

NOTES FROM THE NUMINOUS AND  
THE LUMINOUS

ALUN ROWLANDS

*Now it is probable that true knowledge of the things of  
this world lies in the solid's essential shadow, in its opaque  
black density, locked behind the multiple doors of its edges,  
besieged only by practice and theory.*  
MICHEL SERRES *Hermes* (1983)

Ithell Colquhoun's library is an uncategorised collection of estranged and conflicting knowledge. Grimoires, cipher manuscripts and vellum folios mingle with popular almanacs, magical biographies and speculative pulp fiction. There are yellowing journals with faded reflections on esoteric subjects from oneiromancy and witchcraft to liturgical and numinous texts. Dark frontispiece titles read *Ore*, *The Glass*, *Sangreal*, *Other Voices* and *Fantasmagie* followed by articles on occult philosophy, rarefied alchemical matters and mythology. New Apocalypse's anthology of verse shares shelf space with W.B. Yeats's *A Vision* and numerous pamphlets on stillomancy, parsemage and decalcomania.<sup>1</sup> The sum of this collection indexes Colquhoun's lascivious material enquiry traversing Surrealism, automatism and the occult. Automatism, in both writing and drawing, was central to Colquhoun's work providing her with methods connecting the surreal with the hermetic, both in art and philosophy. In her authored books there is a search for the liminal, found within the shadows of imagination, in myths and folk memories, in mystic visions and in the topologies of natural forces. *The Living Stones: Cornwall* (1957) chronicles megalithic remains, a palimpsest landscape inscribed and encoded with mystical notions of history as both geological and magical. Amidst the dark forces of this forged landscape, with its wells, underground streams and caves, a place of solitude is sought. Colquhoun searched for a studio. This ascetic refuge, away from the rational modernity

of the city, would be a space to pursue work that harnesses the energy of strange forces and knowledge. Here, her confluence of art and occultist alchemy attempted material, experiential and transformative processes. Colquhoun would no longer author her work, preferring, instead, to use a sigil conjured from a magical monograph. For Colquhoun, art, writing and the occult were indistinguishable in pursuit of an operative knowledge.

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*The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) by Adorno and Horkheimer, written during the darkest of wars, is a grim assessment and critique of modernity. It questions progress via instrumental rationalism charted through phenomena such as the detachment of knowledge from practical life, the manipulative nature of culture and paranoid behavioural structures. Tracing the development of the Enlightenment's 'dark side' they proclaim that 'the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant' – the source of this disaster is a pattern of blind domination of nature.<sup>2</sup> Reason, they answer, has become irrational. Reason is the cause of its own misfortune: 'the myths that fell victim to the Enlightenment ... [were] its own products'. We believe ourselves to be 'free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown' that determines the path of demythologisation, expunging superstition and ritual – 'the Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalised.'<sup>3</sup> Progress pursued at the expense of that, which is 'other' whether human or nonhuman, is exploited or destroyed. In this process, the self is created as subjectivity divorced from direct experience of the outside world. Our collective social memory is vague and distant, but is present in us as a certain inchoate feeling of loss.

Pursuing a narrative that keeps the magical separate from the actual will inevitably leave its uncanny reminders. Here, we invoke magic and modernity by the study of a lacuna where magic is 'other', as counterpoint to a liberal understanding of modernity's transparency and progress. Modernity produces its own magic. Ordinary thinking must be silenced, distracted, or methodically deranged – 'Nothing is true, everything is permitted'.<sup>4</sup> We could contend that magic 'belongs' to modernity, revealing the correlation and melancholy by which the magical can come to haunt modernity. And, the story will, inevitably, begin again as we confer hidden potencies in our newest familiars.

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In Eva Rothschild's elegant sculptures the 'insignia of modernity' are subverted by the irrational in favour of an emotional content. Semantic yearnings are intertwined with a curious melancholy. Mournful of a passing connection, Rothschild's work probes a loss of valence in idealism and belief that lingers in certain objects. *High Times* (2005) is a fountain of finely cut strips of muted leather, with a vertical avidity that evokes 'geysers of energy'.<sup>5</sup> This totemic spring simultaneously

appeals to its own material autonomy and extraneous forces of allusion. Held in exhibited stasis, we mine through our sentimentalist and voluntaristic tendencies that imbue objects with meanings that are superfluous to their material reality. Art-historical resonances are apparent and acknowledged but the 'how' of the work's appearance suggests more. Pulp absorption of new age spiritualism adheres to this latent materialism. The act of interpretation is itself quasi-mystical adventure, where there will always be a kernel of resistance that will not dissolve. Perhaps, we need to be more precise – to consider forms that can be accounted for and measured.

