



*An art-based inquiry towards
more sustainable, progressive and
ethically-grounded Magic practices.*

Essay
by Charlotte Muniken

The following text is a revised version of the thesis *Protocols for Magic*, written by Charlotte Muniken, April 2026, initially submitted to: The Department of Experimental Publishing, for the Master of Arts in Fine Art & Design: Experimental Publishing at the Piet Zwart Institute, Willem De Kooning Academy, Rotterdam, NL.

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Abstract

The following thesis aims to outline and discuss three critical points of concern within the Western contemporary practice of Magic.

Namely, the pervasive focus on Magic as being “in opposition” to Science, the environmental impact of Magic as a Capitalist commodity, and, the political implications and pitfalls of contemporary Magic movements and beliefs. These three subject matters represent, what I believe to be, the major obstacles to a positive development of sustainable, inclusive and progressive Magic practices within the Western cultural sphere.

Building on the outline of these concerns, the thesis analyses how these topics are impacting contemporary beliefs and practices, and how these topics connect to wider societal contexts. In addition, each chapter aims to suggest one, or several, concepts and approaches to Magic — Derived from existing movements, or sub-currents, within Western Esoteric and Occult culture — That seek to address, and/or construct alternative modes-of-practice to the problems laid-out. Each chapter concludes with a reflection on how the discussions and insights produced have informed and were incorporated in my material research project.

The material project, *Protocols for Magic*, is an art-based inquiry into the practice of Magic. It seeks to construct accessible frameworks and resources for the practice of Magic through creative expression and craft-based methodologies. Its primary aim is to facilitate constructive, yet critical, dialogue on the concept and perception Magic and its practice.

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Talisman tree: During the first Protocols for Magic workshop, participants created talismans out of craft materials and found objects, that were then hung on a “tree” made of various branches.

Introduction

How would you define Magic?

Maybe as an invisible power able to overcome all natural laws and scientific reason? Maybe the use of rare magical artefacts that connect to supernatural planes? Or maybe, it is secret arcane knowledge that allows you to see the truth of the world? Or maybe, it is all just silly superstition..

According to professor Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2016), there is no conclusive academic consensus on what Magic is and how to define it. However, he argues that most common definitions tend to fall into one of three categories. The first is, what Hanegraaff (2016) refers to as, the "intellectualist" approach, which defines Magic as a form of primitive proto-religious belief, that lacks the depth of Religion, and all the rational logic of Science.

The second "functionalist" approach largely perceives both religious and magical beliefs as equally irrational, but distinguishes Magic from Religion through its perceived lack of organised social infrastructures. And lastly, the third approach defines Magic as a world-view based in "participation", and as a counterpart to the more scientific world-view of "instrumental causality". (Hanegraaff, 2016) All three of these approaches Hanegraaff (2016) correlates with the so-called "magic-religion-science" triad; An academic framework that developed over the past few centuries, and that has inextricably linked our conception to Magic to that of Religion and Science. (Hanegraaff, 2016)

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In the following chapter, I will outline how our conception of Magic, as existing in opposition to Science, our scientific worldview, is deeply intertwined with our overall concept of Western modernity and scientific rationality, and how this narrative framing has perpetuated neo-colonial ideology and the idea of the "primitive other". I will also discuss the third approach of defining Magic through the idea of "participation", or more commonly referred to as Participatory Consciousness. A concept that is gaining ground in the academic study of Anthropology and Religion, as well as, contemporary practices of Magic. As Hanegraaff (2016) mentions, Magic tends to resist singular definitions. *As a human concept it exists in flux; Our relationship to it ever-changing, and, inherently experimental.* In the view of archaeologist Chris Gosden (2020), the idea of Magic continues to persist throughout human history due to its capability to constantly renew itself. And, because as a practice, that is "to do Magic", it can take on an infinite amount of forms, depending on time, place and context. (Gosden, 2020)

However, as we will see in chapter two, the survival of Magic into our modern modes-of living has lend it a new and more destructive side. While Western interest in Magic has risen, popular culture has turned many of the more religious and spiritual aspects of Magic into an aesthetic eager to be consumed by the masses. (Castle, 2025) In *The Commodification of Wicca: Capitalism's Impact on Spiritual Authenticity* (2025), using the example of Wicca, Ellie Castle describes how: "A belief system rooted in reverence for the Earth is now complicit in practices that degrade it."

In the second chapter, I will discuss how a supposed “Magic revival” of the past two decades, has led many previously “niche” belief systems and Magic[★] sub-cultures to become the object of mass-consumption and cultural dilution. With drastic but often disregarded social and environmental impacts. (Castle, 2025) And I will analyse how modern practitioners are seeking more sustainable and environmentally-conscious practices through DIY-methodologies.

