Preamble: On Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia*

The phrase “occult philosophy” is often used by scholars to describe an intellectual movement prevalent during the Renaissance, which combined elements of Christian theology with a range of non-Christian traditions, from ancient Egyptian theories of magic to Renaissance astronomy and alchemy. In its own way, occult philosophy’s mashing of diverse intellectual traditions questioned the hegemony of any one particular tradition (most notably, orthodox Christianity as ensconced within a whole host of legal documents defining the parameters of heresy). In our increasing awareness of the cataclysmic effects of climate change and global warming, and yet after the “death of God,” what new meanings can occult philosophy have today?

Occult philosophy is first and foremost a historical phenomenon. Modern work by scholars such as Frances
Yates has done much to place occult philosophy within its philosophical, religious, and political context. In her book *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Yates argues that what has come to be called occult philosophy is really an amalgam of diverse intellectual traditions, traditions that have, historically speaking, often been at odds with each other. In this mixing together of different speculative traditions, one finds: Greek natural philosophy (Aristotle) and cosmology (Pythagoras), Neoplatonism, Renaissance alchemy, Egyptian Hermeticism, Christian-Scholastic theology, and Jewish mysticism. The work of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, in particular, stands out for its eclecticism and its ambitious attempt to synthesize diverse philosophical and theological traditions. In Agrippa’s work, Yates identifies a thread that combines Hermeticism, as filtered through Renaissance thinkers such as Marsilio Ficino, and a hybrid Christian-Cabbalistic mysticism as filtered through thinkers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. However, in Yates’ view, Agrippa’s text takes occult philosophy in directions that other thinkers were not prepared to go, for fear of accusations of heresy. “It is the Ficinian magic which Agrippa teaches in his first book, though he teaches it in a much bolder way. Ficino was nervous of the magic; he was anxious to keep his magic ‘natural,’ concerned only with elemental substances in their relations to the stars and avoiding the
‘star demons,’ the spirits connected with the stars. It was really not possible to teach astral magic whilst avoiding the star demons, as Agrippa saw and boldly accepted the challenge.”\(^{14}\)

First published in 1531, Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (*Three Books of Occult Philosophy*) presents a veritable compendium of Renaissance philosophy, theology, mysticism, science, and magic. While Agrippa began writing the *Occult Philosophy* as early as 1509, the work itself went through a number of editions, with an English translation appearing in 1651. An itinerant scholar, Agrippa traveled extensively throughout Europe, coming into contact with intellectuals participating in the religious reform and scientific humanism movements of the time (some modern historians even suggest that Agrippa’s travels point to an unknown secret society of which he was a member). The *Occult Philosophy* has had a tremendous impact on later generations, its influence seen in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century European revival of occultism (for instance, in the work of Eliphas Lévi or Gérard Encausse in France) and in early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century groups such as the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society.

In Agrippa’s philosophy, the nature of reality is divided into three worlds – the elemental world, the celestial world, and the intellectual world. Each of these terms has specific meanings in the context of
Renaissance occult philosophy. By “elemental” Agrippa means the natural world, comprising as it does the spectrum of animate and inanimate entities, organic and inorganic nature, as well as the primary elements as inherited from classical thought (water, air, fire, and earth). Beyond the elemental or natural world is what Agrippa calls the “celestial,” by which he means the sky, the stars, the firmament, and the planetary cosmos. This celestial domain is partially that as defined within the science of astronomy, and partially that as defined within the long tradition of Neoplatonic cosmology, Pythagoreanism, and Cabbalistic mysticism. Finally, beyond the celestial is the “intellectual” world, and here Agrippa displays again the influence of Neoplatonism, referring to the supernatural world of intermediary beings (angels and demons) as well as the First Cause, the Neoplatonic “One,” or God. Hence “intellectual” has little relation to the modern, colloquial sense of the cognitive functions of the brain. This last world is intellectual in the sense that it contains, in Platonic fashion, the abstract, purely formal essence of all things in the celestial and elemental worlds.

The basic philosophical commitment of Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy* is that there is a basic distinction between the world as it appears to us, and the “hidden” or occulted qualities of the world which, though they are not apparent, are all the more important and essential
in gaining a deeper knowledge of the three worlds (elemental, celestial, intellectual). While most of the Occult Philosophy is dedicated to detailing, often in a very practical way, the process of revealing the hidden essences of the world, the world as such doesn’t always lend itself to being revealed. In fact, there are a number of moments in the text that describe the world as in fact refusing to be revealed at all. Early on in the first book, Agrippa includes a number of interesting chapters on what he calls the “occult virtues of things.” The strange effects of certain herbs or minerals, anomalies in the sky or the stars, the practice of necromancy or geomancy, even the existence of magic itself – all these are evidence of aspects of the world that refuse to reveal themselves, that remain hidden or occulted. As Agrippa notes, “they are called occult qualities, because their causes lie hid, and man’s intellect cannot in any way reach, and find them out.”

His examples vary widely, from the mundane example of how digestion occurs, to the rather fantastical example of how creatures such as satyrs may exist. All these examples are united by their existing and yet being unexplainable by human beings: “So there are in things, besides the elementary qualities which we know, other certain innate virtues created by nature, which we admire, and are amazed at, being such as we know not, and indeed seldom or never have seen.”
This idea – of the occulted world which both makes its presence known and yet in so doing reveals to us the unknown – this idea is the dark underside of occult philosophy and its humanist claims. Against the humanist world-for-us, a human-centric world made in our image, there is this notion of the world as occulted, not in a relative but in an absolute sense. Etymologically speaking, that which is “occult” (occultus; occulere) is something hidden, concealed, and surrounded by shadows. However, that which is hidden implies that which is revealed (revelare), just as that which is already apparent may, by some twist, suddenly become obscure and occult. That which is occulted can be hidden in a number of ways: something can intentionally be hidden, as when a precious object or important piece of information is stored away or withheld (buried treasures or best-kept secrets). In this case we enter the human world of hide-and-seek, of giving and withholding, of all the micro-exchanges of power that constitute human social networks. We as human beings actively hide and reveal things that, by virtue of this hiding and revealing activity, obtain a certain value for us as knowledge.

To this we can add another way in which the occult is hidden, and that is a hiddenness in which we as human beings play little or no part, and which is either already given, or which occurs inspite of, or indifferently to, our attempts to reveal that which is hidden. This second
type of hiddenness – which may be cataclysmic or everyday – is the hiddenness of the world that we find ourselves thrown into, a hidden world which, regardless of how much knowledge we produce about it, always retains some remainder that lies beyond the scope of our capacity to reveal its hiddenness. In some cases the hidden world is simply the world that does not bend to our will or to our desires, the differential between the world as the world-for-us and the world as the world-in-itself. In other cases the hidden world may be something like the “unsolved mysteries” that percolate in our popular culture fascination of the paranormal.

Let us introduce a terminology for talking about the occult in a contemporary context. This second notion of the occult – not that which we as human being hide or reveal, but that which is already hidden in the world – this we can refer to simply as the occulted world, or better, the *hiddenness of the world*. But here we need to make a further refinement. The hiddenness of the world is not just the world-in-itself, for the world-in-itself is, by definition, absolutely cut off from us as human beings in the world (the world-for-us). When the world-in-itself becomes occulted, or “hidden,” a strange and paradoxical movement takes place whereby the world-in-itself presents itself to us, but without ever becoming fully accessible or completely knowable. The world-in-itself presents itself to us, but without simply becoming the
world-for-us; it is, to borrow from Schopenhauer, “the world-in-itself-for-us.”

If this is the case – that the world-in-itself paradoxically presents itself to us – then what is it exactly that is presented, what is revealed? Quite simply, what is revealed is the “hiddenness” of the world, in itself (and not, I stress, the world-in-itself). This hiddenness is also, in a way, hideous. The hidden world, which reveals nothing other than its hiddenness, is a blank, anonymous world that is indifferent to human knowledge, much less to our all-too-human wants and desires. Hence the hiddenness of the world, in its anonymity and indifference, is a world for which the idea of a theistic providence or the scientific principle of sufficient reason, are both utterly insufficient.

With this in mind, we can suggest a new approach to “occult philosophy” as defined by Agrippa. Whereas in traditional occult philosophy, the world is hidden in order that it is revealed (and revealed as the world-for-us), in occult philosophy today the world simply reveals its hiddenness to us. A second shift follows from this. Whereas traditional occult philosophy is a hidden knowledge of the open world, occult philosophy today is an open knowledge of the hiddenness of the world. Despite Agrippa’s criticisms of both science and religion, the orientation of his work remains within the ambit of Renaissance humanism. For Agrippa it is not only possible for
humanity to gain knowledge of the world, but it is also possible for humanity to, by virtue of occult practices, obtain a higher “union” with the “Maker of all things.” Today, in an era almost schizophrenically poised between religious fanaticisms and a mania for scientific hegemony, all that remains is the hiddenness of the world, its impersonal “resistance” to the human tout court. Hence, in traditional occult philosophy knowledge is hidden, whereas in occult philosophy today the world is hidden, and, in the last instance, only knowable in its hiddenness. This implies a third shift, which is the following: whereas traditional occult philosophy is historically rooted in Renaissance humanism, the new occult philosophy is anti-humanist, having as its method the revealing of the non-human as a limit for thought...

