition, as Geertz points out, is rather bare in its character, as simplified definitions tend to be, however it serves to point one who would investigate the concept of religion in a particular direction.¹⁸ With that in mind, this section will be briefly investigating the nature of the religious claim *in light of the above section on spirituality* while further teasing out and modifying Geertz’s paradigm as necessary.

What then, is religion? First and foremost, a religion is a complex system of symbols¹⁹ which serve the function of “...[synthesizing] a people’s ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Fontana Press, 1993) 90.

¹⁸ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

¹⁹Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 91. A “symbol” can be defined, for our purposes, as “...any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning...’”

worldview—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order.”²⁰ These systems of symbols describe an order of the cosmos, a place in that cosmos for the individual and collective, and a way for the individual and collective to behave.

More importantly though, religion must engender belief in its own set of symbols. Geertz uses the example of piety.²¹ Piety is a proclivity rather than a performance. This is to say that the pious individual does not simply do something that would be viewed as pious because he is prompted, but rather a pious individual is likely to do pious things. Piety is an impulse without an overt prompt, it is a part of the character of the pious individual. Similarly, one is not religious because they do what is religious when prompted, a truly religious person will have the tendency toward these actions, and their relevance, as part of their character. The symbols of a religion must enter its practitioners’ psychical landscape as a portion of the external world which the practitioner inhabits. Furthermore, the symbols of a practitioner’s religion must *not only* be part of the practitioner’s psychical landscape as a facet of the external world, but, *to the practitioner*, they must exist in some way that is *at least compatible* with those symbols as they exist in the practitioner’s understanding of a body of knowledge. In this way, the body of information which comprises a religion, the doctrine, practice, cosmology, moral obligations, which otherwise *exist externally to the would-be practitioner as a set of propositions*, must *enter the psychical landscape of the practitioner in a configuration that allows the concepts conveyed by those symbols to be deemed “true” in some regard.*

²⁰ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

²¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 95.

The environment of the religious person must engender the reality of these symbols within his/her psychological landscape in such a way that the behaviors of the religious life are, at the internal level, the most reasonable way to react to the environment, which at this point, per the experience of the individual, assumes the conception of these symbols as reality. In order to do that, however, a religion must *affirm something* for the would-be practitioner.²² It must affirm an order to existence that the would-practitioner is able to deal with, or, rather, that one which the practitioner can accept as an order to reality.²³

A religion is, then, for the purposes of this work a set of symbols, a body of information which:

- Conveys a particular order to the external world.
- In doing so, gives some indication of where the practitioner fits within this order, and how it is that the practitioner *ought to act* due to that place. As a part of this, a religion places ethical and moral stipulations on its practitioners.
- Additionally, this order must be able to explain the position in which the practitioner finds him/herself phenomenologically. *The practitioner must be able to see him/herself within the presented order.*
- By the environment the practitioner of a religion finds him/herself, engenders a psychological reality of the relevant symbols within the practitioner which is compatible in some form with the practitioner's

²² Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 99.

²³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 99.

understanding of the religious body of knowledge. In other words, the symbols and the conceptions intended behind them must be *spiritually real* to the practitioner, not just some external claim.

A *religious claim*, is, then, a claim which draws authority from or establishes such a set of symbols. With this in mind, let us examine the core mechanics of the magical claim and see how it differs from the religious claim.

The Magical Claim in Brief

Because the concept of magic is unpacked in-depth later on in this section, I will simply provide an abbreviated version of the core of the magical claim, for the purpose of comparing it to the religious claim. A brief explanation of the core of the magical claim is as follows:

- Occurrences are connected to, and can be made to connect to, other occurrences in the world by subtle and overt linkages
- These linkages can be altered, or even created, if sufficient criteria are met. The occurrence which incites this alteration is an *alterative occurrence*.
- With the alteration or creation of these linkages, conditions external to the alterative occurrence may be changed.
- The psyche has the potential to become an alterative occurrence.
- The volitional act of alteration or creation of these linkages is the practice of magic. Worldviews which necessitate these principles are magical worldviews.

Having established a basic outline of the fundamentals of the magical claim, which will be built upon later, the below will explain why it is that it is necessary to talk of magic as distinct from religion if one is to study it as a phenomenon.

Magic and Religion: Overlapped but Distinct

Having established what constitutes religious and magical claims, I will now address where magic and religion exist in relation to each other. It's fairly clear that the existence of magic could be very easily supposed in the order of reality that a given religion proposes, and thus have its practice regulated by the prescriptive behavioral doctrines posed by that religion.²⁴ That said, it also ought to be fairly clear, by this point, that the practice of religion and the practice of magic simply do not make the same claim, *spiritually* they are not synonymous. A belief in magic can conceivably avoid the moralistic and ethical prescriptions necessary for a religion to be a religion. A system of magical practice does not, definitionally, have to make moral or ethical claims in order to maintain its status as a system of magical practice, however a system of religious *must* do so in order to maintain its status as a system of religious practice.

Additionally, while magic would seem to necessarily impose at least *some* sense of order on the universe which, by my own definition of magic, would require a practitioner to be able to fit themselves into it, and one would assume that to seriously make a magical claim would require a spiritual truth to the concept of magic within the individual, I would argue that the same could be said for the belief in the contemporary

²⁴ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 65-225. Evans-Pritchard's study of the Zande tradition and society goes into great detail on the moral and ethical prescriptions placed upon various magical practices.

understood laws of nature, which would seem to fill all the requirements for religion other than the requirement of moral and ethical prescription.²⁵

I will make the statement that *claims of magic and religion assert fundamentally different but potentially related claims*. Furthermore, in the spiritual sphere, the practices of magic and religion are simply different, which is to say that the phenomenological reality of interacting with the world in a religious manner is different from the phenomenological reality of interacting with the world in a magical manner. The experience of religious practice draws its conception from a belief that the world is a certain way, whereas the experience of magical practice draws its conception from a belief that the world can be altered through the exploitation and alteration of subtle linkages.²⁶ These experiences can, phenomenologically, be had at the same time, but this speaks to the fact that one is capable of simultaneously holding two beliefs that do not necessarily contradict each other, and not to an inherently religious nature of magic or an inherently magical nature of religion.