Yet, consumerism and environmental concerns aren’t the only pressing political entanglements of contemporary Magic. As Jamie Sutcliffe writes in his introduction to *MAGIC* (2021), it is Magic’s apparent malleability, to fit any and all narratives, that has made it popular within fascist ideologies just as often as it has progressive ones. As such, in the third and last chapter, I will outline the ways Western Esoteric and Occult movements are inadvertently recreating supremacist neo-colonial dynamics through cultural erasure and extraction. (Hale, 2019a; Zwissler, 2025) And, detail how compatibilities between Western Occult and Pagan beliefs, and the ideology of the New Right are creating fascist pipelines based on shared political agendas. (Hale, 2019b)

And lastly, I will speculate on how the concepts of Anarcho-Occultism and Magic Resistance offer frameworks for Magic practices that aim to counter these concerns.

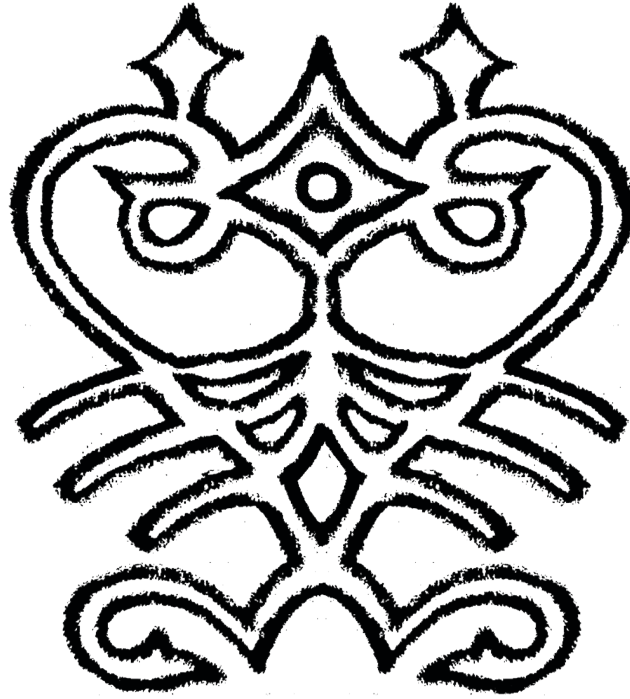
With all these points in mind, I would like to acknowledge that each of these subjects are extremely complex and contain nuances that I couldn’t possibly cover all within this thesis. However, I hope to provide sufficient insight on each concern to illustrate why I would like us all to ask:

*In what ways can alternative currents
and subcultures form practices of resistance
against the pervasiveness of fascist,
neo-colonial, and extractive ideologies
within Western Magic[★] culture?*



*How could we form more sustainable,
progressive and ethically-grounded Magic
practices?*

i. Magic[★]: When using the terms Magic and magic-adjacent with the added ‘★’, I am referring to an extended understanding of Magic, to include associated topics like Esotericism, Occultism, Witchcraft, Wicca, Paganism, New Age, and etc.



03

Chapter One: *Magic vs. Science*

To begin, in this chapter, I give a brief introduction into how the current dominant academic view of Magic developed. And, how Magic's strict separation from Religion and Science has influenced Western contemporary Magic¹, Occult² and Esoteric³ cultures. Then, I look at the ways in which emergent sub-currents are, once again, reconstructing their magical practices through the lens of Science and Psychology by adopting terms such as Secular and Sceptical Witchcraft. And, how the concept of Participatory Consciousness is changing academic discourse on Magic¹. As well as, my own position.

Beginning with the relationship between Magic and Religion, it is important to understand that, for most of human history, the line separating the two was blurred. As Gosden explains in *The History of Magic* (2020), what we have come to identify as "Magic" is one of humanities longest enduring "world views" (meaning belief systems), dating back to at least 40,000 years ago.

Whereas, what we consider to be formal or organized Religion only emerged alongside humanity's first civilizations (e.g. Mesopotamia, 4500 BCE). Within these ancient societies, and the many that followed, Magic formed an integral part of religious belief, and societal and cultural customs at large. (Gosden, 2020)

¹ *Occultism*: see Glossary, page 37.
² *Esotericism*: see Glossary, page 36.

A more definite distinction between Magic and Religion, within the Western canon, truly emerged during Medieval Europe's mass conversion to Christianity (c. 300–1050). Through Christian cultural and ideological expansion, the idea of Magic became largely associated with pagan¹ practices and non-Christian beliefs, that ought to be eradicated. Far-reaching cultural and societal repression, and legal persecution, against supposed “Magic practitioners” sharpened throughout the Reformation period (c. 1517–1648), during which Protestant Christian theology reframed the belief and supposed practice of Magic as a sign of demonic delusion and inadequate religiosity. A period of history that is most often epitomised by the European witch trials (c.1450–1750). Following the Reformation came the Enlightenment period (ca. 1685–1815) and “scientific revolution”. With it, another pivotal shift in Western attitudes towards Magic. Forming the foundations of the Western academic framework of Magic today. (Middleton et al., 2026)