*Stairway* (2005) consists of an arrangement of triangles cascading downwards, held tentatively by cast hands. The geometry is considered, elated with the intersecting angles diagramming crystals spilling from a pyramid. Poised and measured, drawn from hard calculus, elementary forms worked through to reach an improbable formal conclusion. Our calculations and figuring will always leave a remainder – we reach for our textbooks. 'Mathesis' according to Agrippa in *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531) was one of the three branches of magical knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Developed from Pythagorean mystical philosophy, it contends that numbers were the hidden symbolic language of creation. Cabalistic numerology was an expression of a secret code. This code was a key to thought and action intimately connected to confronting artefacts or articulations that defy common modes of interpretation. The secrets of these articulations were to be found and interpreted in the plains and surfaces of elegant geometry. To grasp the full implications of an artwork's secret life perhaps requires some form of second sight.

In *Actualisation* (1998) Rothschild gives us the tools to do just that. Two perfectly formed glass orbs sit side by side – one dark, one light – impelling us to 'see'. The art of scrying offers us the potential of seeing events that are not physically observable. Visions are interpreted through the careful examination of reflective surfaces – a crystal, a pond or a thumbnail. The vision is elucidated from consistencies, web-like faults or the cloudy glow of light. From within these properties the scryer hears their own disassociated voice affirming what is seen within the concentrated state. The process culminates in the achievement of a desired stage, rich in visual images to be projected within the medium itself. In Rothschild's work our inability to activate such potential reaffirms a melancholy. It renders us with objects that cast our possible projections back onto us. And, in this way liberate themselves as artworks and formal objects in their own right.

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Derek Jarman's film *Sulphur* (1973) reveals a cast of obscure protagonists sensuously appearing and disappearing in the gathering shadows.<sup>7</sup> Languidly dressed, suggestive of dark romantic scholars, they laconically move around a cavernous ruin. At intervals a girl with a dress spun from gossamer, wearing a hat

frosted with feathers, angles a mirror towards the camera. The camera responds, closing its aperture as light flickers and flares onto the lens. Imbued with a performative occult symbolism, the simple elemental effects create a nyctophobic atmosphere. In *Sulphur* Jarman reminds us that film, at its most basic, is a portrayal of the eternal battle between light and dark, independent of its actual content.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the 1970s Jarman experimented with exploiting the grainy deficiencies of low-resolution film stock – degenerating sequences ‘caused by the re-filming of multiple images’. *Journey to Avebury* (1971) and *The Magician* (1972) compress poetics and mythology influenced by C.G. Jung’s writings on an archetypal past hidden in all of us and the alchemy of John Dee.<sup>9</sup> Here, light is seen merely as a cloak for the purer alchemical fire – a theoretical position that Jarman sees persisting even within the mechanistic and the secular. As Jarman suggests in *Dancing Ledge*, ‘the ‘poetry of fire’ relies on a treatment of word and object as equivalent; ‘both are signs, both are luminous and opaque ... the pleasure of seeing language put through the magic lantern.’<sup>10</sup> From the Laterna Magica, zoetrope, and kinoscope through to the Lumière brothers an array of optical inventions were created to animate images in rapid succession to produce illusion. The vertiginous sensation of the optical in this luminous world attains a persistence of vision. This is the peculiar ability of our mind to create a fusion of apparent motion from a series of static time-images. The phantom traces of these images, produced by light, linger on the threshold of this uncertainty. Transgressing the threshold of deception, we enter another world in which forms irk the imagination in a poised transition of glass, light and projection.