What follows are a series of informal readings, or lectio, which trace this theme of occult philosophy and the hiddenness of the world. In Medieval philosophy and theology, a lectio (literally, a “reading”) is a meditation on a particular text that can serve as a jumping-off point for further ideas. Traditionally the texts were scriptural, and the lectio would be delivered orally akin to a modern-day lecture; the lectio could also vary in form from shorter more informal meditations (lectio brevior) to more elaborate textual exegeses (lectio difficilior). We begin with a first group of lectio (lectio1-3) that depict the use of the magic circle in literature. Here the motif
of the magic circle serves as a boundary between the natural and supernatural, and the possible mediations between them that are made possible by the circle itself. Hence the magic circle is not only a boundary, but also a passage, a gateway, a portal. In these cases the hidden world reveals itself at the same time that it recedes into darkness and obscurity (hence the tragic tone of many of these stories). The second group of lectio (lectio 4-6) will take this motif in another direction, asking what happens when the hidden world reveals itself without any magic circle to serve as boundary. Here blobs, slime, ooze, mists, and clouds are prevalent, being not quite pure nature and yet not quite pure supernature. This moment – the manifestation of the hidden world without boundaries or mediation – will lead us to ask whether there is a new kind of “political theology” on the horizon, one that ambivalently attempts to manage this age-old boundary between the natural and supernatural.

1. Marlowe’s *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* ~ Goethe’s *Faust I*
In his study of the cultural anthropology of play, Johan Huizinga notes how play involves a number of ritualized practices, in which play is at once separated from the everyday world and yet mirrors it and comments upon
The games we play, whether as children or as adults, at once reaffirm hegemonic social structures while also revealing to us the rules of play. Whether they are games of chance or games of strategy, play achieves this ambivalence through a spatial and symbolic motif that Huizinga calls “the magic circle.” As Huizinga notes, “play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.”

The magic circle need not actually be a circle, nor need it be magical. “Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’ cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground.” Hence a playing field, a game board, or even a special hall or building can be an incarnation of the magic circle: “The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., all are in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain.”

Despite this everydayness – or indeed because of it – Huizinga notes that the “circle as such, however, has a magic significance.” For Huizinga, the magic circle has its roots in classical world mythology, in which one finds the themes of fate and free will at the hands of the gods or cosmic forces. Huizinga notes that in the Mahābhārata, for instance, a game of dice is played
among the descendents of the legendary king Kuru. The place where the game is played “is a simple circle, *dyūtamandalam*, drawn on the ground...The players are not allowed to leave the ring until they have discharged all their obligations.”\textsuperscript{20}

Hence the magic circle has a cosmological significance, mirroring the cosmic or mythic ordering of the universe. This is inseparable from a social and political significance, in which the magic circle delimits a boundary between law and transgression, the legitimate and illegitimate, the sacred and profane. All incarnations of the magic circle “are temporary worlds within the
ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.”

One of the most noteworthy uses of the magic circle is in the form of ritual magic, particularly as it applies to the literary representations of necromancy and demonology. These instances are not only literal uses of a magic circle, but they also demonstrate, in their successes or failures, the political and theological aspects of the magic circle that historians such as Huizinga point out. The Faust myth provides one example. Though there are at least one or more historical personages known as Faust, little is known of their lives except by hearsay.

In 16th century Germany, several books recounting the life of Faust were in circulation. These “Faustbooks,” as they are known, detail the basic elements of the story: Faust’s challenge to faith, his pact with a demon, and his eventual downfall and damnation. One Faustbook tells how Faust, after dismissing the miracles performed by Christ, began to demonstrate his ability to perform miracles just as easily. When confronted by the Church, Faust rebukes, noting that “I have gone further than you think and have pledged myself to the devil with my own blood, to be his in eternity. How, then, can I return? Or how could I be helped?”

In the late 16th century Faustbooks began to be translated and made their way around the continent. In England The Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr.
John Faustus was published around 1588. It is thought that this edition prompted the playwright Christopher Marlowe to compose the first version of his own Faust story, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* in 1604. Marlowe’s version of the Faust myth is noteworthy for several reasons. It formalizes with great detail the ritual practices of Faust, while also raising a host of difficult theological and philosophical questions regarding the mobile boundary between science and religion. In Marlowe’s first edition, the play opens with a despondent Faustus questioning and then abandoning all (legitimate) forms of human knowledge as limited and inefficacious: “Bid On kai me on farewell. Galen, come! / Seeing ubi desinit philosophus, ibi incipit medicus, / Be a physician, Faustus. Heap up gold, / And be eternized for some wondrous cure.”23 Showing off his classical education, Marlowe has Faustus almost indifferently rattle off Greek and Latin – he bids farewell to On kai me on or the question of being and not-being so central to Greek philosophy; he then takes up the proverb ubi desinit philosophus, ibi incipit medicus, or “where the philosopher ends, the physician begins,” announcing his intent to move beyond theory and into practice.

What is left for Faustus to do, seeing that all human knowledge has come to naught for him? Should he turn to religion? Here Faustus expresses his most vitriolic phrases, for with religion “We deceive ourselves” in an
absurd, vicious circle of temptation, sin, and repentance – thus Faustus claims, “Divinity, adieu!”\textsuperscript{24} In Marlowe’s version, all that is left are the dark arts. As Faustus picks up an unnamed book of magic, he notes how “These metaphysics of magicians / And necromantic books are heavenly, / Lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters - / Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.”\textsuperscript{25} This litany of magical tools – “lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters” – already paves the way for Faustus’ use of the magic circle in his evocation of demons, the act that has come to define the Faust myth.
The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus.

With new Additions.

Written by Ch. Mar.

Printed at London for John Wright, and are to be sold at his Shop without Newgate, 1624.
The key scene appears in both versions of the play, though in the second version of 1616 both the stage directions and the changes in the text create a much more dramatic, even cataclysmic atmosphere. The second version begins with thunder and a storm. We see Faustus in his study, with his books of black magic. Suspended above him is a swarm of demons, including Lucifer. Faustus is unaware that they are there, suspended above him, but we in the audience can see them, waiting. The ritual is worth citing in full, particularly for the way that it connects Faustus’ use of the magic circle with elemental and even planetary forces:
Following this we get more thunder and Faust incanting in Latin his evocation. The demon Mephistopheles appears, and the two begin their dialogue that eventually leads Faustus to sign in blood the pact with the demon. However, what is striking in the passage above is the way in which the “hidden world” of occult philosophy appears to suddenly and cataclysmically become revealed. Planets shift, winds howl, and a demon emerges...
from the smoke – this is, to be sure, the stuff of contemporary horror film. Yet for all this spectacle, the world, by the play’s end, remains shadowy and hidden, up to the final scenes where Faustus is dragged into the underworld as fulfillment of the pact.

What is also interesting is that Marlowe brings together two shadowy bodies of knowledge of the Elizabethan era: that of occult philosophy and its connections between the microcosm and macrocosm, and that of the ongoing controversies over and persecutions of witchcraft and demonology. Both discourses raise a topic hotly debated among theologians and law-makers of the time, principally, the relation between the natural and the supernatural, or between the “scientific” cosmology of the planets and elements, and the “religious” topology of angels, demons, and other spiritual creatures. Marlowe’s Faustus is not simply a black magician out to sate his every desire, and neither is he an official doctor enshrined within the halls of legitimate Church institutions such as the university. Rather, in his use of the magic circle, he is someone who does not or cannot see the distinction between the natural and supernatural, the cosmic forces of Orion and the Antarctic and the spiritual forces of angels and demons.

Interestingly, the dramatic staging of this scene is almost entirely left out of Goethe’s version of the Faust myth. But the motif of the circle persists throughout the
early scenes of Goethe’s text. In the first book of *Faust* (1808), Goethe has Faust ruminate for pages, in a melancholy state exemplary of the German-Romantic anti-hero, on his search for ultimate knowledge. Like Marlowe’s Faustus, Goethe’s Faust also abandons the official human knowledge of philosophy, science, and religion. For Faust, the world remains hidden, and it is doubtful that any *human* knowledge or access to the world will reveal anything of worth. Faust laments, “That I might see what secret force / Hides in the world and rules its course. / Envisage the creative blazes / Instead of ruminating in phrases.”

Faust’s impatience with book-learning leads him to a kind of Romantic embrace of the world in itself, though even in this gesture Faust takes with him a book of magic: “Flee! Out into the open land! / And this book full of mystery, / Written in Nostradamus’ hand -/ Is it not amble company?”

While there is no magic circle scene like we see in Marlowe’s version, Goethe does give us something like a magic circle, though all the drama takes place in its contemplation. In his search for ultimate knowledge, Faust is led to first contemplate the symbol of the macrocosm, perhaps of the type frequently encountered in Renaissance alchemical treatises – a spherical diagram showing the cosmos and all of its layers.