Magic, In-Depth

“It is not a definite and definable power, the power of doing this or that; it is Power in an absolute sense, with no epithet or determination of any sort.”²⁷

-Emile Durkheim, in reference to Wakan²⁸

²⁵ This would seem to indicate something about the general nature of experience and spirituality. Anything which provides a sense of consistency or “order” to one’s sense of the world and is manifestly true in one’s experience could easily fit the requirements for religion if moral and ethical prescriptions were somehow derived from it. This may indicate that the definition is too broad, or it may indicate that the function that religion serves does not necessarily derive from what one might consider to be typically religious beliefs. I am inclined to believe the latter, as the definitions built are about mechanical operations in the phenomenology of the spiritual sphere, not what specific iterations of those functions are *allowed* to be magical or religious.

²⁶ It should be noted that the claims made about these experiences assume that the religious system and magical system being referred to are *spiritually true* to their practitioners.

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 195.

Magic, as a concept, has a place in the common, contemporary mind as a broad and vague class of phenomena that are either a) impossible (cannot, and do not happen), or b) if and only if such phenomena occur, *miraculous*, that is, in defiance of the laws of Nature, or outside of understanding. This conception of magic, this nature-defying class of phenomena whose only explanation is that they are unexplainable, is not the magic to which I refer. Under this conception of magic, something that is understood is no longer magic, even if it may act according to principles which seem to be inherent in the idea of magic. I would assert that these sort of moving goal posts are deeply problematic for any concept, as it impedes the ability of one to communicate, and it makes useless concepts which may be useful, were their basic terms simply accepted. In short, *an archaic explanation can be updated without losing the significance of what it is explaining*. In this work, I use the term “magic” to refer to a specific class of phenomena whose nature will be outlined in the following. I, and that which is magic, if it is magic, *is* magic.

Tanya Luhrmann presents the “core claim” of magic as a broad concept as, “...*that mind affects matter, and... in special circumstances, like ritual, the trained imagination can alter the material world.*”²⁹ One can reasonably extrapolate, then, that “magic” within this scheme would be any practice which assumes this concept and attempts to exploit it. This conception of magic is beneficial to the study of magic because it asserts an etic interpretation of the concept of magic which does not ignore the

²⁸ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 195. What Durkheim believes to be the Souix expression of his “Totemic Principle.” The principle is, particularly when expressed as Wakan by the Souix, the animating drive behind all things, an undefined and undifferentiated power by which all things happen. Such principles are thought by Durkheim to be the most elementary objects of religious activity, whether directly and consciously, or indirectly or subconsciously. While Durkheim presents a Totemic Principle as merely a thing that is believed in, the concept itself is similar to several other concepts which are helpful in building a realistic magicalism.

²⁹ Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, 7.

lay understanding of the word, and does not ignore the commonalities between various emic conceptions of magic, and things which would fall under its definition (the one proposed), which would seem to be important if one wishes to seriously study worldviews which allow for “magic.” It is my hope to establish an understanding of the concept of “magic” which is applicable to all instances of what modern practitioners would refer to as “magic,” as well as a definition which is applicable to the study of magical claims and beliefs, expanding upon what Luhrmann has proposed.

The Existence and Employ of Magic

Certainly this idea of the psyche influencing the world is common in attempts to define magic which spring internally from more modern thought systems which believe in magic. Aleister Crowley defines magic (“magick”³⁰, as he spells it) as “...*the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will.*”³¹ This definition would certainly seem to agree with Luhrmann’s definition of magic, but more importantly, sets up an important component of not necessarily all magical claims, but magical claims focusing on the *volitional employ of magic* or the *volitional practice of magic*. I draw this distinction because there are two basic ideas of a magical worldview, the first being *that magic is done*, as demonstrated by Luhrmann and Crowley’s definition.

The second basic idea of magical worldviews is that *magic exists ambiently*, this is to say that there are natural processes and properties which constitute ‘magic’ that are

³⁰ This spelling has become rather popular in modern day magical communities, though it is not universally used.

³¹ Crowley, Aleister, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram Press, 1930) XVII.

not the result of volitional exploitations or performances of magic. Peter Carroll's description of magic is decidedly in this camp.

Ether in materialistic descriptions is information which structures matter and which all matter is capable of emitting and receiving. In transcendental terms ether is a sort of "life force" present to some degree in all things. It carries both knowledge about events and the ability to influence similar or sympathetic events. Events arise spontaneously out of themselves or are encouraged to follow certain paths by influence of patterns in the ether. As all things have an etheric part, they can be considered to be alive in some sense. Thus all things happen by magic; the large-scale features of the universe have a very strong etheric pattern which makes them fairly predictable but difficult to influence by the etheric patterns created by thought. Magicians see themselves as participating in nature. Transcendentalists like to think they are somehow above it. Materialists like to try and manipulate it.³²

Carroll's definition certainly does not exclude the volitional employ or exploitation of magic, which for him works via movement and transfer of a force called *ether*. *Ether*, as used by Carroll can be seen as an exchange of information between material objects and events. Ether can, in Carroll's view, be affected and manipulated by the psyche, as the psyche produces its own ether, which is perhaps unique in that its information is malleable, due to the ability of the psyche to change existing information and produce new information within itself.³³ This information is present ambiently throughout the world and is capable of being manipulated. That said, in the act of defining magic, Carroll downplays the psyche in favor of describing this more ambient idea of magic, as the Carrollian conception of magic overtly describes a material force, which is in no way supernatural, though the manipulation of it by a conscious psyche may indeed be

³² Peter J. Carroll, *Liber Kaos* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser, LLC, 1992), 55.

³³ Carroll, *Liber Kaos*, 7.

viewed as paranormal³⁴. An ambient idea of magic can also be found further back in history, within the medieval conception of natural magic.³⁵ The philosophy of medieval natural magic acknowledged subtle occult properties of objects within the world which existed independently of a magician or any other persons, though it was possible for individuals to make use of such properties. Magic existed as part of the world, and was inherent in the natural properties of "...stones, metals, plants, and animals, the sympathies and antipathies existing in the whole of nature..."³⁶ Another medieval conception of ambient magic, which Carroll's theory is more reminiscent of, describes the material objects, as well as words and actions, send out rays which influence the cosmos, and which can be manipulated by a learned practitioner to influence the world, particularly through acts such as prayer, ritual and sacrifice.³⁷

³⁴ Carroll, *Liber Kaos*, 70.

³⁵ Peter J. Forshaw, "The Occult Middle Ages," in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 39.

³⁶ Forshaw, "The Occult Middle Ages," 39.

³⁷ Forshaw, "The Occult Middle Ages," 40.

What is Asserted by a Claim of Magic, or, What Constitutes a Magicalistic Conception of Reality?