As explained by Randall Styers in *Magic and Social Control* (2004), during the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment period, the Reformation's narrative-framing of Magic as an acute threat to social (and religious) order was transposed to the new ideological frameworks of its era. The concept of Magic came to be increasingly defined through the lens of Science and psychology. “Magic” became synonymous with superstition, disordered thinking and an “inferior capacity” for logical reasoning. (Styers, 2004) At the same time, Christian culture, in particular Protestantism, became the comparative norm for judging the “adequacy” of other religious beliefs and customs. In other words: Any form of deemed-magical belief was categorically redefined as *the* sign of “primitive” cultures, and, “archaic” pre-religious belief systems; mostly implicitly used to mean non-Christian, and, non-Western. Simultaneously, Magic* became the *antithesis* of the Enlightenment, of progress, and of the “rational” Western scientific world-view *modernity* had just created. And hence, now wielded as the ideological enemy of the *modern world*, this new definition of Magic became an important narrative tool for the advancement of Western colonial and political interests. — A tool for colonial conquest, racial oppression, cultural erasure, gender-based discrimination and persecution and white Christian supremacy. (Styers, 2004)

However, despite the many centuries-spanning efforts to erase it, Magic never did disappear from the Western cultural landscape.

The adverse reframing of Magic in opposition to Science may have been a key contributor to what Padraic E. Moore, in his essay *Art and Magick in the 21st Century; Reflections of a Neophyte* (2019), calls “the magical renaissance of the late 19th century”. This *turn-of-the-century* period saw the formation of copious new esoteric and occult movements. Many of which came to adopt borrowed scientific language and terms to (re)construct new systems of belief and magical* practices. (Bever and Styers, 2017) Partly in a critical response to the rigid scientific doctrines of their time, but most notably, as a result of newly emerging theories in the field of Psychology. Sometimes referred to as “the psychologisation of magick”. (Moore, 2025)

One prominent influence is the work of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. As described by occultist and writer Joseph Mounts (2025), Jung's influence

runs deeply within contemporary Western occult philosophy. His ideas on archetypes, the collective unconscious, and synchronicity have remained engrained in modern Esoteric and Occult frames-of-thought. (Mounts, 2025) Many of the most influential occult and esoteric movements of the late 19th and early 20th century still exist today. (Or, evolved and contributed to similar/adjacent off-shoots.) Altogether, they kept Western cultural interest in Magic* alive, and significantly influenced the later “Magic Revival” of the 1950’s and 60’s; a time during which a variety of new religious movements established themselves in Europe and North-America. Most notably, Wicca², Neo-Paganism³ and modern Satanism⁴, as well as, the “New Age” spiritual movement. (White, 2026)

But why is all this relevant?

Part of this research project is to investigate, and put into question, aspects of Western practices of Magic*. To do that, I believe that we first have to understand what shapes and influences *our* perception(s) of Magic more broadly. Before addressing potential problems these may cause.

To illustrate, albeit that artistic studies leave room to explore more *subjective* topics, wanting to explore Magic in relation to practice, rather than history, theory or metaphor, created reoccurring tension in discussions with tutors, peers and any number of people that have come into contact with this project. Throughout my research, questions regarding the “rationality” and “scientific legitimacy” of Magic (as a research topic) kept coming-up, in a number of ways:

“What do you mean by Magic?”

“Please, define it first.”

“Do you believe in that?”

These sort of reactions are understandable, since I frequently describe my own personal perception of Magic as neither supernatural nor religious in nature⁶. The felt pressure to formulate “my own” exact definition of Magic, coupled with a constant need to clarify: “*Yes, I do believe in Science*”, has significantly impacted my approach and the methodologies applied in this research. *Spoiler: I have yet to agree on a set definition.*

During my search for a “suitable” definition, I first came to truly learn of the historic contexts of Western Magic*. And the origins of *our* urge to pit Magic against rationality. Putting my own preconception into perspective.

I won’t be the first nor the last person to seek a “rational” definition of Magic

It was during that search that I stumbled upon the terms “Secular” and “Sceptical” Witchcraft. Compiled from various sources, my understanding of the terms is as follows:

Secular Witchcraft is a form of witchcraft (practice) that is non-religious and non-dogmatic, and largely excludes any sort of belief in the supernatural or a higher power. Secular Witchcraft is open to people of any religious faith, as it acts more as a conceptual framework to the practice of Magic, rather than a set of rules. (Burgess, 2022; Wrekk; Em)

Skeptical Witchcraft, similarly, focuses on applying a rational and science-based approach to the practice of Magic and Witchcraft. And, is “sceptical” to any form of superstition or supernatural definition of Magic. *Sceptical Witchcraft* is mostly aimed at an atheistic, agnostic or “skeptic” practitioner. (SASSWitches; Obscure Clouds, 2019; Em)

Although they describe slightly different approaches to Magic, I have sometimes come across both terms used interchangeably, or combined. I believe that there probably is a significant overlap of people who use and identify with these two terms, since both emphasise the practice of Magic through the lens of modern Psychology, and a scientific world-view. From my own personal observation, and statements read online, these communities predominantly exist as an “online phenomenon”, and are not much represented in the “mainstream” Witchcraft-culture, yet.