Again Goethe’s Faust, like Marlowe’s Faustus, notes the mystery of the hiddenness of the world. What divine
force is it, Faust asks, that “Make nature’s hidden powers around me, / manifest?”\(^{29}\) This meditation prompts Faust to the epiphany of the interconnectedness of all things. As he notes, “Though every nerve, my veins are glowing.” And again: “All weaves itself into the whole, / Each living in the other’s soul.”\(^{30}\)

Yet, this first “dramatic” contemplation of the world’s hiddenness only leaves Faust in despair. His only realization is the limit of all human knowledge. Picking up another book, Faust gazes upon a symbol of the earth spirit (\textit{Erdgeist}), leading him to a second contemplation. Modern commentators have debated what exactly this earth spirit is – another name for an alchemical symbol, a pagan symbol linked to cyclic or seasonal time, or a Romantic personification of nature. Whatever it is, it prompts Faust, with some excitement, to ruminate on the elemental mysteries of the planet – Faust notes, in short, staccato phrases, the clouds, storm winds, the moon, and the sea. It finally leads Faust to actually evoke the earth spirit, which appears as a flame whose light is too bright for Faust to bear. Abstractions of the magic circle appear elsewhere in Goethe’s \textit{Faust} – a crowd of townspeople at a festival make a circle around Faust to commend him; at the same festival an anonymous black dog seems to follow and makes circles around Faust; later, in the conversation between Faust and Mephisto, the latter is blocked from leaving Faust’s
study due to a magical pentagram that has been placed above the door. These and other instances reinforce Goethe’s abstraction of the magic circle, which comes to have the central characteristic brought forth in Faust’s contemplations: the magic circle as that which paradoxically reveals the hiddenness of the world-in-itself.

2. Wheatley’s *The Devil Rides Out* ~ Blish’s *Black Easter, or Faust Aleph-Null*
Adaptations of the Faust myth in modernity are innumerable. While it is not my aim here to document each and every one of them, let us note just two 20th century examples, specifically for the way they take up the magic circle motif. Published in 1934, Dennis Wheatley’s sensationalist novel *The Devil Rides Out* contains what is perhaps among the most detailed and elaborate magic circle scenes in the horror genre. The novel features, as its protagonist, the Duke de Richleau, a dashing and gentlemanly figure whose background in the dark arts helps him to solve mysteries that outwit even British Intelligence. Wheatley wrote several novels featuring Richleau, and in *The Devil Rides Out* a furtive black magician attempts to lure some of Richleau’s friends into a coven of witches. In this, as other Wheatley novels, Richleau fights magic with magic, not unlike the van Helsing character in *Dracula*; it is therefore Richleau’s
intimate knowledge of the dark arts that makes him its greatest foe.

In the midst of an elaborate plot involving Satanism in modern London, Wheatley’s novel has Richleau and his friends make a final stand against the black magician Mocata. In this scene, at the home of one of his friends, Richleau patiently makes preparations for the construction of a magic circle. After removing all furniture and rugs, the group – Richleau, Richard (an unswerving skeptic), Mary Lou, and Simon – proceeds to sweep and mop the floor. As Richleau comments, “I would like the room gone over thoroughly, since evil emanations can fasten on the least trace of dust to assist their materialization.” The group then changes into simple, freshly cleaned clothes. Taking a piece of chalk, string, and ruler, Richleau then proceeds to draw a perfect circle on the floor. To this outer circle he adds an inner circle. Then to this he draws a five-pointed star, whose points touch the outer circle and valleys touch the inner circle. Around the rim Richleau inscribes in Latin an exorcism text, along with ancient symbols, including Cabbalistic signs from the Sephiroth. Richleau then completes the “astral fortress” with a number of objects: silver cups with holy water, placed at the valley of the pentacle, long white candles at the apex of the pentacle, horse shoes, mandrake roots, and, for each person, rosaries, a string of garlic, asafetida grass, and phials of salt and mercury.
Richleau explains the rules of the game and what is at stake: “What may happen I have no idea...I cannot tell you what form his attack is likely to take...He may send the most terrible powers against us, but there is one thing above all others that I want you to remember. As long as we stay inside this pentacle we shall be safe, but if any of us sets one foot outside it we risk eternal damnation.”  

What does happen happens in phases. The first phase appears not to be supernatural at all, and involves psychological or affective disturbances (one of the characters, Richard, grows impatient when nothing happens, and is about to exit the circle to go to bed). A second phase involves anomalies of the room itself (unnatural play of light and cast shadows, violent winds in the room that come from nowhere). These merely pave the way for a third phase of strange “ab-human” creatures (a viscous dark shadow cumulating on the ceiling, then “a dim phosphorescent blob...shimmering and spreading into a great hummock...It had no eyes or face but from it there radiated a terrible malefic intelligence.”  

The climactic moment comes when, all else failing, an angel of death in the form of a shadowy black stallion comes to claim their lives. Richleau must resort to a secret incantation (from the “Sigsand manuscript”) that finally wards off this last attack. (The Hammer Studios 1968 adaptation of *The Devil Rides Out* spends a great deal of time on this scene, in which, interestingly,
the magic circle becomes a kind of allegory for film in general and horror film in particular.

At each stage of the attack Richleau and his friends are tested. Up until this point in the novel we have no real, direct evidence of the supernatural. Though we hear of a Satanic coven, and though Richleau, we are told, is in possession of erudite knowledge on the topic, we as readers never witness the supernatural in real time. Here, the magic circle drawn, the rules of the game established, and the play begun – here, the supernatural is able to manifest itself. First it comes in a form nearly indistinguishable from idealism (that is, from the thought of the supernatural, as possible or impossible). Then it comes in the form of inanimate, elemental forces (light
and darkness, flame and shadow). This leads to its manifestation in the abject monster, the “nameless Thing” undulating and writhing just outside the circle’s edge. Finally, the figure of death itself approaches, whose personification in the stallion masks the deeper metaphysical unknown of death itself. The magic circle is both what allows the “hiddenness” of the world to reveal itself, as well as that which protects the human subject from the rational unacceptability of this hidden, world-in-itself. It can be written off as mere illusion and trickery, an over-active imagination, and so on. But if, as Huizinga reminds us, the magic circle is also a mirror of the world, then the hiddenness of the world must also be understood as more than mere idealism, more than “it’s all in your head”...

Wheatley’s novel takes up the traditional notion of magic as presented in the Faust stories by Marlowe and Goethe. Here magic is not completely divorced from something called science, but neither is it simply equivalent to it. In these instances magic – and in particular black magic – is deemed an illegitimate form of knowledge primarily because it stands opposed to both the orthodox religious worldview (the world as divine creation) and the then-burgeoning scientific worldview (the world as knowable in itself through reason and experiment). The knowledge gained by black magic is neither the knowledge of the world as given to us by the divine
Logos, nor is it the knowledge produced by the machinations of human reason. The knowledge of black magic is – or claims to be – a knowledge of the world as essentially hidden, rather than given (religion) or produced (science). The knowledge it lays claim to is, for this reason, occult knowledge, but knowledge that is only made apparent within the topography of the magic circle.

But while much of the dialogue in Marlowe and Goethe surround the status of human knowledge, we forget that the primary motive for Faust is practical – that is, the instrumentality of such occult knowledge. What happens when one takes occult knowledge not just as a philosophical problem, but as a resource to be harnessed and transformed into a tool? Certainly this happens to some extent in Wheatley’s novel, where Richleau fights magic with magic, pitting occult knowledge against occult knowledge. But for all its evocative aesthetics of black magic, The Devil Rides Out remains firmly inscribed within a conventional moral framework (White Magic vs. Black Magic). What Richleau never talks about is the practical paradox of instrumentalizing the hidden world – that is, of taking that which by definition we as human beings cannot comprehend, and transforming it into a tool...or a weapon.

This is the theme of James Blish’s novel Black Easter, which originally contained the subtitle Faust Aleph-Null. Published in 1968 as part of a larger series of
works dealing with religion and science fiction, Black Easter takes up the Faust myth and places it in the modern context of nuclear war. The premise of the novel is straightforward – a wealthy arms manufacturer named Baines seeks to release all the demons on the world for a day. Presumably he, like Faust, has exhausted all the knowledge of his field, all the means of making weapons and accumulating global capital. The only weapon left undeveloped is in fact the supernatural one, the weapon of all weapons. In his search he contacts a reputed sorcerer named Theron Ware, who works as a sort of noir-esque private detective (much to the chagrin of the Church). Ware minces no words with Baines, stating with great sobriety, “All magic – I repeat, all magic, with no exceptions whatsoever – depends on the control of demons.” In Blish’s near-future scenario, we get glimpses of a number of modern institutions, including the Consolidated Warfare Service, the Reformed Orthodox Agnostic Church, government think-tanks on weaponized anti-matter, a report titled The Effects of Atomic Weapons, and secret arms deals that feed directly into the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict.

The climax of Black Easter is the actual evocation scene, depicted as something between Faust’s conjuration and an experiment in particle physics. In a laboratory, Ware consults a panoply of grimoires, including the notorious Grand Grimoire, to ostensibly outdo Faust a
hundredfold. “Ware stared at the Grand Circle for a moment, and then walked around it clockwise to the lectern and unlocked the book of pacts. The stiff pages bent reassuringly in his hands. Each leaf was headed by the character or sign of a demon; below, in special ink reserved for such high matters – gall, copperas, gum arabic – was the text of Theron Ware’s agreement with that entity, signed at the bottom in his own blood, and by the character of the demon repeated in its own hand.”

What follows in the novel is Ware’s almost endless list of demons, their names, signs, and descriptions.