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Jarman’s processes of dark superimposition search for the ontology of the luminous image. We can trace this enquiry refracted within the contemporary work of David Noonan. Noonan conjures untitled images from a library of existent and eclectic materials. Manipulating the liturgy of art and cinema these printed images suspend a strangely insular theatre. Enigmatic rituals, white peacocks, harlequins, reversed illuminated manuscripts and the nightly animism of owls populate this theatre. The forest hosts a druidic gathering; a dandelion replaces an eye trapped onto the printed surface of jute and linen. The props drawn from dark sources collide in a fastidious montage. The ruinous floats and flaunts artifice, in a fictional and mythical mise-en-scène. We are left to project our imagination into the assemblage of metonymic accoutrements. ‘Every piece of the ensemble is necessarily freighted with magical meaning.’ Ritual, repressed in the regime of reason, in Noonan’s work, ‘returns as an image’.<sup>11</sup> This is a lodestone image, montaged from single frames spliced from the film reels of irrational histories. Montage, here, is orientation, developing a compass of the cognitive and efficacious kind: making visible percepts, passions and tangible forces. It forms the objects in the very process of putting them into place. There is an ethereal quality to a montage of displaced images whose affinity and purpose bears analogy to alchemy.

Chrysopoiesis is not just mystifying, it hinges on an intrinsic improbability. It conflates a library of speculative sources. It is as though a textbook of chemistry, breathing exercises, geology and several sex manuals have been torn to fragments and fused into a totally new chemical compound of thought. The montage image reveals the haunted autonomy of the fragment. In Linder’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (2007) frozen episodes extracted from dated pulp magazines fold into images of blossoming rare flowers. There is the air of a recumbent open ritual, of potential sacrifice, an obscuration that morphs within the solvency of montage. We slide into the cracks of fact, debased codes and style, the seam versus the seamless. Our visual pleasure is derived from the shock recognition of these seams. Their evocation permits entertaining historical slippage. Blodeuwedd is the anti-heroine made from flowers – broom, meadowsweet and blossoms – her story is part of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, in which her adultery fuels mariticide.<sup>12</sup> She is cursed, transformed into an owl, where she will never show her face to the light of day. These forced arboreal connections co-exist with the reflexive impulse to mark each element as artificial and exchangeable in nature. Montage is rooted in a modernist strategy for bringing the actual into art. Paired elements are displaced to act as ‘other’.<sup>13</sup> The parts retain a measure of their strangeness. But then this is useful when articulating a world that is not exactly reassuring and becoming stranger.

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Ghosts cling to communicational media. Artists’ appeal to the spectral often functions as a by-product of technological advances. Like ghosts themselves, these dematerialised innovations shaped sanguine apprehension, while simultaneously altering received notions of representation and vision. As Rosalind Krauss argues in *Tracing Nadar* (1978), one of the speculative keystones of early photography was the ‘inherent intelligibility of the photographic trace’ developing out of the nineteenth-century ‘marriage of science and spiritualism’. In Nadar’s memoir, quoted by Krauss, he writes about ‘the power to give physical form to the insubstantial image that vanishes as soon as it is perceived, leaving no shadow in the mirror, no ripple on the surface of the water.’<sup>14</sup> Spiritualism suggested that the soul could exist autonomously from its material form, which allowed for its inveterate expression to be revealed in incandescent shapes and paranormal entities. The glass negative became an index for these recurring forms. The spiritualist claims may not have been convincing but conceptually they had grasped the possibilities of the luminous image. With Samuel Morse’s 1837 invention of the telegraph, writing too became a possibility for communication between disembodied agencies. The table wrapping of the nineteenth century was the most immediate yet controlled mode of non-rational communication, structured and visionary.

‘I’m stimulated by – a notion of encryption, of actually making someone aware that the invisible is also perceivable ...’ Cerith Wyn Evans channels the visual and textual into kaleidoscopes of illumination and code.<sup>15</sup> Language and its transla-