In the context of this research project, applying a “secular” or “skeptical” approach to Magic sounds compelling. Applying a science-based perception, or rather, a perception that does not contradict a scientific understanding of the world, aligns with my personal position.

However, on surface level they remain quite vague in their definition of Magic. An aspect that may be inherent to the concepts themselves. Although the Secular/Sceptic communities, as a whole, do not adhere to one conception of Magic in particular; While digging through online forums and community pages; One concept reappeared frequently: That of “Participatory Consciousness”.

06

Participatory Consciousness, also sometimes referred to as the Participatory theory or theory of participation, is a term that developed in the field of Anthropology during the first half of the 20th century. (Hanegraaf, 2003)

As described by psychiatrist and anthropologist Simon Dein (2025), Participatory Consciousness posits consciousness as existing in two modes; The “world-causal”, which assumes a perception of reality based in analytical, logical and scientific reasoning. And, the “participatory” approach, which is described as a more holistic and interconnected view of reality. (Dein, 2025, p.2) In his own terms, a participatory mode of consciousness “is intrinsic, analogical” and “it includes all the senses and emotions and involves a worldview in which the boundaries between the subject and object and between the individual and the external world are less distinct.” (Dein, 2025, p.1) In practice, participatory consciousness can take the form of meditation, rituals, sensory play or other methods designed to heighten ones engagement with the world. (Dein, 2025)

Although the Western academic sphere, and society more generally, has put much effort into defining itself through the “world-causal” position; And has continuously employed the “participatory” distinction as a justification, a rationalisation, for the social and cultural “othering” of peoples marginal to

practitioners: In the context of this research, “practitioners” always refers to any person i. e. practicing, or wanting to practice, any sort of Magic^{*}, Witchcraft, Occultism, or the like.

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Western “modernity”. (Hanegraaf, 2016) — Dein (2025) explains that these two “modes of perception” should not be viewed as opposites to each other, but rather, as co-existing in intersecting ways, within all cultures, and across history, including the West. (Dein, 2025)

Participatory Consciousness can potentially form a fitting and relevant framework for this project approach to Magic. To practitioners¹, who similarly to myself, are looking for ways to “reconcile” their definition of Magic with Science, a participatory theory of Magic can mitigate the emphasis put on empirical truth, and effectively co-exist with a scientific world-view. Through emphasising an experiential, analogical perception of reality, the focus on quantifiable metrics and empirical truths is lessened.

Additionally, Participatory theories of Magic are not just increasingly popular in secular/sceptical circles, but have become widely incorporated across Western occult and esoteric movements at large. (Dein, 2025) Which probably speaks to the aforementioned “psychologisation of Magic”, wherein our general understanding of Magic is increasingly turned “inward”, into the realms of individual subjectivity. (Hanegraaf, 2003) With this understanding, “doing magic” becomes about enacting change through internal, psychological processes, as opposed to, creating a (im)material outward effect. (Hanegraaf, 2003; Dein, 2025)

The *Protocols for Magic* workshops and prototypes approach the practice of Magic through similar frameworks to that of Participatory Consciousness.

By breaking down the principles of “doing” Magic into formulating intent and symbolic representation, the workshops and exercises I conducted encouraged the participants to explore a variety of simplified magical concepts (e.g., spell-writing, symbols, talismans, etc.) through creative experimentation, intuitive association and personal interpretation. Sometimes, I added collaborative elements as a way to interrogate the participants individual and collective perceptions and preconceptions. And, to encourage dialogue and the exchange of differing positions in regards to Magic and beyond.

For example, the *Protocol for Collective Correspondences*¹ (see page 7) tasked the participants to intuitively assign a color to a list of concepts. The analogy I used in the workshop was that of common color associations used in the firelds of advertising and design (e.g.: green = ecology, red = passion, blue = medical). This exercise led to a lot of enthusiastic discussions on the “feeling” certain abstract ideas evoke, with all participants sometimes agreeing on the assigned colors immediately, or, avidly debating very different opinions. Based on the shared “color correspondances” the participants made, they were then tasked to use it as a template to craft talismans, based on the spell (set intention or wish) they had previously constructed from the *Table of Symbols*.

Protocols for Magic's Table of Symbols: A list of 40 symbols representing relatively abstract terms and concepts. All symbols are my own creation, except the common symbols for ear, water, air and fire (also used in traditional Alchemy).