This last conception, perhaps, detailed in the medieval manuscript, *De Radiis Stellarum* by Abu Yusuf ibn Ishaq al-Kindi,³⁸ would seem to merge more fully these two persistent ideas of magical belief: that *magic is done* and that *magic exists ambiently*. With this and the other definitions in mind, I would like to propose what I view to be the core of a magical worldview. The basic set of assumptions that any magical worldview operates under would appear to be:

- ***Linkage of Occurrences:*** Occurrences are connected to, and can be made to connect to, other occurrences in the world by linkages which are quite material. These linkages, perhaps, would be the transferences of information which Carroll describes as ether, or the “rays” described by al-Kindi, as they affect the world around them, the ways in which a given occurrence is linked to other occurrences.
- ***Alterations in Linkage and Alterative Occurrences:*** These linkages can be made, or altered, if sufficient criteria are met. If, as in the varying ambient conceptions of magic described earlier, these interactions of properties, these linkages, exist in the world independently of a magician, it stands to reason that at least some of these alterations happen naturally, as these linkages are constantly influencing their own relevant occurrences and therefore other occurrences they are connected to, as nothing exists in a vacuum. An occurrence which instigates the creation of new linkages or alteration of existing ones may be referred to as an *alterative occurrence*.

³⁸ Forshaw, “The Occult Middle Ages,” 40.

- ***Effects of Alterations in Linkage:*** By the alteration and creation of these linkages, conditions external to the alterative object or force can be altered. Once again referring back to Carroll and al-Kindi's theories of magic, these exchanges of information, these rays, these linkages exert real influence, however subtle.
- ***The Psyche as an Alterative Occurrence:*** The psyche has the potential to be one of these alterative objects/forces, and is capable of doing so volitionally. The mind does not exist in a vacuum, as it is, at the very least, linked to a body, which is linked subtly to its environment. In this way that the psyche may influence linkages to and of occurrences in its environment, either by direct linkage of the mind to other occurrences, by material manipulation of objects and forces which are already linked to the occurrences to be altered, resulting in indirect but nonetheless volitional manipulation, or a combination thereof.
- ***Volitional Alteration and the Magical Worldview:*** This volitional act of making and/or altering these linkages is the practice of magic. A worldview which makes claims that must necessarily operate on these principles is a magical worldview.

Metaphysics of Connectivity

“As all things have an etheric part, they can be considered to be alive in some sense. Thus all things happen by magic; the large-scale features of the universe have a very strong etheric pattern which makes them fairly predictable but difficult to influence by the etheric patterns created by thought.”³⁹

What is meant by the concept of “linkage” or “connectivity?” The above quote from Peter Carroll’s *Liber Kaos*, introduced previously, provides an excellent explanation from the lofty realms of occult metaphysics. All things influence their environment, and larger things have larger influence. My aim with this and the next several sections is, as mentioned, to both expand upon the five assertions of magic, and to defend each of them as viable concepts. That work begins, for all five assertions, with the first, as each assertion assumes the last. Thus, the establishment of a theory of connectivity as both magically and conventionally viable is an important first step in the work to be done in subsequent sections and, ultimately, the rest of this work.

We may look at an effective, though limited, exoteric example that would support something like this theory: gravity. Any mass will have its own gravitational pull: however a bigger mass, and thus a more powerful gravitational field, will dominate a weaker gravitational field that is within its reach. A larger object will pull a smaller object to it. However, a smaller object is not without its own influence, so while a star such as the sun may restrain a planet such as the earth in its orbit, the orbit of the moon (smaller than the earth, but much closer in size to the earth, in comparison to the size difference between the earth and the sun), influences the vast oceans of the earth and the spin of the earth itself. The gravitational field of the sun has the earth on a fairly set path,

³⁹ Carroll, *Liber Kaos*, 7.

however the earth can be influenced in comparatively smaller ways by the moon.

Additionally, our solar system exists within a galaxy of stars, all exerting gravitational influence upon each other, theoretically pulled toward a large gravitational nexus at its center. The complex structure that is our galaxy is held together, made to happen, by this force that masses exert upon each other.

While I do not mean to imply that Carroll's *ether* is flatly synonymous with gravity, or that the idea of magic is a claim to manipulate gravity, I do wish to introduce an idea that will be central to this work; that *certain phenomena within reality would appear to "mimic" the principles of magic in part or in whole*. Within this scheme, the claim that the world happens by magic is *not* a claim that the world happens by way of miraculous, nature-defying forces, but that *the world operates upon principles which allow and facilitate the exertion of one influence upon another*. However, if this is the case, the astute reader may ask, how is this conception of magic reflective of Luhrmann's core claim of magic, or, perhaps, why would one call this magic at all? The reader is right to ask this question, as what I've done is claimed that something which is *explained* in a working capacity by conventional scientific understanding operates under principles of magic.

Simply put, the claim I make is one of ambient magic, a claim of *systems of occurrences* which are forged and reformed naturally. Additionally, as I hope to show, these systems may be altered, their linkages reformed, volitionally. In order to do this, I will lay out what I will refer to as a *metaphysics of connectivity*. To begin, I would direct the attention of the reader back to folkloric evidence, to examine two interrelated concepts, which already exist within the world of magical belief. As mentioned before,

there would seem to be, inherent in the world of magicalism, two fundamental types of “belief in magic:” that of an ambient force or forces referred to as “magic” which is optionally employed by a magician, or worker of magic, and that of the volitional (or at the very least psychological) act which alters the lay of events or circumstances in conformity (or attempted conformity, as sometimes the case may be) with will.

Most explanations of magic in the world of the American occult, in my experience, will default to Aleister Crowley definition of magic, given previously, which supports the latter of these two beliefs, but makes no mention of a belief in the ambience of magic. There is a contrast between commonplace explanations of magic, and the beliefs that accompany it in this way, which it is possible that many practitioners (or perhaps even scholars) do not think about.