tion become frequencies emitted through the medium of light. Chandeliers secrete literary sources including poems, aphorisms, letters, and philosophy. The lights pulse. Translated into Morse code citations are transmitted. Wyn Evans resurrects this now decommissioned spectral language to fashion opaque ‘aural-images’. The citations are taken from the artist’s library of texts, forming a polyphony of divergent genres and voices. A seance is manifest with the likes of Theodore Adorno, William Blake, George Bataille and Judith Butler, dimly holding hands around a circular table. The illegibility of the texts emerges through the interstitial space between pictures and words, between the on and off of the binary switch. They command us and we endeavour to seize the command. What is occluded is orchestrated into something other than what is perceived. Superimposition and encryption conflate perception, which falls prey to deception, illusion and the imperceptibility of meaning. The fissure in communication opens a space for the irrational to break through. Certain conduits for thinking rehearse different scenarios. What voices might these wires have carried, what energies radiate from this plant, what sounds emitted from this turntable and what visions we see when we close our eyes. Wyn Evans summons a subjunctive enquiry via an omnivorous sensibility to determine the hermetic and imagine the ‘exoticism of the experimental’. In this pursuit, at the edge of visibility, constantly revealing and concealing, we find the phosphorescence of neon texts. The brilliance of erudite quotations, ‘rinsed with mercury’. A notable source for Wyn Evans has been James Merrill’s epic apocalyptic poem *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1980).<sup>16</sup>

Merrill convened seances, over a twenty-year period, dictating otherworldly voices and spirits, into an elegiac 560-page poem. The book carries us to the candlelit dining room with its flame-coloured walls where Merrill (the scribe) and his partner David Noyes Jackson (the hand) navigate the Ouija board with a willow-ware cup. In a shimmering interplay of verse forms, Merrill sets down their extended conversations with W.H. Auden, W.B. Yeats, Plato and a brilliant peacock named Mirabell. The empyrean residents enunciate amongst and through imagery of mirrors, reflective surfaces and crystallised lenses. The prosodic episodes echo Cerith Wyn Evans’s use of citation and reference, like an endless palimpsest of ethereal utterances. The written ‘I’ provides a template for a virtual voice, a ghost who speaks out of the dark – in an etymological confusion of ‘crypt and encrypt’. In this very way there is a notion of the ‘dematerialisation of the proper noun.’<sup>17</sup> Certainly, every communicational medium makes available a ‘conceptual personae’, the one that can send, receive, and record the messages it permits. When the medium is writing the first person crystallises this figure, the putative self-referring originator of the text. A figure that is at once invisible, absent, without location, detached from the voice, and unmoored from its time of origination or its subsequent appearances.

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The aphasic state induced by occultist practice and the seancing of multiple personae heightens the collective senses in which ‘each of us is

several’. These indeterminate phantasms exist within the gaps of the known, threatening and opening up the anomalous. When artists endorse radical alterity the unseen and the unknown are acknowledged as magnetic reorientations. The pledge in searching out occult recesses in modernity simulates and produces new subjectivities. The risk in this endeavour, via proluxic references, immaterial and material promiscuity, is the initiation of the ‘secret’. The secret embraces shadowy hermetic articulations, denying interpretation, hinting at potency. But if it fails to act on potential, insinuating significance then efficacy is lost. This mode of practice holds ‘the promise of transgressing the limits of its own discursive codes by speaking two languages at once, the didactic and the hermetic’.<sup>18</sup> This tension brings the role of the artist to the fore – as a figure of the anomaly.

The anomalous operates in the territory of the ‘in-between’ – in between the rational and the irrational; words and images – in a script consisted of transitive verbs. Such scripts could only be followed as they become exemplified, or exercised in their performance. We can locate this methodology in the practice of sigilisation. Austin Osman Spare developed the sigil as an operational ‘thought-form’ with an inimical abstract force that belies its incantation. These ritualistic montages mobilise our desires through the reduction of textual characters to semi-abstract or pictorial forms. Here, process is manifestation itself. Sigilisation marries experimental encryption (akin to automatic drawing) with alphabetic thought, whereby ‘x is our desire, a desire no longer possessed by us but by which we are possessed’.<sup>19</sup> In Mark Titchner’s *Z.O.P* (2009), Spare’s sigilisation is employed sculpturally within a series of totemic angular structures. Darkly inscribed, they are containers of buried word-signs.<sup>20</sup> Titchner’s sigils cite the Welsh occultist and author Dion Fortune’s *Psychic Self Defence* (1930) both as reference and as instruction. Fortune warns us that we ‘live in the midst of invisible forces’, and that we move amongst ‘invisible forms whose actions we very often do not perceive.’<sup>21</sup> These charges are accompanied by a litany of chemical, procedural and ritualised considerations for the protection of our psyches.<sup>22</sup> Titchner heeds the warning. Singular masts broadcast material energy within a field defined via a cordon of hexed geometry. Defining a zone, these sentinels offer us protection from all that is intangibly nefarious. Imbued with a folkloric technology they carry disparate material and aesthetic elements. One in particular resonates a proverbial connection. Orgonite is a solid material, crystallised into translucent pyramids trapping clockwise-wound metal coils.<sup>23</sup> Accented by herbal infusions of St John’s wort and ‘charged’ water it provides a barricade of bio-energetic force. This dynamic coalesces in Wilhelm Reich’s research into the putative force of ‘orgone’ – an omnipresent luminescent medium – that Reich perceived as key to understanding the pervading ‘repression and baneful violence’ in society.<sup>24</sup> Titchner’s work diagrams a psychic haven, a space delineated ‘between’ the rational and the irrational. He promotes explorative forms of conjecture and behaviours, outside of what can be known, fostering new transmissions of affect. Practices and references are offered in a process of immunisation and simultaneous non-control that forges as space for the marginalised. For these operations to inform art they must become