Of course this, like all such experiments, goes horribly wrong – or really, it goes too well. All the demons are loosed upon the Earth, followed promptly by natural disasters and the Emergency Broadcast System. In the panic, Baines, speaking to a military scientist, unrepentantly exclaims, “we’re turning out to be wrong about the outcome – but no matter what it’s our outcome. We contracted for it. Demons, saucers, fallout – what’s the difference? Those are just signs in the equation, parameters we can fill any way that makes the most immediate sense to us. Are you happier with electrons than with demons?”

The cataclysm concludes with the arrival of Baphomet, who speaks, with great dramatic flair, as the voice of the cataclysm itself: “WE WILL DO WITHOUT THE ANTICHRIST. HE WAS NEVER NECESSARY.
MEN HAVE ALWAYS LED THEMSELVES UNTO ME.”

On one level, *Black Easter* is easily understood as an allegory for the atomic age and the looming threat of Mutually Assured Destruction. We get black magic instead of atomic physics, sorcerers instead of scientists, warring nations instead of warring religions, and so on. But *Black Easter* is not a work of fantasy; arguably it isn’t even a work of speculative fiction. The allegorical reading gives way, at a certain point, to a reading of the novel that is metaphysical. Taking the novel in this way does not mean, however, that one has to accept or reject the real existence of magic. The metaphysics of the novel lies in its evocation of the world and its hiddenness, especially when the hidden world is cataclysmically revealed through weapons that make it nearly impossible to distinguish a human-made war, a naturally occurring disaster, and a religious apocalypse.

3. Hodgson’s *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* ~ “The Borderlands” (*Outer Limits*)
Up to this point we’ve been considering variations on a theme: that of cultural representations of the magic circle in its occult usage. In these stories the magic circle maintains a basic function, which is to govern the boundary between the natural and the supernatural, be
it in terms of acting as a protective barrier, or in terms of evoking the supernatural from the safety inside the circle. We can now take another step, which is to consider instances in which the anomalies that occur are not inside or outside the magic circle, but are anomalies of the magic circle itself. This need not mean that the magic circle malfunctions, or has been improperly drawn. In some cases it may mean that the magic circle—as the boundary and mediation of the hidden world—itself reveals some new property or propensity.

A case in point is in the “occult detective” subgenre, a style of fiction popular in the 19th century. In these types of stories, a hero-protagonist combines knowledge of modern science with that of ancient magic to solve a series of crimes and mysteries that may or may not have supernatural causes. Algernon Blackwood’s *John Silence – Physician Extraordinary* and Sheridan Le Fanu’s *In a Glass Darkly* are examples in fiction, while Charles Fort’s *The Book of the Damned* is an example in non-fiction. These types of stories are not only the precursors to modern-day TV shows such as *X-files* or *Fringe*, but they also bring together science and sorcery into a new relationship.

Published as a collection in 1913 as *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder*, William Hope Hodgson’s occult detective stories are noteworthy for their reinvention of the magic circle. Hodgson’s detective, named Thomas Carnacki,
not only has at his disposal a deep and erudite knowledge of the occult, but he also has an array of gadgets, tools, and gizmos. Unlike many of the other occult detectives, who solve mysteries by crafty ratiocination, Carnacki combines rational “scientific” thinking with the appropriate tools for the job. Some of these tools are simple and low-tech, such as candle wax to seal windows and doors (thereby indicating if an entry was made during the night). Other tools are, by early 20th century standards, quite modern: Carnacki frequently makes use of photography in attempts to visualize spirits that may be invading a house or room. Still other tools are ancient and magical: Carnacki makes use of water circles and frequently refers to the Old English “Sigsand manuscript” for particular spells or incantations.

These types of tools are used mostly to document a presence that may or may not be supernatural. However the tool that trumps all the others is one of Carnacki’s own design and invention: the “Electric Pentacle.” It is featured in a number of the Carnacki stories. In “The Gateway of the Monster,” Carnacki investigates the haunting of a particular room in a house. Residents complain of slamming doors, moving furniture, and strange, floating drapes. In itself the symptoms are unremarkable – your classic gothic haunting. But Carnacki’s approach is unique. Determined to spend the night in the room (dubbed the “Grey Room”), Carnacki
first draws a traditional magic circle on the floor, with the aid of the Sigsand manuscript. As with our previous examples, this serves as a barrier or protection against what Carnacki calls the “Outer Monstrosities.”

But this in itself is not enough. Here Carnacki calls upon esoteric research, including a lecture by one Professor Garder, “Astral Vibrations Compared with Matero-involuted Vibrations below the Six-Billion Limit.” Summarizing the research, Carnacki notes: “When they surrounded the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power – almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvelous ‘defence’ against certain manifestations.”

Using vacuum tube technology, Carnacki in effect invents a steampunk magic circle:

“I turned now to fit the Electric Pentacle, setting it up so that each of its ‘points’ and ‘vales’ coincided exactly with the ‘points’ and ‘vales’ of the drawn pentagram upon the floor. Then I connected up the battery, and the next instant the pale blue glare from the intertwining vacuum tubes shone out.” While Marlowe and Goethe implicitly combine science and magic in their theories, here Hodgson materially combines them in the layering of the traditional pentacle with its vacuum tube, steampunk cousin.
In most of the cases the Electric Pentacle serves Carnacki well as a barrier, whether it is from a giant “death Hand,” the eerie “blood drip,” a “Saiitii manifestation,” or the “Ab-human” shadows of the “Outer Worlds.” In one case, however, the Electric Pentacle does something different. In the story “The Hog,” Carnacki attempts to cure a man possessed by the images and sounds of a horde of cosmic pigs. Convinced that the man is not simply mad or hallucinating, he ensconces him within an elaborate version of the Electric Pentacle, with different colored vacuum tubes signaling different kinds of manifestations. Far from serving as a protective barrier, the center of the circle itself actually becomes a portal to another dimension, turning into a misty, bottomless, black pit: “A very curious thing happened then, for all around the edge of the pit, that looked so peculiarly like black glass, there came a sudden, luminous glowing...and, abruptly, out of the tremendous Deep, I was conscious of a dreadful quality or ‘atmosphere’ of monstrousness that was coming up out of the pit.” What finally emerges is a surreal, demonic animal: “I saw it pale and huge through the swaying, whirling funnel of cloud – a monstrous pallid snout rising out of that unknowable abyss...A pig’s eye with a sort of hell-light of vile understanding in it.” In Hodgson’s Carnacki stories, the Electric Pentacle is a hybrid of magic and science that, in stories like “The Hog” serves to invert the
traditional uses of the magic circle. Instead of providing protection and serving as a barrier between the natural and supernatural, the Electric Pentacle actually focuses and intensifies the passage between them, whereby the “hidden world” reveals itself as a sort of extra-dimensional monstrosity.

This same idea is seen in “The Borderlands,” an episode of the classic TV series *Outer Limits*. Aired in 1960 and directed by Leslie Stevens, the episode also juxtaposes science and magic, though in ways different from the occult detective genre. The episode opens, significantly, with a séance. An old, wealthy industrialist is attempting to reach his son, who has recently died in a car accident. However, not all present are convinced of the spiritual medium, and one of the assistants calls their bluff, revealing a simple cloth-and-string rig. After the failure of the séance, a discussion ensues about the possibility of reaching the dead. The others present at the table are scientists, working on the use of modern turbine power to open a gateway to the fourth dimension. Using a simple demonstration of magnets and an introductory lecture in quantum physics, the scientists convince the industrialist to use the city’s entire power plant for a brief period of time to try to open the gateway. The caveat is that whoever goes through to the other side must also search for the industrialist’s dead son.
The bulk of the episode details the experiment. Unlike the Electric Pentacle, which in form and function remains a traditional magic circle, here the magic circle is different. In the center of the lab, a large chamber serves as the platform or portal. Around it is arranged various unnamed laboratory technology – huge magnets, electron scanners, and tape-driven computers. This “black box” is the magic circle, and its techniques are not magic but laboratory physics, its animating principle not the magical word or sign but the principle of atomic magnetism. The episode documents the experimental protocols for each phase of the experiment, as laboratory technicians recite in monotone voices instructions and data, sounding like a very different type of grimoire. At
the experiment’s peak, the scientist does enter into the fourth dimension, depicted in the episode as a wonderful montage worthy of Surrealist cinema. Space and time collapse in the consciousness of the scientist, but the search for the dead is for naught. If the occult detective genre still attempted to strike a balance between science and magic, *Outer Limits* episodes like these make a claim for bleeding-edge science as the new occultism, and electromagnetic laboratory chambers like the one we see as the new magic circles. If the lab is the circle, then the lab experiment is the magical ritual.