← - | 08

Table of Symbols							
Earth ▽	Electricity ◇	Water ▽	Light ×	Fire △	Blood ▽	Air △	Bone —
Self ⦿	Other ●	Body ⊕	Mind ⊗	Senses ~	Emotion ⦿	Inuition ⦿	Logic ⦿
Binary —●—	Spectrum ⦿	Reality ⊕	Dream ⦿	Illusion ⦿	Time ⦿	Space □	Matter ⦿
Anger ♂	Fear ♂	Joy ♀	Love ♀	Sadness ♀	Life ⦿	Death ●	Cycle ⦿
Unite ⦿	Modify ⦿	Diverge ⦿	Create >○<	Destroy ⦿	Growth ⦿	Decay ⦿	Stasis ⦿

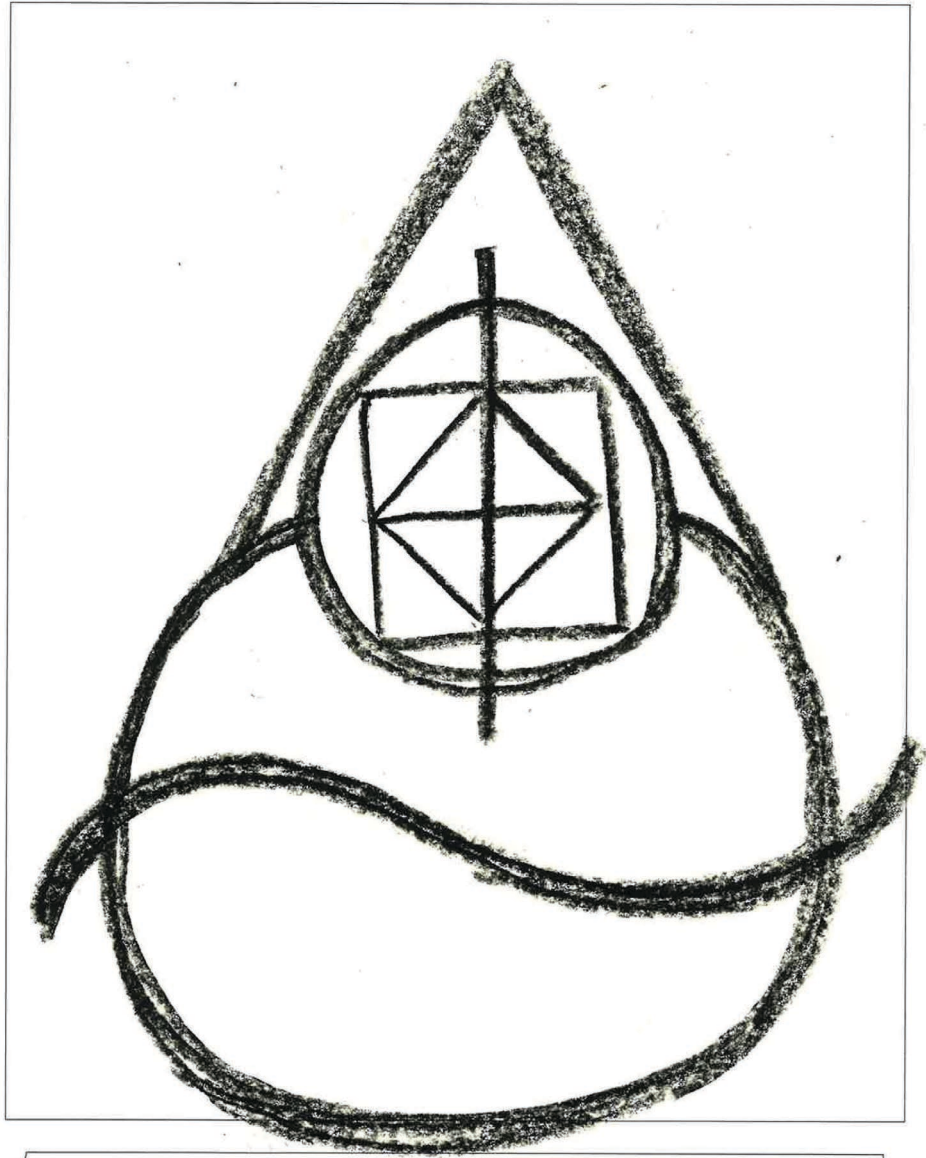
The *Table of Symbols* (image above), used in multiple *Protocols*², is a list of fourty terms/concepts represented as small (imaginary) signs. Inspired by alchemical symbols and sigilism³, I created the table as a tool participants can use as a guide to translate sentences or ideas into abstracted visual interpretations.

1. *Correspondances*: see Glossary, page 36.
2. *Protocols for Magic* are templates and workshops that introduce selected concepts within contemporary Magic★ practices through creative art-sand-craft based exercises and tutorials.
3. *Sigilism*: see Glossary, page 37.