functions – not only subject matter but also methodology – a mode of substantiating how immaterial economies diffuse and become part of material experience.

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There is bookishness within magic and the occult. Part of the hermetic advocacy is encyclopaedic, building libraries that conflate language and codes, textual entities and connections. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, Umberto Eco suggests that esoteric truth is perhaps nothing more than a semiotic conspiracy theory. Born of an endlessly proliferating referential literature – the fabric of the 'book' reminds us that our subjectivities coalesce with an internally consistent matrix of signs and affects. Allied to materially encrypted ciphers, the properties of surfaces, illuminated and lodestone images, the occult attempts to capture forces through the apparatus of the imagination. Occultist control is coercive, operating in the indistinct fissure between sensation and internal imagery. It performs through tangential contact, through poetic images that exert their power over the senses. Fleeting through the aperture of the senses, they impress on the imagination certain affective states. It is this, perhaps, that brings it into contact with art, fiction and poetry at many points.

For W.B. Yeats, occultist study was a vital constituent of his literary edification. His poetry is potentially contaminated and manifest in occult imagery. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and H.D.'s verse are fraught with scepticism, mystical metaphors and the semiotic exotica of esoteric lore.<sup>25</sup> Occult-like strands and topoi in fiction and poetry forge anomalous and strange unions of philosophies, many of them known in fragments, and most of them subtle or obscure, even when known. Here, poetry and magic challenge us to see the archetypal world not as an inert storehouse of unchanging forms but a persistently transforming parade of figures.

We can unearth figures of poetic fiction within the excavated objects and images of Steven Claydon. This fiction is colonised through the solidity of busts commemorating dubious characters, whose importance is lost on us. Sat on the dusty hessian plinths of an obscure museology these bronze and polymer ceramic subjects bear the weight of an indistinct history. Imbued with a monumental patina of age we apprehend a venerated state, in both contexts of evidencing past events and in the physical forms of their representation. A peacock feather occludes the eye in a refrain of alchemical mirroring and chrysopoetic technology. Mystical potency is apparent in the cast material qualities of bone, copper powder, fragment of quartz and quotidian ephemera. There is no easy taxonomy, classification, set or category for these metonymic props and properties. Metaphors abound amidst divergent streams of alternative evolutions. These metaphors are more than they seem, as phantoms they manipulate us – as real as the objects they cloak and carry with them into the slipstream of the imagination. Reaching for a methodology we note that, amongst many citations, Claydon appeals to J.G. Frazer's dissertation *The Golden Bough* (1906–15).<sup>26</sup> This

comparative study addressed magic and ritual as dispassionate phenomenon through genre. Its questionable anthropological agenda fuelled its literary influence. Collapsing genealogies, Claydon abridges Frazer's thorny voyage as a theoretical possibility towards the construction of a promiscuous fiction.