What the educated scholar of magic will be aware of is that most magical worldviews, especially those derived from indigenous traditions, are far more expansive than “the world can be affected by the will.” With the magical belief there is often a series of complex nuances to the world that extend far beyond this incredibly simple claim. Objects have their own properties, one might even say, their own magic, which can help or hinder the works of the magician, which can be seen in the *ngua* of the Azande, as observed by E.E. Evans-Pritchard.⁴⁰ Evans-Pritchard translates the term as “magic,” but there’s something specific happening with this concept, *ngua*, which he has translated with the word, “magic.” *Ngua* refers to techniques and practices revolving around objects which have their own unique magical properties, as well as these objects themselves (which Evans-Pritchard refers to as “medicines”) which influence circumstances and events when used properly. Most men and women require the use of

⁴⁰ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 227.

medicine to engage in what would be called “magic” in the western world, because most men and women are only capable of accessing *ngua*.⁴¹ The reason that *ngua*, a form of magic which cannot be undertaken without the aid of the properties of outside materials, is all that is available to common magicians, is because the other form of “magic,” referred to as *mangu* (translated by Evans-Pritchard as “witchcraft,”) is only accessible to those born with it, *mangu is part of the biological makeup of the individual*.⁴² The *ngua-mangu* dichotomy within the Zande culture is illustrative of these two fundamental types of magic within magical thought.

Another point which must be addressed is the blending which can take place between these two concepts, of which another example may be found within Evans-Pritchard’s work. The Zande “witch-doctor,” illustrates a blending of properties originating from within and without a practitioner of magic. Witch-doctors (*Avule/Abinza*) are professionals who identify the presence and cause of *mangu*, as well as combat its effects, through special uses of *ngua* in combination with ecstatic dance.⁴³ Though a witch-doctor relies upon the inherently magical properties of objects, which exist externally to him, he must undergo a process of internalizing those properties in order to obtain special internal capabilities. The powers of the witch-doctor are attained through a long process of ritual maintenance and consumption of various plant-based

⁴¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 226. I do take issue with Evans-Pritchard’s translation of *ngua* as “magic,” because it does cause a fair bit of confusion when talking about the overall subject of magic. Evans-Pritchard does, however, address this in his appendix, stating that his choice in translation was with the aim of providing a vocabulary with which to interpret the terms of the Zande vernacular, and not to make assertions on what should be classed as “magic” within the Zande culture.

⁴² Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 227.

⁴³ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 228.

ngua.⁴⁴ Additionally, the path to becoming a witch-doctor is paved with great financial cost. Knowledge of *ngua*, which is central to the art of the witch-doctor must be bought.⁴⁵

That it is the *knowledge* of these *ngua* which is central to the exchange, their properties, the proper ways to use them, and where to obtain them, is central to this exchange, and not the actual substances to be consumed or interacted with (though these are often included in the case of rarer *ngua*) alludes to the heavily internal component of the witch-doctor's art. It is not enough to possess a substance which is capable of producing an effect, one must *actually know how to produce an effect*, and in the case of the witchdoctor one must become *part of the system* of which the *ngua* that he uses are also a part. One must learn to dance the traditional witch-doctor's dance with the special medicines in his belly, and only once he has learned to properly undertake this task, can he begin to access the divinatory powers of the witch-doctor's trade.⁴⁶ This transference and attainment of power between the natural world and the practitioner of magic speaks to more than simple manipulation of a system, but participation in it. The witch-doctor does not simply move *ngua* around so that their properties affect the world, and he does not simply speak to them, instructing them what to do, though all of this is still part of his craft. Above all else, the witch-doctor must mix *ngua* with his being in order to produce the effects of the witch-doctor trance.

The Zande witch-doctor's art becomes interesting when we take into consideration the previously mentioned conception of *spirit*, which refers to the "self" which exists as the relationship between the mind and the world. The *spirit* of the witch-doctor would *necessarily* be changed by this relationship with the *ngua* being ingested in

⁴⁴ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 94.

⁴⁵ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 95.

⁴⁶ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, 96.

combination with these ecstatic dance ceremonies. The witch-doctor's *spirit* becomes part of the system, which is the dance, which is the art of divination, and the art of combating the malevolent force of *mangu*. Much like the human *spirit*, it would seem that the witch-doctor's art exists as a relationship between several factors. It is not that the *ngua* to be ingested, that a witch-doctor exists to ingest them, that a witchdoctor dances, and that there is *mangu* that result in the witch-doctor's art, but the relationship between these occurrences, *that these occurrences do not exist in a vacuum, and are linked specifically to each other, is what causes the witchdoctor's art to exist*. This is the nature of systems of linkage. Occurrences link to one another, in effect forming larger occurrences, which, of course, only exist because those more basic occurrences are linked to one another. Further, those more complex occurrences form greater systems which also *cannot be said to be the result of the mere existence of its parts*.

I would evoke a previous example and claim that this is true of solar systems, which exist as systems of gravitation and radiation generated by stars and planets. The fact that a sun and any number of planets exist does not *on its own* constitute a solar system. The components of a solar system must interact with each other in such a way as to form a system which acts as its own occurrence, even as several smaller occurrences compose it. The same is true of biological organisms, both simple and complex. A single celled organism does not exist because the various chemical components which compose it exist, it exists because of these components interact with each other in specific ways. This is then echoed in multi-celled organisms—each cell must interact with the other cells and the environment in specific ways in order for a multi-celled organism to actually be a cohesive organism. *That the components of an occurrence exist is not sufficient for*

the existence of that occurrence. The components of an occurrence must interact in a way which brings that occurrence about, for all whenever something happens, whatever 'it' is, there is a way for it to happen, otherwise it does not happen.

The world, the universe, reality, would, then, seem to be composed of these “spirits,” which is to say, occurrences which exist *as the relationships between more basic occurrences*. These *spirits* are, in themselves, systems of occurrences, which overlap and interact with each other, and change. Coupled with the previous establishment of naturalism, the matrix, the structure of reality, is natural principle, which allows for occurrences, as well as allowing for occurrences to relate to one another to form systems, leading to yet greater occurrences. To clarify, I make no claim that reality is twofold in essence. It is important, however, to make a distinction between the basic principles which allow for reality’s occurrences and the occurrences which follow from it, so that what it is that is basic may be determined. There are, very clearly, occurrences which take place into reality. Following previous reasoning, those occurrences have some way of occurring, and therefore the content is governed by structure. This is not to say that the structure of reality and the content of reality are fundamentally different, but rather that the extant and possible expressions of reality have two fundamental types of function, those of structure and those of content.⁴⁷

I would argue, then, the singular base of reality, from which occurrences come about, and those occurrences which come about as its result. The things which come about are occurrence and *spirit*, the boundaries between which are essentially nonexistent, given, as previously discussed, the nature by which things exist. To further

⁴⁷ Galen Strawson, “Real Naturalism v2.” *International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy* 1, no. 2, (2013): 104, accessed October 12, 2016, www.metodo-rivista.eu/index.php/metodo/article/download/48/42

fortify this idea of a monistic conception a reality supervenient upon a singular base principle, I refer back to Spinoza's God, which, again, is synonymous with nature. Nature is necessarily the *causa efficiens*, as even if there must be a definitive beginning to what is traditionally conceived of as nature, that is, the reality in which the reader, and this work, exist, the reality in which the simply material occurrences we are accustomed to occur, there must necessarily be principles in place before the genesis of that nature, allowing the genesis of that nature, and which that nature is necessarily beholden to.⁴⁸ Once again, for anything that happens, there must be a way for it to happen, no matter what 'it' is. It is these principles which allow for the genesis of what we conventionally understand as nature which are the base most substance of nature. The highest governing principle, from which all others follow, is identical to existence in that there is only that principle, and differentiation from that principle.