Protocols for Magic circles (example created by participant): An exercise to interpret a spell (derived from song lyrics) into a symbolic representation, a “Magic Circle”/sigil. There are no direct rules or guidelines on how to use or combine the symbols. People are free to create whatever design they come-up with, and add their own symbols if they want.

09

Protocol for Magic Circle



Spinning and weaving around each new experience, my body feels eternal.

Another exercise that uses the *Table of Symbols* is the *Protocol for Magic Circles*. It's objective is to represent a spell (altered excerpts of song lyrics) by choosing and combining symbols into a new composition.

A surprising reoccurring feedback I received on this exercise is that participants found the task difficult and/or challenging. With some people sharing that they felt like they were trying to solve a puzzle or a math equation. From my observations, participants seemed to take this exercise very seriously, spending much more time on it than I had expected.

Across the different *Protocols* I created, tasks that involved the *Table of Symbols*, merging interpretation and abstract visualization, were often perceived as a sort of “exercise in logic”. With some participants stating that these tasks felt “more like doing Magic” compared to exercises that revolved around freely making or crafting without any such guidelines, where participants sometimes reported that “the aspect of Magic fell to the background”.

I interpret these findings as an apparent need by participants for some kind of external logic to be applied to the concept of Magic. This sentiment is in line with my personal experience of repeatedly being asked to provide some sort of “rationalization” or reasoned definition to my perception of Magic. Whereas, instances where I encourage a more undefined or ambiguous approach to Magic, participants were much more likely to dismiss or overlook an exercise’s correlation with Magic. To me, this truly shows how entrenched our concept of Magic is to that of rationality, scientific reasoning.

To summarise; Our modern conception of Magic is inextricably linked to our idea of modernity, rationality and how we perceive Magic’s relation to Science and Religion. Despite centuries of Magic being pitted against Western ideals; Magic*, Esoteric and Occult movements have continued to thrive and evolve into our modern day, through what experts are calling the “psychologisation of Magic” (Moore, 2025; Hanegraaf, 2003)

But the need to perceive Magic through a scientific lens is a sentiment also shared by an increasing number of practitioners. With the most notable examples being the secular and skeptical Magic* and Witchcraft movements, that are gaining prominence online. Within these movements, concepts such as the Participatory Consciousness theory have become popular frameworks for the definition of Magic*, and spiritual and occult practices, more generally.

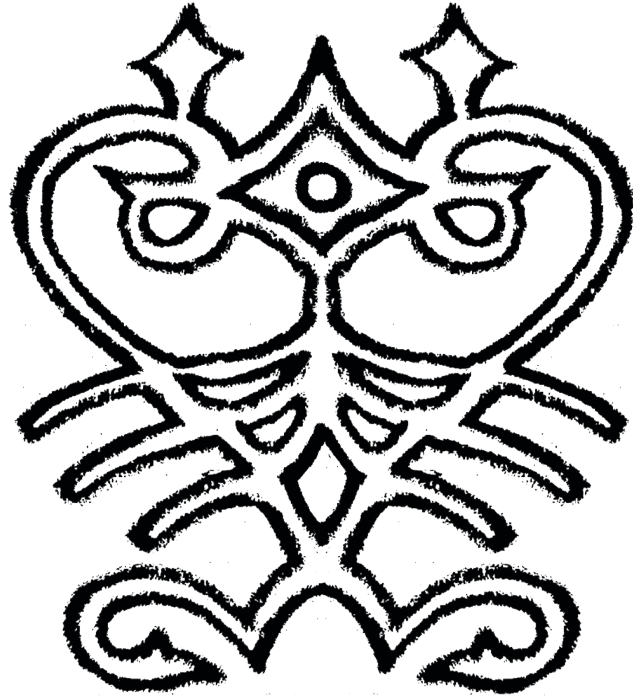
This may be due to the fact that the concept of Participatory Consciousness itself is gaining scientific consensus within the academic study of Magic*. According to Dein (2005), a growing amount of scholars are starting to adopt a participatory framework within their research practices. In particular in the fields of Anthropology and Religion, participatory theories are changing the ways we are discussing the persistence of Magic in our post-secular age, and the rise of new religious and spiritual movements, like Wicca, Neo-Paganism and New-Age Spirituality. Dein (2025) describes this as a general shift in the epistemological research of Magic towards a more experiential understanding, compared to a continued focus on rational thinking.

IO

In light of the historic context outlined in this chapter, theories of Participatory Consciousness can act as a useful tool to challenge our common Western associations held towards Magic. Recent studies are showing that participatory oriented world-views have persistently survived, in-and-outside of the Western sphere, throughout, and in spite of, global modernisation and Western ideological expansion. (Dein, 2025) Effectively disrupting and eroding the notion of a “purely rational” and “logically superior” Western modernity.