*A Lark Descending (Preparations for Leda)* (2008) materially diagrams myth. A bust of Zeus forces itself out of a blue plastic bag. It is the head of classical antiquity, undermined with the crude addition of a beak, at the summit of geometrical display. The mode of appearance sets disparate material elements as an organised body. An erect steel construction beam rusts redundantly alongside coiled yellow tubing in a libidinal equation of economy. Zeus's erotic seduction of Leda is caricatured within the transformative potential of objects. This becoming-animal transfiguration appeals to animism and the smelting of a poetic object; objects that, in turn, readily seduce us through the lustre of their strangeness. Emerging from the ruins, from a profusion of modernisms, Claydon's concrete narratives question the easy supplanting of one idea with the next and propose daring speculation. What if events had taken a different path with a persistent logic of the return to those moments that failed or partially enfolded. The works summons a subjunctive scenario and a sequential hauntology.<sup>27</sup>

Walking in the ruins, frozen within an idiosyncratic museology, places us in a state of temporal dislocation. The hauntological attunes us to the forces and traces of past events that continue to perturb the present. Storehouses of artefacts and images dwell 'between' the world and their fading potential. We begin to orient ourselves towards untenable ideas and aesthetics from an Arcadian past. All objects and texts have phantoms – 'a history of ghosts within the living present' (and the future they prophesise) creates an uncertain state where we cannot 'count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us'.<sup>28</sup>

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Poetry does not seek to carry us from point to point sensibly. It leaves the image open and fragmented. It is the indocility of the image that matters above a senseless fixing. In this way, we are in tune with dark poetic potential that corresponds to vivid concentrations. Kaye Donachie's paintings are infused with a virulent light that reveals and conceals a vulnerable figuration. Their fleeting brushstrokes trap portraits of haunted protagonists emerging from the super-luminous gloom of history. Strange and unsettling visionaries enact non-conformist rituals within this pictorial world. Donachie's subjects are often marginalised protagonists who sought to illuminate an irrational and tangential enquiry governed by desire. Chasing this desire into esoteric shadows, these paintings exist in the potent twilight between history and fiction. The painted surfaces become crossroads, a relay of qualities and sensations, inhabited by phantasms that mediate between the corporeal and immaterial

world of intelligences and ideals. It occurs to us that a passionate lucidity is required to 'form an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.<sup>30</sup> Such a complex affronts the senses. It is a radiant node or cluster from, through and into which percepts are constantly rushing. In *Savage Pilgrim* (2009), forms fissure from within a vertiginous landscape. The painting seeks to momentarily hold an image, enough for us to picture the portrait of a poet, before dissolving into a *mise-en-abîme*. This pneumatic study reveals a portrait of D.H. Lawrence, a vitalist cipher for an unending search for sensation, for the experimental and satisfactions of desire. Lawrence's 'savage pilgrimage' maps a poetic wanderlust, a way of connecting with a world of flux and 'becoming', as a desire to escape limitations. In Donachie's poetic-image this desire transfigures into a reminder that the mass of forbidden and forgotten books and ideals could still be precious material to build a world.

The literary motif of the pilgrimage is a powerful obligation within the darker recesses of a romantic occult fiction. Appealing to a movement away from an overcrowded present, there is an urge to establish a counter-world to the departed reality. Many of these pilgrimages remain within the imagination, a withdrawal into the sensorial, located in the drawing room of the seance or shew-stones of the sycrayer summoning forms of flight. Others, as recorded in fiction, require a thousand-acre seclusion in the expanse of protective wastelands, hiding away from prying eyes to attend to the pull of isolation and the mystical communion with land. Prospero's island permitted the practice of his 'rough magic', echoed in Colquhoun's search for a remote studio, and Crowley's mountain summit beckon the image of a constructive separatism.

David Thorpe constructs a retreat of dwelling and thinking through his hermetic objects, architectural structures and cryptic montages. Intricate sculptural forms tower from simple wooden pedestals adorned with thorny motifs. Elegant dark wood and glass screens densely refract coloured light, concealing delicate botanic studies and textual glosses of spiritual mantras.<sup>31</sup> There are depictions of a strange retracted nature and the occasional figuring of the inhabitants of this scholastic world. The sum of these parts establishes its own occluded ecosystem. Thorpe builds a fiction housed within a 'a closed world with no sense of a world beyond them, a closed perspective.'<sup>32</sup> His 'confederacy of seekers' that occupies this space pursues an enlightened aesthetic activity, acutely secretive and defensive. Invention is defence; it permeates this material world contained within adornment that bears arms. *The Exiled Flower is Great Libertie* (2005) is a monastically laboured watercolour plate torn from the pages of an un-natural history 'shot through with geometries of ornamental fortification'.<sup>33</sup>