Such a baseline principle is echoed by Mary Anne Atwood, who presents the theory of transmutation within the field of alchemy not as a defiance of the laws of nature, as the alchemical art's attempts at transmutation are often thought, but as a demonstration of understanding of fundamental laws, nay, *the* fundamental law of nature.⁴⁹ Though transmutation is generally understood to be the action of transforming one type of object into another, this is a false interpretation of the concept. Atwood states that one cannot generate gold from lead any more than one can generate a horse from a dog.⁵⁰ Transmutation is not between specificities, but rather of *first matter*, or the *universal subject*, which is the principle and unformed base "material" by which all things exist and from which all things arise, being the unformed and undifferentiated base makeup of

⁴⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 62.

⁴⁹ M. A. Atwood, *A Suggestive Inquiry Into Hermetic Mystery* (Glastonbury: The Lost Library, 1850), 72.

⁵⁰ Atwood, *Suggestive Inquiry*, 73.

existence.⁵¹ The alchemical art professes, for Atwood, manipulation of this baser, principle *universal subject*.

All iterations of the *universal subject*, specified or not, are subject to laws. Lead cannot be transformed into gold because only the *universal subject* can make such transitions, namely and exclusively, the *universal subject* may only transition between itself and a given specificity, and from a given specificity to itself. To offer an alternate phrasing, the *universal subject* may *specify* into a given form, or, may *unspecify* from a given form.

I would pose that there must be some sort of *universal subject*, even if it is, perhaps, not that which is envisioned by Atwood (though it may be,) in the form of a base most principle, even if (as I whole heartedly suspect) that base most principle cannot be categorized conventionally as matter. I have stated multiple times that anything which happens, whatever *it* is, has to have a way of happening, otherwise it does not happen. Each occurrence (a) which arises, regardless of what it then gives rise to, is given rise to by another occurrence (b), in that that occurrence (b) either generates or simply is the “way” in which the subject occurrence (a) is able to occur. The same must be true of occurrence (b), however, which must exist by dint of an additional occurrence (c) in a fashion similar to the way in which (a) exists by dint of (b). I resist, however, in a similar fashion to Aristotle, the notion that these dependencies continue in infinite regress.⁵² It seems logical that there would be some sort of rock bottom to this chain of dependency.

Each occurrence does not necessarily simply generate one daughter occurrence. In other words, it is not the case that one occurrence is always equal to one daughter

⁵¹ Atwood, *Suggestive Inquiry*, 72, 75.

⁵² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (University of Adelaide: 2015), 12.8.

occurrence (that is to say, an effect or linked set of effects generated by its properties.) Occurrences often have multiple effects upon their environments, and thus several daughter occurrences will result from that occurrence. Couple this with the fact that, given the metaphysical necessity of such chains of dependency, each such chain (no doubt intersecting and joining with various other chains), must be able to exist by dint of *something*, which would seem to mean that there must be a basic property which allows these chains of dependency to arise. This base most property (and, for that matter, this idea of chains of dependency), however, is different from the Aristotelian first mover in that I refer here not to movements or causes, but the structures which allow for this. Events have causal lineages, however I do not suppose that there was, at some point an event which sparked all of existence, or, more accurately, I don't refer to such an event with this argument, for any such event would still require that there be structural properties ingrained within reality which allow it to happen. I am referring to these structural capabilities of reality, and that these must stem from a base structure which allows all structure and content (within the confines of that structure) to come forth, by dint of the properties inherent in this base most structure (though perhaps the term "structure" is dubious at that point.) The difference between this base most principle, this *universal subject*, and those things which specify it are, perhaps, more closely related to Spinoza's notion of *substance* versus his notion of *things*, as is perhaps evidenced by my heavy use of Spinozan logic to establish the naturalistic element of the material.⁵³

However, I would hope that the significance of my brief evocation of Aristotelian logic is not lost on the reader, as even though the Spinozan and Aristotelian frameworks are sufficiently similar enough to lend support to my framework individually, there is also

⁵³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3-9.

great significance in that both can be drawn on for support of this framework, and that there may indeed be something to Atwood's *universal subject*, in that there would seem to be reason to hold a singular, base most principle as that which all occurrences logically supervene upon.

Reality is then, structurally, the base most principle, the *universal subject*, supervened upon by all other occurrences (further structural principles which follow from it, and eventually more recognizably concrete occurrences, such as matter and those things which are partly or wholly composed of it), and in content, the results of that structure, which form systems, giving rise to the previously discussed *spirits*, participating in "larger" *spirits*, and as all occurrences participate in and are linked to this base structure, reality composes a combined *spirit*.

But what of ambient magic and practitioner-born magic? The Zande witch-doctor is an adequate frame for not only this metaphysical framework, but the act of magic, which acts upon the principles of that metaphysics, because the art of the witch-doctor acknowledges what is ambiently concrete, and yet participates (at least in aim, and in the way that I have described) in those impersonal forces, making them personal. The properties of the *ngua* he has learned to use are unlocked, in the folklore, by his use of his body's properties. He participates in the ambient magic that is present in the world, takes magic into himself so that it is a part of him. The Zande witchdoctor acknowledges participation in other *spirits*, makes himself part of the world of *spirits*. He becomes very overtly engaged, spiritually. Not only does he participate within the world, but he participates in such a way that the boundary between himself and the world becomes lesser, so that he may gain gnosis of that world. The witch-doctor's attempted act is

fundamentally one of acting on the connectivity of the world in a very overt sense. Any act of magic must necessarily participate in the ambient connectivity of the world's occurrences if it is to be effective.