Lastly, in the context of my research project, I have come to adopt aspects of a participatory framework of Magic, with the goal of surveying and encouraging productive dialogue on the topic of Magic, its practice, and the various preconceptions we may hold towards it. Not as an attempt to reject the importance of scientific knowledge, but rather, to explore it’s relation to Magic, as a way to critically interrogate our own biases bound to Western colonial ideology. Generating findings that suggest this task may be more difficult than initially expected.

However, Magic’s relation to the West’s colonial history is not the only pressing issue I wish to address within the essay.



II

Chapter Two: *Magic vs. Capitalism*

In this second chapter, I outline how the continued survival of Magic within Western culture has evolved into what is being called a 21st century “Magic revival”. Then, I present how modern practitioners are perceiving and being impacted by this notable shift in attitude towards Western Esoteric and Occult cultures. I explore how the commodification of Magic and Witchcraft-inspired aesthetics has contributed to the exploitation and so-called consumerist dilution of religious and spiritual movements. Finally, I discuss the ways in which modern Witches are incorporating DIY-methodology and anti-consumerist attitudes in their practices, as a means to address rising concerns regarding sustainability and the environmental impact of overconsumption.

In the previous chapter, I described the West’s centuries-spanning adversity towards Magic. First, from the side of Religion, then, from Science. Nonetheless, Magic has survived into our Western modernity, and remains alive and well today! Many academics, including Hanegraaff (2016), Dein (2025) and Gosden (2021), are arguing that it is because, and not in spite of, Magic’s tumultuous relationship with modernity, that contemporary beliefs and practices of Magic are continuing to evolve and diversify, faster than ever before.

For example, studies of the past two decades are reporting that more and more people, especially across Europe and North-America, now identify as Wiccans, Neo-Pagans and/or practitioners of New Age spirituality. (Romero, 2024; Zwissler, 2026; Gomes, 2011) Or, have started adopting and expressing an overall more spiritual world-view than was common in past generations. (Evan et al., 2024) Although, anthropologist researcher Laurel Zwissler (2026) explains that the fragmentary nature and lack of institutional organisation inherent in these modern religions (especially in Paganism and New Age), can make it difficult to obtain exact numbers (e.g. through census studies). (Zwissler, 2026)

These findings represent a noticeable shift in attitude towards the practice and belief in Magic within Western society at large. Contrary to what early modernists predicted (or hoped for).

The apparent rise in popularity of magic-adjacent* ideas is often described as a “Magic revival”, as in a “revived” interest in magical* traditions and beliefs of the past. (Castle, 2025; Charlesworth, 2022) This, putting religion aside, has become most notable through popular culture, most prominently online. As Ellie Castle explains, in *The Commodification of Wicca: Capitalism’s Impact on Spiritual Authenticity* (2025), the arrival of the internet, especially social media and online platforms, created a surge in interest in Magic, Witchcraft, and other esoteric and spiritual movements.

Using the example of Wicca, Castle (2025) explains that, for the first time, new online spaces enabled practitioners of all kinds to more easily connect with each other. And, share their beliefs and practices with the world. The internet provided a whole new level of visibility to a wide slew of movements that had previously remained in relative obscurity. In short, ‘Witchcraft’ and ‘Wicca’ became searchable terms. And as a result, modern Magic* practices became more accessible, and more popular, than ever before. Which in turn, inspired a pop cultural obsession for anything “witchy”, magical and occult; Expressed in a wave of books, movies, series and games featuring loosely Wicca-inspired characters and fashion. (Castle, 2025)

This cultural shift, the so-called “mainstreamification” of Magic, didn’t just contribute to a general change in Western perceptions. It also had a direct impact on the communities whose practices and traditions had suddenly been thrust into the public eye. One such notable impact I’ll be focussing on has been the “aestheticization” and concurrent commodification of everything Magic-related. *Magic not as a practice, but as an aesthetic.*

Castle (2025) believes that, following the introduction of modern Witchcraft into mainstream culture, enhanced by the internet, it was especially sites such as Instagram and Tumblr, and later, TikTok, that added a more “pronounced visual element” to online Witchcraft content. (Castle, 2025)

This contributed to the public image of Magic and Witchcraft to gradually shift from being understood as spiritual and religious practices to foremost being perceived as an aesthetic; Now far-removed from their original meaning, Magic* has become consumable and mass marketable! (Castle, 2025)

While it would be unfair to state that the movements and practitioners in question are the sole responsible for this development — *if there's money to be had, Capitalism will find a way to exploit it* — they certainly play a part.