The safeguarding of secrets by an awakening community often forms a control structure that is designed and enforced via a hierarchy of the initiated. This council, in Thorpe's hermetic pattern, crackles with arcane, pre-modernist philosophies that experiment against the real. These patterns are full of historical echoes that change the coordinates, shifting the assemblage slowly to allow a different vista

from within our collective memory. In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine describes 'the plains, and caves, and caverns of memory, innumerable and innumerably full of innumerable kinds of things.' Augustine calls this an 'inner place, which is as yet no place' and catalogues the images, knowledges and experiences that exist there.<sup>34</sup> In Thorpe's situations memory stores not only sense perceptions but also skills and ideas, which are not apprehended through the senses. Knowledge, in this process, is the gathering and ordering of all these notions, naming and practicing at the edge of things. Thorpe's screens, such as *The Invincible General* (2005), divide these spaces, compartmentalising knowledge into a labyrinth of references; references poeticised through operative relics in a prophetic fiction. This fiction offers a proliferation of new myths, a multiplication of other possible worlds and the belief that 'we can transcend all limitations.'<sup>35</sup>

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Fusing archaic material with twisted materialism we return to the atavistic abyss and hard-nosed research which revives and marks a point beyond the limits of language. We summon a super-luminous image which is unrecognisable, that shocks us out of a narrative that otherwise makes sense – an image which we cannot name, we cannot put a noun to; an image which escapes description as optical and that leaves us resorting to the language of poetry. John Russell's *Untitled [Abstraction of Labour Time/ Eternal Recurrence/Monad]* (2009) has a prophetic and vitalist tenor. An unmeasured chthonic space explodes into an adjectival feverish vision. It builds a shared world to house disparate fictions that constellate a 'crystal-image'.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, allegorical narratives take an interesting turn when they become allegorical knowledge maps. A few steps beyond the over determined landscape and ruinous arch, we recall the *Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser's epic Elizabethan poem that Coleridge described as taking place in a domain 'ignorant of all artificial boundary, all material obstacles... it is truly in land of Faery, that is of mental space.'<sup>36</sup> For all the suggestiveness and intensity of description, Russell's virtual history painting is not sensual but a dense visualisation of abstract conceptions. Spatial allegory swells and foams with a form of figural and conceptual modelling. Beneath all the currents of thought is the ocean from which they arise and into which they will fall back, an ocean of 'becoming' – dark, convulsive, seething. Our three dimensions are exhausted and insufficient constructs. But our incapacity to vividly imagine new dimensions creates a crisis in representation. Constructs collapse into a number of intense polarities between realism and imagination, book and fiction. Art, here, is on the edge of the real and the rational where the shadow is so inky it swallows archetypes.