4. Lovecraft’s “From Beyond” ~ Ito’s *Uzumaki*

At this point we can pause for a brief review. In our previous *lectio*, the magic circle serves as a portal or gateway to the hiddenness of the world. In some cases the use of the circle actually guarantees the separation of the natural and supernatural, while also making possible the manifestation of the latter in the former. This is the case in the Faust stories by Marlowe and Goethe, where passages between nature and supernature are relatively restricted. While the supernatural is evoked, the division of natural and supernatural remains intact. By the end of Marlowe’s play, for instance, Faustus is dragged down to Hell, and the cosmology of the world remains as it has been.
But we’ve also seen that the ritual aspect of the magic circle has a wider impact, affecting anomalies in the weather, in everyday objects, in the beliefs and desires of individuals, and even – as in Goethe’s *Faust II* – in the events of world history. The supernatural begins to bleed into the natural. The magic circle, whose function was to govern the boundary between them, begins to spiral out of control, as the human subjects “in” the magic circle struggle to control and comprehend that which lies outside of it (and thus outside the scope of human knowledge). Wheatley’s *The Devil Rides Out* deals with these struggles on the level of religious morality, while Blish’s *Black Easter* deals with them on the level of geopolitics and nuclear war. Gradually the boundary between the natural and the supernatural – topographically ensured by the use of the magic circle – is becoming more and more fuzzy. The final stage of this fuzziness is when the magic circle itself starts to behave anomalously, as we’ve seen in the occult detective subgenre. In some cases, the circle inverts its traditional function and amplifies the blurriness of the supernatural and the natural.

The *Outer Limits* episode ends on a note of caution, with humanity saving the world from its own inventions. But not all modern scientific incarnations of the magic circle are so filled with optimism. We get a slightly different, more menacing picture from early
20th century writers in the “weird fiction” tradition like H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft’s short story “From Beyond,” published in 1934 in the pulp magazine *Fantasy Fan*, takes the technological magic circle in a different direction. Instead of serving as a gateway or portal to other dimensions – a function still very much within the traditional magic circle – Lovecraft’s characters construct a magic circle whose function is the dissolving of the boundary between the natural and supernatural, the four-dimensional and the other-dimensional, the world revealed and the world as hidden. This dissolving of boundaries between the natural and supernatural is also found in the work of contemporary authors influenced by Lovecraft, including Caitlín Kiernan, Thomas Ligotti, China Miéville, and filmmakers such as E. Elias Merhige. In Lovecraft’s story, what results is a “subtractive” magic circle, which by its very receding into the background bizarrely flattens all dimensions into one.

In “From Beyond,” the narrator recounts the experiments of one Crawford Tillinghast, a reclusive physicist who begins to explain his rationale as follows: “We see things only as we are constructed to see them, and can gain no idea of their absolute nature. With five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos, yet other beings with a wider, stronger, or different range of senses might not only see very differently the things we see, but might see and study whole
worlds of matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand yet can never be detected with the senses we have.” "Tillinghast continues, a little excitedly, announcing “I have always believed that such strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows, and now I believe I have found a way to break down the barriers” (in Lovecraft’s inimitable prose, italics always indicate an epiphany of cosmic horror...). "Tillinghast goes on to show the narrator a device he has constructed, set up in the center of the laboratory, which Lovecraft only describes as a “detestable electrical machine, glowing with a sickly, sinister, violet luminosity.”

Seated around the device, in the center of the lab, the narrator and Tillinghast re-enact the magic circle of Faustus and his later incarnations. When Tillinghast turns on the device, the narrator experiences an influx of color and shape. Quickly, however, the trip begins to turn sour: “At another time I felt huge animate things brushing past me and occasionally walking or drifting through by supposedly solid body.” Finally, the narrator “sees” around him that which has always existed but which human senses forever obscure: “Foremost among the living objects were great inky, jellyfish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they overlapped; that they were semi-fluid and capable of
passing through one another and through what we know as solids.” The horror of this “cosmic” and “preternatural” realization is then doubled by another more tangible horror. As Tillinghast exclaims to the narrator, “Don’t move,’ he cautioned, ‘for in these rays we are able to be seen as well as to see.” Tillinghast, who by now has gone far into mad-scientist territory, begins to prophesize of “ultimate things” stealthily approaching “from beyond.” Later, the police find only the narrator and Tillinghast’s lab, but not his body. The story closes, as with many a Lovecraft story, with ambiguous newspaper reports of unsolved mysteries. The narrator – as with many of Lovecraft’s protagonists – wishes he were insane, wishes that he could rationalize the “beyond” as mere illusion: “It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me.”

With Lovecraft, we see several transformations to the magic circle. First, as with the Electric Pentacle, the magic circle’s function is inverted – it now serves to focus and intensify the strange, enigmatic appearance of the “hiddenness” of the world. And it does so not through traditional magic, but through the modern sorcery of science; instead of referencing alchemy or necromancy, Lovecraft’s characters use the language of optics, physics, and the fourth dimension. There is also a second transformation to the magic circle, which is that science
and technology are not just used to upgrade the magic circle – they *are* the magic circle. This distinguishes the device in “From Beyond” from the Electric Pentacle; while the latter remains a traditional magic circle, the device in Lovecraft’s story distills the metaphysical principle of the magic circle, which is a boundary or point of mediation between two different ontological orders, two different planes of reality. Lovecraft discards the architectonics of the magic circle, but keeps the metaphysics. The device serves as nothing more than a nodal point from which the characters are able to “see” the extra-dimensional reality and the weird creatures that swim about them every day. The aim, then, of the device as a magic circle is primarily a philosophical one: rather than assuming the division between the natural and supernatural, and then utilizing the magic circle to manage or govern the boundary between them, in “From Beyond” the magic circle is used to reveal the already-existing non-separation between natural and supernatural, the “here and now” and the “beyond.”

A third and final transformation to the magic circle has to do with *the disappearance of the circle itself*, while its powers still remain in effect. During the story, as the characters witness the “beyond,” the device itself gradually recedes into the background as the characters can only look about in a state of horrified awe. It is as if we get the effects of the magic circle, but without the
magic circle itself. Nearly all the traditional uses of the magic circle adopt the model of spectator and spectacle – inside the circle is the audience, and outside it is the dramatic action (again, this is most explicit in the film version of *The Devil Rides Out*). In “From Beyond,” however, we lose this separation, and there is no spectacle that we may view from inside the safety of the circle. Instead, natural and supernatural blend into a kind of ambient, atmospheric no-place, with the characters bathed in the alien ether of unknowable dimensions. The center of the circle is, then, really everywhere...and its circumference, really nowhere.

This third transformation – in which the magic circle as such is diffused into the world – is the principle motif in Junji Ito’s manga series *Uzumaki*. First appearing in Shogakukan’s *Weekly Big Comic Spirits* in the 1990s, Ito’s manga tells the story of a small Japanese town that is mysteriously afflicted by the symbol of the spiral. The spiral first appears as the obsession of several townspeople, one of whom – a Mr. Saito – begins to see spirals everywhere – in a snail’s shell, in the swirling river water, in incense smoke, in hand-made pottery, in tapestry designs, even in the fish cakes in his udon soup. As he frantically comments to a friend, “...I find the spiral to be very mystical...It fills me with a deep fascination...like nothing else in nature...no other shape.”49 In a final, desperate attempt to achieve this mystical union
with the spiral, Saito’s body itself undergoes a spiral-metamorphosis. His eyes swirl around in opposite directions (so he can see the whole world as a spiral...), his tongue twists inward like a spiral, and his entire body twists and curls itself into a giant, fleshy spiral.

Not only does the “spiral obsession” become contagious, affecting people throughout the town, but, more importantly, the spiral begins to manifest itself in strange and unnatural ways: at the cremation of Saito, the ashes and smoke rise into the sky, forming a menacing, dark spiral shape with vague hints of ghostly faces floating within it. In the scenes that follow, the townspeople discover spiral-shaped grass growing in the hills, spiral-shaped...
clouds in the sky, spiral-shaped mud and clay from the town river, and so on.

Thus what begins as a psychological and subjective obsession quickly turns into an objective manifestation in the world. In one episode, a potter discovers that the clay he uses seems to be imbued with unnatural capacities, forming grotesque, spiral-like forms, with hints of horrific, haunting faces deep within the clay itself. In nature (the river, the sky, the mud), in the body (the eyes, tongue, ears, hair), and in art (ceramics and clay pottery; tapestry design), the spiral manifests itself both in and as the world.

_Uzumaki_ adds yet another dimension to the magic circle motif we’ve been tracing. The spiral is, in one sense, an abstract, geometrical shape. It has no actual existence in the world, except as a manifestation in the form of a spiral (a snail’s shell, a slice of fish cake). This paradoxical state means that the spiral can only be said to negatively exist – the spiral in itself is never manifest except as a spiral “in” some thing, in the world. This sort of bleed-over effect of the abstract into the concrete world is different from our traditional examples of the magic circle. In Goethe’s _Faust_, we saw that Faust only encounters the magic circle symbolically, in his contemplation of the abstract symbol of the macrocosmos. But the abstract symbol and the concrete manifestation remain separate; Faust’ contemplation of the symbol in
itself does not lead to the evocation of demons or magic. In *Uzumaki*, by contrast, something else happens in the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, between symbol and manifestation. On the one hand, the spiral has no existence except as manifestation – and it is this contagious, pervasive manifestation that the characters describe as unnatural or strange. On the other hand, throughout the *Uzumaki* series, the spiral is more than just a pattern in nature – it is also equivalent to the idea of the spiral itself. That is, the abstract symbol and the concrete manifestation are inseparable, to the point that the outer world of the spiral’s manifestation can “infect” or spread into the ideational world of the spiral as an idea. Beyond a geometrical symbol, and beyond a pattern in nature, the spiral in *Uzumaki* is ultimately equivalent to thought itself – but “thought” understood here as not simply being the interior, private thoughts of an individual. Instead, the spiral-as-thought is also “thought” as unhuman, “thought” as equivalent to the world-without-us. In this sense *Uzumaki* suggests that the Absolute is horrific, in part because it is utterly unhuman.