IV. THE ACT OF MAGIC

Volition and Alteration

While the above is all well and good, it would appear to be nothing more than a metaphysical theory. Most previously I have stated that an effective act of magic must participate in the ambient connectivity of the world's occurrences, however I have yet to explain how this may be done and done effectively. I have yet to explain the volitional alteration of systems, let alone explain how it is possible to do so in a tangible fashion. Further, without this explanation, the above would seem to be a metaphysical theory posed to defend claims which many readers would relegate to the realm of superstition. Were I to stop there, I would not have accomplished my goal. Here will be my examination of the efficacy of the *act of magic*, whereas before I have examined the meaning of *ambient magic* in a monistic, material world.

As previously discussed, 1) *the claim of ambient magic is not one of supernatural forces dwelling in the natural world, but a claim of natural properties, which influence and interact with other properties, and indeed that 2) the world operates on the interaction of such natural properties. Furthermore I have asserted that 3) a claim that the world operates by magic is not a claim of a supernatural driving force, but a claim that the occurrences of the world in which occurrences influence one another by way of their natural properties.* From the preceding, given that reality operates in the manner I have described, *reality operates by ambient magic in the formulation which I have described.* I have also made the claim that 4) *those occurrences which are psychical*

in nature, who are indebted to at least one psyche for the manner in which they exist, including a psyche itself, are material, and therefore natural. Further, I have claimed that 5) reality is composed of spirits, that is, occurrences which exist as the relationship generated by a system and its components, as no single thing exists simply by virtue of its components merely existing. Furthermore, these spirits are fundamentally the result of the same baseline set of metaphysical structure. This most previous point I have named the theory of connectivity, whose operations may be understood as both a result of the realities of point 1 and 2, and a contributing mechanism to the continuation of the realities of point 2. I have also claimed that 6) the human self is a psychical spirit which exists as the relationship of the human mind to the world, and thus involves itself in and incorporates itself into many systems within the material world, in that the nature of the relationship which comprises it changes based upon the tangible occurrences the mind encounters, and in that changes in the self result in new behaviors which then produce tangible effects in the world.

The act of magic has been established previously to be distinct from the existence of magic. As magic has been assumed to be, rather than a supernatural force or series of supernatural forces, the interaction of natural properties it has been established that *ambient magic is not supernatural*. Furthermore, as the psyche has been determined to be material, and therefore part of the naturalistic whole, the accomplishments of any volitional act cannot be supernatural, and thus *the act of magic is not supernatural*. An act of magic is, then, simply an act of *volitionally altering linkages between occurrences, effectively altering the systems which compose them, thus altering the spirits which incorporate and comprise those systems, effectively altering material reality*. The employ

of arcane techniques is not necessary to accomplish such volitional alteration, given this updated definition of magic. To understand the difference between an *act of alteration* and an *instance of alteration*, one merely needs to understand which alterations in linkage occur *as a result of volition*, and which occur *due to ambient interactions between occurrences, systems and spirits*. It is this same understanding, then, which is required to understand the fundamental difference between an *act of magic*, and an *instance of magic*. Further, given what has been previously explained, there is *no fundamental difference, at the metaphysical level, between an act of alteration and an act of magic, or between an instance of alteration and an instance of magic. Though there are techniques conventionally recognized as magical which are effective in their purposes (one of which will be examined later), and it is a possibility that additional, heretofore unknown laws of nature, may be interacted with by more conventionally magical means, the volitional influence of the psyche upon the natural world can be demonstrated by more standard means.*

Heidegger gives the example of a silver chalice to discuss the four formal causes: the *causa materialis*, the material cause, or the material of which a given object is created, in this case the silver of which the chalice is made; *causa formalis*, the formal cause, or the shape or form that the given object takes, in this case the material shape recognized as “chalice;” the *causa finalis*, the final cause, the end to which a given object is a means, or the function, in this case both its functionality as a vessel generally as well as its specific intention as a sacrificial vessel; and the *causa efficiens*, the efficient cause, that which brings forth the end effect, which brings into effect the ultimate result of the actual chalice, in this case, the silversmith.⁵⁴ Heidegger points out, however, that the

⁵⁴ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York & London: Garland Publishing), 6.

venerated paradigm of fourfold causality, does not wholly capture the nature of causality. I would argue that this is especially true of created objects, that is to say, objects born of this thing we refer to as *creativity*.

The material, formal, and final causes of the chalice are indebted to the act of pondering the chalice as a concept, and it is only by that act of pondering that the silversmith was capable of *creating* the chalice at all.⁵⁵ This act of pondering is the act of forming *psychical linkages* between the matter of silver, the chalice shape (already born of *psychical linkages* drawn between the properties of liquid matter, solid matter, flat surfaces and concave surfaces), and the concept of a sacrificial vessel (once again itself born of a series of *psychical linkages*.) A functional, material sacrificial vessel requires certain properties which the shape of “chalice” fulfills, and the shape of “chalice” further requires certain properties of the material it which enters its shape in order to be a functional chalice, which silver is capable of fulfilling. This vessel-chalice-silver complex is the *system of psychical linkages* which is *required* for the silver chalice of the example to take shape at all. Though it is true that the silversmith must forge a *material system* consisting of the sufficient amount of silver and the shape of “chalice,” *that material system cannot exist without the corresponding psychical system as a model*. Ergo, functionally, *a volitional alteration which produces a material product necessarily produces a hybrid psychical-material system*.

While it has been established that both *psychical alteration* and *material alteration* can and do happen avolitionally, both the psychical forging of the outlandish entities earlier described and the silversmith’s production of the silver chalice constitute *acts of alteration* where avolitional alterations do not, merely constituting *instances of*

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 8.

alteration for two reasons: 1) Both the forging of the chalice and the imagining of the aforementioned entities entail psychical component, necessitated by 2) the volitionality of these alterations. None of these systems would have occurred without the volitional alteration of *psychical or psychical-material* systems. While it is *theoretically true* that the previously mentioned beings could have spontaneously made appearances in my head, and that a chalice-shaped lump of silver could simply occur naturally in the world, barring the extreme unlikelihood of the latter and the admittedly less extreme unlikelihood of the former, a *lack of volition to alter or forge linkages* means that these did not occur as the result of an *act of alteration, merely an instance of it*. A system cannot be a product of *an act* simply by resembling a *system which is a product of an act*. Such systems which occur without volition are the product of wild, involuntary imagination in the psychical sphere, and pure happenstance on the material plane, if they were to somehow occur there. *An act*, requires, at the very least, a *volition to alter or forge linkages*, even if one does not premeditate the exact linkages to be altered or forged.

