

# interview

that it is reconstruction rather than continuation, which does not mean there is anything less valid in terms of the value the people get from the practice and the beliefs associated, but it can lead to pretensions of authenticity.

*Reconstruction, or perhaps a better word, the construction of a spiritual belief system seems to be a major principle or goal of the OTO.*

Yes, I think you can create your own religion and make it work for you—which is sort of a Gnostic idea. Your beliefs do not necessarily have to have some direct linkage with something in the past.

*How do you define Gnosticism?*

Generally speaking, Gnosticism is an attitude towards religious practice that stresses the importance of personal revelation and experience over dogmas and written transmissions.

*The term Gnosticism, in a very general sense, also refers to religious orders that use secret ways or methods to reach a higher spiritual existence. These methods, or ways, or whatever you want to call them, are kept secret by those under oath in the order. I know the OTO uses a similar system whereby the members swear oaths and keep secret the things they have learned or encountered through the Order. If it is not too paradoxical of me to ask—since the OTO is a secret society—what is the reason for keeping such methods and teachings secret?*

One of the main purposes of the secrecy is the idea that this experience of divinity within the self is extremely difficult, but not impossible, to communicate verbally. By

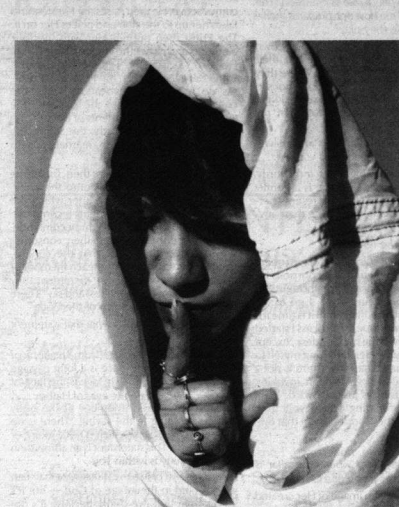
ground movements in and throughout many periods in human history.

Yes, there has been that element too. The attacks of the Counter-Reformation against any type of philosophical speculation, often connected with political ideas of societal change which have gone hand in hand with Gnostic movements for a long time, particularly in times when there is a religiously supported power group with privilege, made it very dangerous to openly discuss personal religious experiences because one would be open to charges of heresy. The definition of heresy was a personal opinion (as opposed to Church dogma). So the adoption of the Masonic fraternities which are the ancestors of the OTO was partly because they provided a structure for the preservation of secrecy in which the members of the society are bound by oaths not to reveal the activities of the society to outsiders, ensuring that there could be a free and open communication within the fraternity without fear of the ideas being discussed getting into the hands of the authorities (or abused by the ignorant).

*You refer to the Masonic fraternities as being ancestors of the OTO. How are they related?*

Fairly directly. As far as documentable connection, if we go back to the mid-nineteenth century the OTO was originally founded by German Masons who had connections with Freemasonry for some time before that, particularly the rites of Oriental Free masonry which is pretty well extinct now except for the OTO.

*In what sort of atmosphere did the British Masons—who seem to have provided the necessary link between the ideas being brought to life on the continent and the English speaking world—ground themselves?*



teenth century—writing openly about occult theories largely derived from Jewish and Arabic mysticism that had been filtering gradually into Europe since the tenth century. It was out of a strong cross-fertilization between the German and French masons that the OTO in Germany was formed.

*What is the connection between The Order of the Golden Dawn and the OTO?*

In the very beginning there was this Rosicrucian study group involving Dr. Westcott, Dr. Woodman, and Mathers. They based the Golden Dawn on some cipher documents found in some used book store or something like that, which are of dubious authenticity. These documents supposedly came from some Rosicrucian Adept in Germany called Fraulein Anna Sprengel (of Nuremberg).

Regardless of the authenticity of the founding documents they formed the Order of the Golden Dawn (in 1887) as a Rosicrucian and Hermetic magical order as distinct from a study group. The Golden Dawn split up due to all kinds of political and personal disagreements between its members.

Crowley, however, went on to establish his own magical order, the A.A., (1905), according to his experience with *The Book of the Law*, and was later contracted by the OTO in Germany and given a charter to be the representative in England and the English speaking world. Upon the death of the Grand Master of the Order, Theodore Reuss, Crowley was elected to that title. He reformed the Order to a very large extent, incorporating his own ideas and making *The Book of the Law* a central document.

*This may seem like an odd question but did Crowley write The Book of the Law?*

Yes, although he claims it was dictated to him by a "praeter natural being" (spirit) named Aiwass.

*Explain the origins of such a being as Aiwass, or the origin of ones that you personally may have encountered during an invocation ritual.*

It doesn't make any difference whether or not you regard it as a being brought forth from the material in your subconscious as in "prophecy", or whether it comes from some type of unknown "supernatural agency". For example, one could attribute an unwanted emotion or thought to the influence of a demon<sup>2</sup> or to an uninhibited part of the psyche in Jungian terms. In practice it doesn't really make much difference what explanation you use—and that's a central theme of our practice.

*It seems that in most rituals, of whatever variety or purpose, the participant focuses or concentrates on actual physical symbols placed on the site, and chants the names of beings seemingly outside him or her. How does one integrate the inner world of one's psyche, in a ritual, with the outer, physical and referential world?*

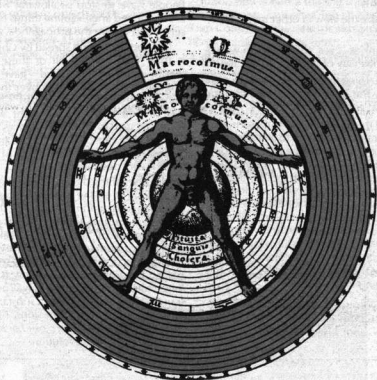
In dramatic ritual one is definitely representing something which is being personified and given a separate entity, but personally, I would be inclined to the view that all things are manifestations of things within us, and would go a step further and say that the entire universe that we experience is within us.

*Is this part of the philosophy which gives rise to the words "There is no part of me that is not of the Gods?" said by all who take part in a pagan mass?*

Yes, and one could accommodate the words "There is no God but man" to that philosophy too.

*Since mass has been brought up, what goes on during an ECG<sup>5</sup>-mass? Can you walk us through the evening?*

**Ana Morgaine:** It's evening when everybody arrives at the temple. They socialize for a while in a sitting room which has a quiet atmosphere and is softly lit. Then the people who are going to play the roles in the mass—the Priest, Priestess and Deacon—will disappear—you know, get prepared, get their robes on and see that everything is ready—while everyone else is still social-



attempting to communicate it one might give a wrong impression and would not actually succeed in transmitting the message. That 'something' or message has to come from the individual's own experience. So the reason for the secrets is to avoid spreading the wrong idea rather than to preserve the right idea and keep it from others.

*This element of secrecy (in the Order), apart from safeguarding the individual's own religious experience, seems to, without coincidence, go hand in hand with the preservation and protection of peripheral or under-*

There was a great concern that Freemasonry was a world-wide conspiracy to overthrow monarchies. In Britain there was a very strong Catholic lobby against continental Freemasonry because of its connections with French revolution and the Founding Fathers in America. So British Masons took some pains to dissociate themselves from continental masonry—turning themselves into a nice middle-class social club. However, masonic groups on the continent, particularly France but somewhat in Germany, were connected with what has generally been called the "occult revival" in the nine-

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