In the examples of Lovecraft’s “From Beyond” and Ito’s *Uzumaki* we see that the traditional magic circle is no longer needed in order to think about the hidden world. This is because, as the stories imply, we are already bathed in the invisible viscous hiddenness of the
world. In a kind of perversion of Kantian philosophy, Lovecraft and Ito suggest that the world-in-itself is only “hidden” to the extent that our phenomenal experience of the world is determinatively a human one. In fact, Lovecraft and Ito implicitly make the argument that not only is there no distinction between the natural and supernatural, but that what we sloppily call “supernatural” is simply another kind of nature, but one that lies beyond human comprehension – not in a relative but in an absolute sense. Herein lies the basis of what Lovecraft called “cosmic horror” – the paradoxical realization of the world’s hiddenness as an absolute hiddenness. It is a sentiment frequently expressed in Lovecraft’s many letters: “Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests are emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form – and the local human passions and conditions and standards – are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all...but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown – the
shadow-haunted Outside – we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold.”

In our readings of the magic circle and the hidden world, Lovecraft’s “From Beyond” and Ito’s Uzumaki act as a hinge, between the more traditional uses of the magic circle (which maintain the relation between the revealed world-for-us and the hidden world-in-itself), and a different, more unconventional variant of the magic circle. That unconventional type of magic circle is one in which the metaphysical principle remains in effect, but the magic circle itself disappears. It is a kind of non-human, anonymous “magic” without any “circle” to inscribe it. What would this mean? For one, it implies that any magic without a circle is also a magic without human agents to cause, control, or utilize magic. But what would magic without the human mean? What would it mean to have revealed to us the hiddenness of the world without any human to evoke that revelation?

Excursus on Mists and Ooze
In “From Beyond” Lovecraft’s characters are suspended in a strange no-place that is neither the normative, human world of scientific laws and therapeutic religion, nor is it the purely supernatural domain of the heavens or the underworld. Once the device is turned on, they cease to be in the magic circle per se, as it is impossible
to distinguish the world outside from the world inside the circle. They seem to almost swim about in a thick, viscous ether of unknown dimensions. In Ito’s *Uzumaki* the magic circle as a symbol diffuses into the world itself, to the point that it infects both the natural world and the very thoughts of the characters. This strange disappearing act of the circle already gives us a clue to our earlier question of magic without the circle. In particular, what is revealed in such instances is not just the world understood scientifically. What is revealed is a world that is neither quite natural nor supernatural, not quite the normal “here and now” and not quite the unknowable “beyond.” Perhaps, instead of a magic *circle*, we have something like a magic *site*.

The magic site is, simply, the place where the hidden-ness of the world presents itself in its paradoxical way (revealing itself – as hidden). In some cases magic sites are like magic circles, constructed by human beings for specific purposes. This is the case with the mad scientist theme in the Lovecraft story. More often than not, however, the magic site spontaneously happens without any human intervention. The magic site need not be on sacred ground, and it need not have special buildings or temples constructed for it. It can be in the darkest, most obscure, hidden caverns or underground fissures. It may be an accidental or unintentional site – the site of an archaeological dig, the site of a mining operation, the site
of a forest or underground subway tunnel. Whereas the magic circle involves an active human governance of the boundary between the apparent world and the hidden world, the magic site is its dark inverse: the anonymous, unhuman intrusion of the hidden world into the apparent world, the enigmatic manifesting of the world-without-us into the world-for-us, the intrusion of the Planet into the World. If the magic circle is the human looking out and confronting the unhuman, anonymous, hidden world, then the magic site is that hidden world looking back at us. It is not surprising, then, that whereas the magic circle evokes vaguely anthropoid creatures (demons, ghosts, the dead), the magic site creeps forth with entities that are neither animate nor inanimate, neither organic nor inorganic, neither material nor ideal.

Let us introduce a new terminology to talk about the ways in which the magic site – as opposed to the magic circle – creeps forth. The magic site manifests the hidden world revealed in two forms: as mists and ooze. Mists evoke many things – drizzling rain, a dense fog, or surreal clouds in the overcast sky. Natural formations like clouds or rain are, certainly, entities inscribed within the scientific study of atmospheric conditions. But the term “mists” may also refer to any inanimate entity that lies somewhere between the air and the ground. For instance, nephrology, the scientific study of clouds,
considers clouds not only on the Earth but on any planet where conditions are conducive to cloud formation – indeed in interstellar space, where gravity fields may attract cosmic dust into nebulae. The ethereal nature of mists means that while they may appear solid and to have distinct forms, they are also immaterial, and can readily become formless.

The same applies to ooze. Again, the term “ooze” evokes more that which oozes than a discrete, static thing. What oozes can be slime, mud, oil, or pus. Ooze can ooze on the body, in the ground, in the sea or space. Slime, for instance, can be understood in a scientific scene (for instance in plant microbiology or prokaryotic biology), but slime is also something between a liquid and a solid. Ooze may also be metamorphic and shape-shifting, as with the organisms classed as *myxomycota*, which, during their life cycle, may alternately behave like plants, fungi, or amoeboid organisms. Despite their differences, mists and ooze are two examples of the ways in which the “hidden” world reveals itself, and often with strange and weird effects.

Mists and ooze populate many of our speculative fantasies about the end of the world. In our fifth *lectio* let us consider, briefly, a few examples of cataclysmic mists in the genres of science fiction and horror, before going on to a consideration of ooze in our sixth and final *lectio*.
5. Shiel’s *The Purple Cloud* ~ Hoyle’s *The Black Cloud* ~ Ballard’s *The Wind From Nowhere*

There are, of course, a number of modern novels and films that portray mists as gothic, malevolent forces, often that serve as cover for ghosts, monsters, or unknown miasmas. Novels such as James Herbert’s *The Fog* (1975) and Stephen King’s *The Mist* (1980), as well as John Carpenter’s film *The Fog* (1980) all fall into this category. The mist in these types of stories is not only itself vaguely material and formless, but in many cases its origin and aims remain utterly unknown to the human beings that are its victims. Arguably, the text that establishes the blueprint for this type of story is M.P. Shiel’s 1901 novel *The Purple Cloud*. Hailed by the likes of Lovecraft as a masterpiece of weird fiction, *The Purple Cloud* is a surreal and sometimes wandering narrative about a mysterious purple gas that emerges from the North Pole and spreads over the entire planet, killing every living being in its path - except for one person, whose recently-discovered journal of the aftermath of the purple cloud constitutes the novel itself.

Shiel’s novel borrows from the “last man” motif popularized by works such as Mary Shelley’s underrated *The Last Man* (1826). But whereas most last man stories depict a definable cause for the extinction of humanity (war, plague, a comet), Shiel’s novel abstracts the cataclysm into a roving, amorphous mist, whose origin is
described in surreal, unhuman terms by the last surviving human being: “The lake, I think, would be something like a mile wide, and in its middle is a pillar of ice, low and thick; and I had the impression, or dream, or fantasy, that there is a name inscribed round in the ice of the pillar in characters that could never be read; and under the name a lengthy date; and the liquid of the lake seemed to me to be wheeling with a shivering ecstasy, splashing and fluttering, round the pillar, from west to east, with the planet’s spin; and it was borne in upon me – can’t say how – that this fluid was the substance of a living being...”\textsuperscript{51} Here we have the magic site from which the mist emerges, flowing deep within the undiscovered coldness of the North Pole. Approaching this site, the narrator experiences something like a dark ecstasy, verging on delirium – a “most cold, most mighty high – had its hand of ice on my soul, I being alone in this place, face to face with the Ineffable; but still, with a gibbering levity, and a fatal joy, and a blind hilarity, on I sped, I span.”\textsuperscript{52}

In \textit{The Purple Cloud} we see a mist emerge from within the Earth, a mist that menacingly washes over the surface of the planet, described by Shiel in an almost eschatological manner. A variant on this theme comes from a novel by the astrophysicist Fred Hoyle – \textit{The Black Cloud}. Published in 1957 as a pulp SF novel, \textit{The Black Cloud} involves a mysterious body of black mass
that appears to be heading straight for Earth. A group of American astrophysicists are the first to detect the interstellar anomaly through their high-tech telescopes: “If you look carefully at what seem like very big clouds, you’ll find them to be built up of lots of much smaller clouds. This thing you’ve got here seems, on the other hand, to be just one single spherical cloud.”

Rational observation and pragmatic urgency are the order of discourse in this novel. At an international meeting convened to discuss the pending danger, one scientist notes, “I find that if the results that have been presented to us this afternoon are correct, I say if they are correct, then a hitherto unknown body must exist in the vicinity of the solar system. And the mass of this unknown body must be comparable with or even greater than the mass of Jupiter itself.”