The Totem Ceremony

There are, however, effectual acts which may be thought of as more “magical” in a conventional sense. This is to say, if one witnessed such an attempt, one might be more willing to classify it as an attempt at magic. In this section I will give an example from my own childhood experience in order to demonstrate this. In doing so, I mean in no way to generalize my experiences to the general population. My experiences are neither demonstrative of the *spirit* of the overall human population, or even demonstrative of the overall *spirit* of those who grew up in a culture of magical belief. Additionally, the use of

my own experience as data for analysis is potentially problematic in that said data is subject to changes in quality based upon my memory of my own experiences, as well as my interpretation of those experiences. The viability of this data becomes even more limited in scope because I am examining psychological effects within myself, which occurred as a response to outside stimulus, as well as the fact that these experiences arise from a cultural backdrop which is primed to enhance and validate these experiences. Where this data *is* useful is in giving a real-world example of magic, in a more traditional sense which, objectively, alter psychological linkages under the guidance of a psyche (though admittedly not exact and fine-tuned control, although it is worth pointing out that such fine-tuned control is really not the point of the technique being explored.)

In a more general sense, however, I feel that this data is important because the intersection between those with lived, emic experience with magical culture; academic scholars of magic; and those willing to record their experiences for the analysis of others is a rather rare one. Betsy Lucal, in her analysis of her own experiences living on the edges of conformity of U.S. society's gender constructs in the 1990s, points out that her personal experience may provide "...theoretical insights into the processes and social structure of gender."⁵⁶ I hope to provide, similarly, insight into the nature of psychological connection, as well as the theory of magic. *At the very least, under certain circumstances, magic can do the following.*

⁵⁶ Betsy Lucal, "What It Means to Be Gendered Me: Life on the Boundaries of a Dichotomous Gender System." *Gender and Society* 13 (December 1999) , 786, accessed October 16, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/190440?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

I would pose that Lucal's piece is important not only in its intended subject, the study of gender roles in society, but for understanding the importance of personal experience and self-analysis in the study of human culture or, seemingly needless to say, the human experience.

My father once performed a ceremony for me that I am told was of Lakota Sioux origin, which he referred to as the “Totem Ceremony.”⁵⁷ I will, here, give a disclaimer that my father gave in a later conversation about the ceremony, which is that our family is not Lakota, and that this is a ceremony which he was taught, influenced by his teacher, and his teacher’s teacher no doubt, as well as my father’s own personality and idiosyncrasies in worldview. As a result of such ceremonies traveling far from their sources, and outside of their home cultures, it is possible that the interpretations of concepts, and even the cosmological correspondences have been changed. *I claim no familiarity with or authority on the subject of Lakota cosmology or ceremony beyond the context of this ceremony. The point is that the ceremony which follows was performed, and not necessarily its point of origin or its accuracy to the original.* The ceremony was performed in response to a period of erratic behavior and extreme emotional unrest that I had been experiencing around the age of fourteen. When this reached an intolerable apex, Father requested that I go along with the ceremony, whose workings I had no knowledge of at the time. The ceremony was meant to teach me

He cleared the floor of the living room, and pushed all the furniture against the walls. He began setting sacred stones in a circle on the floor, where he told me to lie down, on my back. I told him that I needed to go get something, and immediately walked back to my room to retrieve a statuette of Artemis, a Greek goddess, which my mother had given to me as a gift. Being that I was scared and confused, not just in reference to this whole process, but of my general mental state recently, and the statuette had always made me feel safe. Father, however, did not allow me to set her anywhere in the room.

⁵⁷ The meaning of the term “totem” is dubious on a number of levels. For the purposes of this work, the main conception of “totem” I will be using is the one outlined by my father in the story.

There were to be “no outside influences.” There would be no images of gods, heroes, or family members in the room. There would only be me, the recipient; my father, the practitioner; and the accoutrements of the ceremony.

I was told to sit, and to breathe. Father placed a polished, walnut-sized chunk of tourmalinated quartz on my forehead. I closed my eyes, and the sweet, try, thick smoke of white sage filled the room (Father always used white sage to drive out anything that may be lurking in a room, to make the energy of a space pure). While the smoke burned, he told me to listen to focus on his voice, and the beat of the drum, which he began to play. The drum was made from a hollowed out stump, with a leather beater, and tightly-stretched hide covering both ends of the wood.

The sound of the drum was deep, and powerful, resembling a heartbeat. Father, speaking in a low, clear, rhythmic manner, addressed each of the four directions, attributing domains to each of the directions. East: the domain of birth and beginning, South: the domain of growth and adolescence, West: the domain of adulthood and completion, and North: the domain of death and rebirth, beginning and end.

Father then instructed me to clear my mind of all my senses, and only experience my voice, letting his voice guide me. I was told that I would first see a shape within this void, that it would cut through the nothingness. Further, I was told that this shape would be the essence of my lifetime, representative of the core most portion of my being and, when such a thing changes its form, it is in the most extreme of circumstances. Immediately to mind came a great wolf, with striking blue eyes, its fur tinged blue as well. I was asked what it was I saw, and when I responded, Father told me to ask the wolf if its form was true, or if it was a trick. The wolf stated that it was true, with no hesitation.

Father then shared what knowledge he had about wolves, referring to the species collectively as “Wolf,” and referred to this as my *soul totem*. I was instructed to speak to Wolf’s about its “lesson” was, what it was that Wolf had to teach me. Then, after this conversation took place, as if instructing the creature before me, told me that Wolf would lead me through the nothingness, to a place that was familiar but unfamiliar, and that I should follow Wolf.

Wolf, this form which had sprung forth from my consciousness, led me to a clearing in a snow-covered forest of nondescript trees, with a stone circle in the middle of the clearing, a large, flat stone marking the center of the circle. To my excitement, Father instructed that I build a circle, wherever I was, unless there was one already there. I was proud to tell my father, “There’s a stone circle.”

Father then repeated a modified version of the process he used to call the *soul totem* for each of the previously mentioned directions, instructing me to face that direction in the circle, and call out to that direction, for which he restated the domain. From the operative direction appeared a shape, and each time the shape was asked if it presented a true shape or a false shape. Father referred to these as *secondary totems*. I had no false shapes, however something interesting did happen, in that from each direction, I was presented with a chimeric blend of two or more animals. Here I will present the shapes that presented themselves, along with the correspondences for their directions, for ease of analysis.

East, *the domain of birth and beginning*: A large, green, winged snake with a wolf’s head.