- 1 W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* London 1937 Automatic script in which Yeats sets down and systemises the otherworldly messages received via the trance medium-ship of his wife during a thirty-month period beginning in 1917.
- 2 T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Stanford 2002, p.3.
- 3 Ibid., p.11. The authors are not saying that myth is 'by nature' a force of enlightenment. Nor are they claiming that enlightenment 'inevitably' reverts to mythology. In fact, what they find the really mythical in both myth and enlightenment is the thought that fundamental change is impossible. Such resistance to change characterises both ancient myths of fate and modern devotion to the facts.
- 4 Aphorism from Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* §3.24 (1887). Widely interpreted to suggest that there is no objective truth outside of our own perception; all things are true and possible. Echoed later in Aleister Crowley's 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law' as a basic tenet of discordianism.
- 5 I. Colquhoun, *The Living Stones* London 1957. Ithell Colquhoun regarded stone circles, holy wells and other landscape features such as caves as 'geysers of energy'. Drawn to places she perceived as significant and sacred, she felt a profound kinship with the Cornish landscape, revering the life force that she experienced.
- 6 *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, 1531 is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's study of occult philosophy, acknowledged as a significant contribution to the Renaissance philosophical discussion concerning the powers of ritual magic.
- 7 Occasionally referred to as the *Art of Mirrors (Sulphur)* 1973. The title was reworked into the script for *Dr Dee: The Art Of Mirrors and The Summoning Of Angels* in 1975.
- 8 See A. Valentin, 'Introduction to Black and White Magic', in *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema* Edinburgh 1991.
- 9 These films were edited to create the key sequences of *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1980) accompanied by a Throbbing Gristle soundtrack.
- 10 D. Jarman, *Dancing Ledge* London 1984, p.129.
- 11 J. Myers, 'David Noonan', *Frieze* no.103, November–December 2006
- 12 See R. Graves, *The White Goddess* London 1948.
- 13 See J. Rancière, *Problems and Transformations of Critical Art* in 'Aesthetics and its Discontents', Cambridge 2009. Rancière argues for collage as 'third' aesthetic: 'it can combine two relations and play on the line of indiscernibility, between forces of sense's legibility and the force of non-sense's strangeness.'
- 14 R. Krauss, 'Tracing Nadar' *October* no.5, Summer 1978, p.30.
- 15 'Innocence and Experience: Interview with Cerith Wyn Evans', *Frieze* no.71, November–December 2002.
- 16 J. Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover* New York 1982. The title page informs us that the poem comprises the whole of *The Book of Ephraim, Mirabell's Book of Number and Scripts for the Pageant* (which appeared in 1976, 1978, and 1980, respectively), as well as a new coda *The Higher Keys*. The text itself is divided into sections first marked after the letters of the alphabet, then the numbers 0 to 9, and finally by three headings 'Yes', '&' and 'No'.
- 17 C. Wyn Evans *Cerith Wyn Evans* Berlin 2004.
- 18 J. Vewoert, 'Secret Society', *Frieze*, no.124, June–August 2009.
- 19 See M. Lee, 'Memories of a Sorcerer: Notes on Gilles Deleuze – Felix Guattari, Austin Osman Spare and Anomalous Sorceries', in *The Journal for the Academic Study of Magic*, no.1, 2003.
- 20 See M. Titchner, *IT IS YOU*, Bristol 2006. Interview with Martin Clark.
- 21 D. Fortune, *Psychic Self-Defence*. London 1997, 1930.
- 22 Fortune herself made speculative claims in letters that detailed her own participation in the 'Magical Battle of Britain' – a spurious occultist war effort that sought to ward off fascist invasion.
- 23 On 21 April 2009 a group of international orgonite 'activists' were arrested after targeting mobile phone masts and reservoirs with 'holy hand grenades' made of orgonite to counteract the 'negative' energy generated by technology.
- 24 W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York 1980.
- 25 See L. Surette, *Birth of Modernism*, Montreal 1994, p.161. Surette describes the 'scholarly phobia of the occult' in which modernist writers' vexed fascination and obscured influence of occultism contentiously informed the development of modernism.
- 26 J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* New York 1915. It was first published in two volumes in 1890; the third edition, published 1906–15, comprised twelve volumes.
- 27 J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* Paris 1993.
- 28 F. Jameson, 'Marx's purloined letter' in *Ghostly Demarcations* London 2008, p.39.
- 29 See M. Weinhardt, 'The World Must Be Made Romantic: On the Rediscovery of an Attitude' in *Wunschwelten* Frankfurt 2005.
- 30 E. Pound, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* London 1954, p.3.
- 31 D. Thorpe, *A Rendezvous With My Friends of Liberty* ed. Christoph Keller, Frankfurt 2004.
- 32 David Thorpe quoted in S. Stoops, 'Recalling a Meeting of Friends' in *File Note # 19 David Thorpe: The Defeated Life Restored* exh. cat., Camden Arts Centre, London, April–June 2007.
- 33 C. Wood, 'Cultivation', in B. Haines (ed.), *File Note # 19 David Thorpe: The Defeated Life Restored* exh. cat., Camden Arts Centre, London 2007.
- 34 Quoted in F. Yates, *The Art of Memory* Chicago 1966, p.47.
- 35 Stoops 2007 (see note 32, above).
- 36 J. Russell *Ocean Pose* London: Matts Gallery 2007
- 37 Quoted in Angus Fletcher, *Allegory* Ithaca 1964 p.26.

## PLATES