As the black cloud approaches, it starts to become visible to the naked eye, and general panic sets in – there are eyewitness reports of a “general blackness in the sky,” a “yawning circular pit,” and newspaper reports of a “celestial black-out.” As it comes nearer to Earth, atmospheric and biospheric changes rapidly occur – global temperatures drastically increase, there are warm rains in Iceland, an exponential increase in insect speciation in the southern hemisphere, and “the deserts flowered as they had never done at any time while Man had walked the Earth.”
Hoyle’s treatment of the hidden world theme is markedly different from that of Shiel. While both novels involve a mist that threatens to destroy the planet and render humanity extinct, Shiel’s treatment is much more rooted in the tradition of apocalyptic mysticism. Shiel’s prose descriptions read more like one of William Blake’s prophecies than as science fiction, and by the novel’s end this tendency is reinforced even more. By contrast, Hoyle’s narrative is much more in line with Cold War-era “hard” science fiction. Scientists from all disciplines convene to study, hypothesize, and develop an action plan for the black cloud. While the character of Shiel’s novel comes to relate to the hidden world in terms of mysticism and destiny, the characters in Hoyle’s novel have no time for existential angst, as they are caught up in the production of knowledge and the preparations for an impending disaster. In Shiel’s novel the end actually does come – or at least one version of the end. In Hoyle’s novel, by contrast, the end is narrowly averted (a deus ex machina frequently used in 19th century “comet” stories of the same type). Finally, in *The Purple Cloud* the magic site – the site from which the mist manifests itself – is that of the Earth itself, a literally encircled whirlpool of animate gas. In *The Black Cloud*, however, the mist comes from outer space, suggesting that the hidden world is also a hidden cosmos.
The presence of a magic site – some locale from which the hidden world can manifest itself, often with disastrous effects – implies some point of origin for the hidden world, or at least for its manner of manifesting itself to us as human beings. In *The Purple Cloud* and *The Black Cloud* it is through mist that the hiddenness of the world manifests itself, though their magic sites differ (the cold heart of the Earth in one, and the depths of interstellar space in the other). What happens when this strange, cataclysmic mist is present, but without a point of origin? This is the idea behind J.G. Ballard’s first novel, *The Wind From Nowhere*. Published in 1961, the novel has become something of a cult classic, ironically due to Ballard’s repeated attempts to disown it throughout his life. Taking place in modern London – as well as at different locales across the globe – *The Wind From Nowhere* begins with your run-of-the-mill hurricane, which proceeds to turn into a worldwide cyclone that makes the Earth all but uninhabitable for human beings. In its episodic format, we see a range of human individuals coping with the wind, and the dense storms of dust and dirt that accompany it: “The wind had reached 250 mph and the organized resistance left was more interested in securing the minimal survival necessities – food, warmth, and 50 feet of concrete overhead – than in finding out what the rest of the world was doing, knowing full well that everywhere people were
doing exactly the same thing. Civilization was hiding. The earth itself was being stripped to its seams, almost literally – six feet of topsoil were now traveling through the air.”

“It’s hard to describe,” one character says, a “solid roaring wall of black air – except that it’s not air any more but a horizontal avalanche of dust and rock.” Eventually the realization sets in – the wind may continue to increase in velocity until the planet becomes almost completely composed of winds and gases. As one scientist notes, “we’re witnessing a meteorological phenomenon of unprecedented magnitude, a global cyclone accelerating at a uniform rate, exhibiting all the signs distinguishing highly stable aerodynamic systems.” (It also contains a number of rather awkward jabs at humor, like the following exclamation by one character, during one of the wind storms in southern Europe: “So much of life in the States – and over here for that matter – could use a strong breath of fresh air.”) By the novel’s end the wind abates without warning or cause, just as mysteriously as it had begun. But throughout the novel, Ballard traces a theme that would become common in many of his novels – the correlation between internal states and external states, between the inner turbulence of modern, alienated subjectivity, and the outer turbulence of an equally unbalanced atmosphere.
What makes *The Wind From Nowhere* – and Ballard’s other disaster novels – noteworthy is the ways in which the novel itself never totally accepts this symbolic reading, where the outer state simply mirrors the inner state. Unlike *The Purple Cloud* or *The Black Cloud*, there is no magic site to which one can go to witness the hidden world revealing itself. There is only the black “aerodynamic” cyclone that eventually becomes identical with the very planet itself. While the various human characters do form a central part of the novel, it is Ballard’s attention to surrealistic detail, and his elaborate descriptions of climatological events, that invite us to read *The Wind From Nowhere* as really being not about the human characters, but about the anonymous and enigmatic world-in-itself.

6. *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* ~ *X: the Unknown* ~ Leiber’s “Black Gondolier”
In our previous readings we considered the theme of the hidden world as manifest in “mists” – clouds, gases, and the like. There we saw how the hidden world often manifests itself in ways that are cataclysmic – at least for the human characters in those stories. Not surprisingly, genre horror is also replete with ooze. Ooze seems to always attach itself to monsters, dripping off their tendrils and making them all the more abject and
repulsive. Ooze is also an indicator of the threateningly near presence of the monster; it is the footprint or tentacle-print of the monstrous creature. More interesting, however, are those horror stories in which ooze in and of itself is the monster. The most popular example is the 1958 American film The Blob, which features a gooey, pink substance that lands on Earth via a meteorite, and which then proceeds to engulf everything in sight (with a special appetite for screaming teenagers). As with many American films during the period, The Blob generalizes fears about invasions of all kinds (Communists, immigrants, nuclear war) into a blank, unspecified menace that threatens a Cold War-era town and its inhabitants. The Blob relies on a fairly conventional relationship of inside and outside, “us” and “them,” with the key to survival laying in the protection of the former from the invasion of the latter.

But not all ooze-horror stories utilize this inside-outside boundary. That the gooey entity in The Blob comes from outer space – the outside of all outsides, as it were – is noteworthy, for it implies a safe boundary that must be secured at all costs. Other ooze-horror films depict the entity coming not from outside but from inside, from within the Earth itself. This is exactly what happens in the 1959 Italian film Caltiki the Immortal Monster. Directed by Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava – two directors who reinvented the Italian horror film –
Caltiki is in many ways a classic, low-budget, monster movie. Shot in black and white, with stilted acting and special effects techniques that include a giant honey-drenched cheesecloth, Caltiki takes the ooze-horror motif in a different direction that of The Blob.

In Caltiki the ooze comes not from outer space, but from the bowels of the Earth. The oozing creatures are linked to an ancient Mayan myth about an indescribable monster – Caltiki – raised by vengeful gods. The film itself takes place in modern Mexico, where we find an American team of government scientists conducting an archaeological dig. Amid the all-too-human drama of lover’s quarrels and tensions between the local villagers and the American scientists, the expedition comes across an ancient, underground temple – that also happens to contain buried treasures, and a very high degree of radioactivity. This is the magic site, a forgotten, dead temple that contains a still living curse. Once Caltiki is revived – as the expedition attempts to steal away the relics and treasures – it proceeds to attach itself to anything and everything in sight. Eating away the flesh of any living thing, Caltiki stumbles, like a giant, drunken, undulating amoeba, into the nearby town. In the lab, scientists examine a piece of Caltiki that has broken off; their studies suggest that Caltiki is a giant unicellular organism over 20 million years old. Meanwhile, in scenes both wonderful and abject, Caltiki proceeds to engulf
houses, cars, animals, and people, able to grow and divide itself in the process. The scientists finally crack and mystery and discover that only fire can kill Caltiki, at which time a battalion of tanks with flamethrowers comes to the rescue. The ancient curse is again put to rest...for the time being.

In Caltiki we see ooze depicted allegorically, either as the revenge of nature (the Earth “biting back” against its colonizing intruders), or as the revenge of culture (ancient Mexico biting back against American pillaging). But at some point in the film’s action, these allegorical readings recede into the background, and what comes to the fore is the strange, faceless, formlessness of the ooze itself. It seems to have no motive, no vendetta, no program of action, other than simply that of “being ooze.” This anonymity is matched by the affective sliminess of Caltiki, as if it in itself were literally the bowels of the Earth. Thus, whereas films like The Blob imagine threats to the world coming from outside, a film like Caltiki the Immortal Monster turns this around and imagines a threat that is the world, coming from within.

Another variation on this theme comes from the 1956 British film X: the Unknown. Whereas Caltiki gives us the example of ancient ooze, X: the Unknown gives us the example of modern, industrial ooze. In both films the magic site lies buried under the Earth. But whereas the magic site in Caltiki is a buried temple, in X: the
The magic site is a radioactive field previously used for weapons testing. Presumably too many bombs have inadvertently created a fissure in the ground, out of which “Monster X” emerges, with a ravenous appetite for any source of electrical energy. A group of British military men and an American scientist attempt to study Monster X. Similar to Caltiki, Monster X is also an oozing, formless mass that resembles mud more than slime. At one point the scientist gives a mini-lecture on geology, suggesting that Monster X was originally a primordial form of life buried in the Earth’s depths, which has adapted itself to feed off of energy (including radioactive energy). But the scientist, lacking a solution for stopping Monster X, wonders to himself: “but how do you kill mud?” In a moment of irony not uncommon in monster movies, the characters realize that to defend itself against the ooze, humanity must in effect destroy the Earth.