South, *the domain of growth and adolescence*: A large, muscular man, holding a spear, whose head was that of a wolf.

West, *the domain of adulthood and completion*: A monkey with the head of a wolf, whose arms periodically turned into the wings of a bat.

North, *the domain of death and rebirth, and of beginning and end*: This one was the most strange, in my mind. While the others were merely chimeric blends of other animals, the northern totem switched between two shapes. One shape was that of a black wolf with large, black wings, and the other was of a cloaked, humanoid figure with a wolf's skull for a head.

At the end of the ceremony, once each of these secondary totems were discovered, I was instructed to ask one question of each totem, the soul totem and the four secondaries. Their answers were cryptic, and I was unable to discern the meaning behind anything that was said at that time, and thus their answers have not survived my memory. After this point, I was instructed to follow Wolf back to the nothingness, where my father then allowed, verbally, my senses to return to a normal state, and instructed me to wake up slowly as he blessed and dismissed the four directions.

V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE PRACTICE OF MAGIC

My analysis of the totem ceremony will act as my conclusion, as the example of the totem ceremony serves as an analyzable example of a more conventionally magical act of magic, and thus examining its efficacy and utility would seem to be an exercise answering the ultimate question of a defense of a magical worldview, “*is there actually a point in doing magic?*” (Though, perhaps in this case the question ought to be revised to “*is there actually any point in doing magic in the conventional sense of the term?*”)

Before I gave my account of the ceremony I communicated what I understand to be some limits of the use of my personal experience as data. Now, I will elucidate the limits of this particular account, rather than the use of personal experience as data overall.

As mentioned before, my personal experience originates from a cultural backdrop wherein, in my childhood, I was primed for certain experiences and to react in certain ways to those experiences. The use of sacred stones and the imagery of circles would have caused me to expect the following experience to be of a certain kind. Furthermore, with my eyes closed, and thus no longer burdened by visual input, it was even easier to fill in the gaps of what was “supposed” to be happening. Compound this with the great emphasis that was put on mental imagery in my childhood as a result of this cultural backdrop, and where many people might find it difficult to have an experience in the first place (“My eyes are closed, and I see nothing precisely because my eyes are closed), and one might say I was simply ready to have this experience, and it may have been more surprising, if I had experienced nothing.

However, this does not change that the ceremony actually accomplished something. In my childhood, I learned to associate sage with the clearing of negative influences, and as such, the smell of sage smoke caused me to feel calm. The drum beat gave me a steady tempo so that my thoughts did not race. Furthermore, as my eyes were closed, I was not *distracted* by visual inputs, and so I could concentrate on the work at hand. Father spoke in a clear and rhythmic tone, mimicking the drum beat. As I was lulled into a hypnotic state it was easy to simply respond to the prompts I was given, which might be thought of as subconscious association.

The roles of each totem were explained before they were given a chance to appear. As discussed previously, at length, psychological connections are often formed avolitionally. In this case, there is a volitional linkage formed between the practitioner and the recipient, which prompts the recipient's spirit to form an avolitional linkage between a shape (usually an animal, particularly since, in this case, I had been primed to believe the shapes would be animals) and a given concept, if not draw upon a linkage that had already been made between said shape and said concept at an earlier point, with all of this taking place in the context of self-analysis.

Furthermore, when the shape-domain-self linkage is formed, the ceremony includes a fact-check function in the form of confirming the validity of the shape presented, in effect checking the strength of the linkage made, and whether or not there is a stronger linkage to be made. Once the validity of the shape taken is confirmed, the practitioner offers what he knows of that shape, and instructs the recipient to converse with the shape about its lesson and its nature. From here, the recipient gains guidance from the practitioner's knowledge, as well as gaining insight from his own connection to

that shape. This shape-domain-self system forms a *spirit* in the previously established sense, which in this context, is called “totem.” It seems logical that this “totem” would necessarily be reflective of the recipient’s understanding of the domain it represents in relation to the recipient, and thus would provide useful data for self-analysis and, with examination, analysis of the recipient by a practitioner experienced in the workings of such a *spirit*.

If we strip away the ceremony, the accoutrements to the process, which perhaps make the exercise more immersive and easier to complete, and any folkloric associations, this technique is an exercise in generating accessible data about a person’s subconscious by taking advantage of the principles of avolitional linkage, particularly of the psychical variety, outlined before.

This may seem to illustrate a mind-to-mind sort of communication, the nature of this act of magic is illustrative of even greater connections. Images from the world form associations within the psyche, which can, as shown here, be called forth to gain information and make such information interactable, where perhaps it would not have been previously, but, then, it makes sense that those images may be used to influence the psyche from the outside (as they have already done it once, by virtue of the associations they already hold). The psychical connections which we form within the psyche with both other psychical occurrences, as well as material occurrences, are possessed of concrete, interactable properties. While one does not need magic or mysticism as they are conventionally understood to interact with these properties and use these associations to generate effects within other people (as proven by the fields of psychology, sociology,

political science, communications, and advertising), *the totem ceremony is an act of conventional magic which acts upon those principles.*

The act of magic, however, as discussed previously, is not limited to what is conventionally thought to be magical, and is certainly not limited to that which is arcane and ill-understood. It cannot be, if the metaphysics outlined holds. The volitional act of magic is the act of *interacting with complex systems of properties, or participating in spirits, to generate effects.* For magic is the interaction between the properties of occurrences, and the interrelatedness of the laws of nature. The physiological manipulations of the martial artist, both of his own body and his opponent, as well as those of the chiropractor and surgeon, require an understanding of complex systems, and the participation in the properties of complex systems. With greater understanding comes a greater ability to act, and thus a greater ability to generate effects. The same is true of the chemist, the engineer, the psychiatrist, politician, or educator. *For any given thing which happens, whatever it is, there is a way for it to happen, otherwise it does not happen. Magic is not supernatural, but merely a basic metaphysical structure, and the act of magic, though at times difficult to understand need not be made arcane, or relegated to superstition.* This is not to say that all superstition is true, or that all claims of magic are true. In fact, I would distance myself from that claim. *Just as with our understanding of natural principles generally, humanity can be, and often is, wrong,* and I would posit that this has been the case with many principles of magic. However, there would, as previously stated, seem to be occurrences in nature which plainly mimic the principles of magic, and many of these would seem to be interactable by humans (though not all). Simply because we understand some of these principles does not mean that we

fully understand them, and, at any rate, magic's definition does not allow for a moving goal post.

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