Both Caltiki and X: the Unknown feature monsters that frustrate the traditional inside/outside boundary established by films like The Blob. They both feature a magic site, deep within the crusts and caverns of the planet, in which the hidden world oozes and gropes forth to the surface, threatening the human beings that inhabit this surface. This surface/depth boundary is slightly different for each film, however. In Caltiki the depth is archaeological, in that it references ancient, lost
civilizations; here the magic site itself was also once a magic circle. In *X: the Unknown* the depth is geological, in that the animate, radioactive mud that oozes to the surface is itself inseparable from the sedimentary layers from which it comes; here the magic site, while enabled by human actions (e.g. weapons testing), remains utterly unhuman.

In our consideration of ooze – as one facet of the hidden world – we have one more step to take, and that is to consider ooze not only as archaeological and geological, but noological as well. Here ooze is not just a biological amoeba, and not just the mud of the Earth; here ooze begins to take on the qualities of thought itself. Consider Fritz Leiber’s short story “Black Gondolier,” published in the 1964 Arkham House anthology, *Over the Edge*. In this story, the narrator recounts the events that led to the mysterious disappearance of his friend Daloway, a recluse and autodidact living nearby oil fields in southern California. Daloway, it seems, began to develop a bizarre and unnatural fascination with oil – not just as a natural resource, and not just as something of geopolitical value, but with oil in itself as an ancient and enigmatic manifestation of the hidden world. Over time Daloway’s conversations with the narrator begin to take on the form of mystical visions. Oil, he notes, constitutes “that black and nefarious essence of all life that had ever been...a great deep-digged black graveyard of
the ultimate eldritch past with blackest ghosts.”\textsuperscript{60} As a kind of gothic, funeral ooze, Daloway tries to convince the narrator that “oil had waited for hundreds of millions of years, dreaming its black dreams, sluggishly pulsing beneath Earth’s stony skin, quivering in lightless pools roofed with marsh gas and in top-filled rocky tanks and coursing through a myriad channels…”\textsuperscript{61}

The image of oil as stealthily waiting gives the ooze the vague quality of intelligence and intent – and, more specifically, of malefic intent. In Leiber’s hyperbolic prose, oil is not the type of ooze that we see in \textit{Caltiki} or \textit{X: the Unknown}, where the ooze remains hidden beneath the surface of the Earth. Instead, in “Black Gondolier” oil is described as an animate, creeping ooze that already is on the surface, and that immanently courses through all the channels of modern industrial civilization, from the central pipelines feeding the major cities to the individual homes and cars that populate those cities. At one point in the story, the narrator attempts to put Daloway’s crackpot theories into coherent form: “Daloway’s theory, based on his wide readings in world history, geology, and the occult, was that crude oil – petroleum – was more than figuratively the life-blood of industry and the modern world and modern lightening-war, that it truly had a dim life and will of its own, an inorganic consciousness or sub-consciousness, that we were all its puppets or creatures, and that its chemical
mind had guided and even enforced the development of modern technological civilization.” 62 “In brief,” the narrator notes, “Daloway’s theory was that man hadn’t discovered oil, but that oil had found man.” 63

While the oil in “Black Gondolier” is, like the monsters in Caltiki and X: the Unknown, an instance of the hidden world manifesting itself as ooze, there are some striking differences between them as well. For instance, the monsters in Caltiki and X: the Unknown are anomalies of nature (effected by radiation or mining), whereas the oil in “Black Gondolier” is sentient and malefic precisely because it is natural to the planet. The oil is not so much a product of human design or intervention, as we have in the other examples, but the reverse – it is human “modern technological civilization” that is the effect, the product of this sentient, creeping oil. In addition, both Caltiki and X: the Unknown rely on the governance of boundary relationships – Caltiki inverts the inside/outside relationship of The Blob, while X: the Unknown shifts things to a surface/depth relationship. In “Black Gondolier” we see yet another shift, and that is to a relationship of continuity/discontinuity. The monsters in The Blob, Caltiki, and X: the Unknown remain, even though they are formless monsters, discrete entities. They creep, crawl, and undulate forward. One can point to them, isolate them, and even firebomb them. Thus their formlessness – their “ooziness” – is still
constrained by the outline of their form. In “Black Gondolier” any attempt to point to or isolate oil in total is futile, precisely because it is fully continuous, not only with the Earth, but also with modern industrial society. (I write this during the tragic saga of the Gulf oil spill, the scale of which eerily evokes Leiber’s story, as well as Reza Negarestani’s inimitable *Cyclonopedia*.)

Arguably, this image of sentient ooze effects a further transformation of the “hidden world” theme that we’ve been tracing. The final scenes of the story, in which Daloway is silently carried into a great undulating “sea” of oil in the middle of the night, asserts the decidedly unh-human and unfamiliar qualities of the ooze. Both of these presuppositions rely on a basic dichotomy between self and world, between the thinking subject (where thought is interiorized) and a non-thinking object (upon which thought is projected). All of this breaks down in the case of ooze. Oil does not simply become a “big brain,” as if to recuperate all thought within the ambit of human thought. The oil in “Black Gondolier” is both crude, material stuff, and immanent, miasmatic thought, both materially viscous and sentient. What we are presented with in “Black Gondolier” is the suggestion that thought has always been unhuman.
Addendum: On Schmitt’s *Political Theology*

The hiddenness of the world, whether revealed via the human-oriented motif of the magic circle, or the unhuman motif of the magic site, puts forth the greatest challenge, which is how to live in and as part of such hiddenness. In that ambivalent moment in which the world-in-itself presents itself to us, but without immediately becoming the human-centric world-for-us, might there be a way of understanding hiddenness as intrinsic to the human as well?

One of the insights of Carl Schmitt’s 1922 book *Politische Theologie* (*Political Theology*) is that the very possibility of imagining or re-imagining the political is dependent upon a view of the world as revealed, as knowable, and as accessible to us as human beings living in a human world. As Schmitt notes, “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure...”64 Such an analogy has an impact, Schmitt argues, for an understanding of the development of key political concepts, such as sovereignty and the state of exception. The most concise statement of the book comes a few lines later:
“The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.”65

But the way in which that analogy is manifest may change over time. Schmitt notes that the 17th and 18th centuries were dominated by the theological analogy of the transcendence of God in relation to the world, which correlates to the political idea of the transcendence of the sovereign ruler in relation to the state. By contrast, in the 19th century a shift occurs towards the theological notion of immanence (specifically, in modern pantheism and organicist philosophy), which likewise correlates to “the democratic thesis of the identity of the ruler and the ruled.”66 In these and other instances, we see theological concepts being mobilized in political concepts, forming a kind of direct, tabular comparison between cosmology and politics (God and sovereign ruler; the cosmos and the state; transcendence and absolutism; immanence and democracy).

Given this, what would it mean to consider a political theology of the hiddenness of the world (that is, an occult political theology)? To do so, we would have to avoid taking Schmitt’s theory literally. This would not only recuperate the hiddenness of the world into the human frame, but it would also lead to rather absurd political models (in which, for instance, the hiddenness of the world would serve as an analogy for a similarly hidden form of governance, or the secret society as a
political platform...). This is clearly not the direction one would want to take this idea. But where then?

Schmitt’s analysis remains within the scope of the analogical framework, and the big question that comes out of Political Theology has to do with how decisions are reached as to the correlation of this or that worldview with this or that political system. However, what Schmitt pays less attention to is the way in which the analogy itself may come under question. As Schmitt himself notes, “the metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization.” The analogical framework presumes a few key things: First, that there is an accessible, revealed, and ordered world “out there” that may serve as a model or guide for the development of a political system “in here.” This is, arguably, the basis of political philosophy itself. Second, it presumes that this analogical relation is a one-way street, in that the discernable order of the world flows directly into the constitution of politics, when clearly there are a number of ways in which the direction is reversed (as when politics determines how and whether we intervene in “the environment”). Finally, Schmitt’s analogical framework is decidedly anthropocentric, taking for granted that politics – not unlike theology – deals first and foremost with the human (here the Hobbesian analogy of
the body politic is the most explicit example of this kind of anthropomorphic quality of the political).

The question is, what happens when we as human beings confront a world that is radically unhuman, impersonal, and even indifferent to the human? What happens to the concept of politics once one confronts the possibility that the world only reveals its hiddenness, in spite of the attempts to render it as a world-for-us, either via theology (sovereign God, sovereign king) or via science (the organismic analogy of the state)? In the face of politics, this unresponsiveness of the world is a condition for which, arguably, we do not yet have a language. While the *lectio* above have focused on the cultural and philosophical ramifications of this situation, one has only to take a few steps to then consider what the hiddenness of the world might mean for thinking about the political.

Clearly there are no easy answers here. The “hiddenness of the world” is another name for the supernatural, exterior to its assimilation by either science or religion — that is, exterior to the world-for-us. But these days we like to think that we are much too cynical, much too smart to buy into this — the supernatural no longer exists, is no longer possible...or at least not in the same way. In a sense, it is hard to escape the sense of living in a world that is not just a human world, but also a planet, a globe, a climate, an infosphere, an atmosphere, a
weather pattern... a rift, a tectonic shift, a storm, a cataclysm. If the supernatural in a conventional sense is no longer possible, what remains after the “death of God” is an occulted, hidden world. Philosophically speaking, the enigma we face is how to confront this world, without immediately presuming that it is identical to the world-for-us (the world of science and religion), and without simply disparaging it as an irretrievable and inaccessible world-in-itself.