To give some concrete examples; author of the blog wolfpeach.com (2024) describes how today's Neo-Pagan communities (including Wicca and modern Witchcraft) encourage overconsumption. In part, as a result of the general aesthetisation of “witchy” subcultures. *Like everyone else, witches online feel the pressure to share pretty, aesthetically pleasing and likable content, and, adhere to shifting trends within their own communities.*

But mostly, as Wolfpeach asserts, because we all live in “a golden age of overconsumption” — Ruled by online algorithms engineered to constantly serve us hyper-personalised advertisements with the sole purpose of enticing us to “buy into” superfluous trends and symbolic material goods. (Wolfpeach, 2026) *A widespread issue that Witches and Pagans aren't immune to either!*

Wolfpeach (2024) describes this problem as a somewhat contradictory aspect of modern Pagan cultural practitioners, who tend to self-identify as nature-worshipping environmentalists. (wolfpeach, 2024) *A phenomenon with drastic environmental consequences!*

Windcatcher talisman created from empty tea-light candles. Candles of all sorts are popular tools in Magic. However, in many instances, people light small tea-lights once or twice before the wax runs out. This leaves behind a lot of residual aluminium pots that end up as trash. After personally amassing quite a few, I looked-up what one could do with them and found that they work great as embossing plates! Simply clean, cut and roll them flat. Then, use a hard object to press designs into them.*

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In the context of these subcultures, mass-consumable goods often come in the shape of tools, ingredients and accessories to use in one's practice and rituals. While also frequently following trend cycles, these objects also serve as a means to adopt certain aesthetics; Acting as visual markers for religious/spiritual identity. However, a lot of these popular items (think crystals, herbs, statues, clothes, etc) are often mass-produced, unethically sourced and/or of "questionable origin", and made of unsustainable and poor quality materials. Purchasable on both big sites like Aliexpress and Etsy, as well as, small Pagan-owned businesses, alike. (Wolfpeach, 2024)

Wolfpeach (2024) admits that, although at first glance, the abundance of products targeted to "witchy" consumers may feel like long-awaited cultural representation, they urge the larger Pagan community to be far more critical when choosing what to include and purchase for their craft. (Wolfpeach, 2024) *A core message within the Protocols for Magic project!*

Being enticed to purchase a lot of "witchy" goods is something that I personally experienced as a young teenager (over a decade ago), when I first started *consuming* a lot of Witchcraft content, online. Being completely new to and uninformed about the belief-side of these movements, the growing amount of businesses offering affordable Witchcraft-themed items felt like an accessible entry-way into these admittedly intriguing subcultures. But most pointedly, it offered an easy substitution to engaging with these belief systems past surface level trends.

In these "golden days" of emerging witchy content-creators, I saw the stark consumerism and commodification of Magic* directly portrayed in the Wiccan and Pagan influencers I watched, who regularly promoted these items through "witchy" themed hauls, or via direct brand deals with other businesses. Many of which specialized in directly catering (mass-produced items) to the witchy community online. *And how enticed young impressionable me was!* "Unfortunately", I was missing the funds to truly buy into it.

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Nowadays, addressing this "consumerist dilution of spirituality", as Castle (2025) aptly calls it, is one of the pressing issues I see in modern Magic* and Witchcraft culture that I seek to address through my project. And fortunately, I am not alone in this! Throughout my research, I have come across many practitioners who share my concerns and are actively seeking ways to "solve" these issues within their own practices. One of these "methods" I come across frequently is that of "DIY-Magic", or "DIY-Witchcraft".

DIY-Magic, or "Do-It-Yourself Magic", is an approach to practicing Magic that prioritises the use of tools and materials that one already owns, are locally sourced and/or self-made. It seeks to reduce overconsumption, and aims to avoid buying ready-made things as much as possible. DIY-Magic encourages practitioners to grow or forage herbs, craft and repair ones own tools, and overall, incorporate more sustainable and creative methods into their practices.

(Combined from several sources: Wrekk; Rebelsister, 2024; Castle, 2025))

DIY-culture exists as a subculture in its own right, and represents an integral part of many other countercultures¹. In past years, "Do-It-Yourself" methods

1. *DIY and Counter-cultures*: In the 1970s and '80s, the punk movements of the UK and USA popularized DIY-methods to produce and distribute music, zines, merch and other, establishing the anti-capitalist DIY aesthetic associated with punk culture today. (Triggs, 2026)
 2. *Bricolage*: Is the french word equivalent to Do-It-Yourself. It is most often used in the context of artistic practices that use a wide range of mediums and materials. (Tate, 2026)

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have (re)gained popularity in a variety of cultural and artistic sectors, as shared environmental concerns continue to grow. And generally, a DIY-like approach, also sometimes called “bricolage²”, is considered common in Magic^{*}, Witchcraft, Esoteric and Occult cultures at large. (Bellisario, 2025; Moore, 2019) *Afterall, for most of human history, prior to the industrial revolution, hand-crafting stuff from scratch was the norm!*

However, I think the increasing amount of practitioners that advocate for a “return” to, and incorporate, more DIY-methods, demonstrates how noticeably pervasive overconsumption has become within these movements. Within our consumer culture, DIY-practices can form acts of resistance against current Capitalist norms.

However, I would advise not to overly frame DIY in solutionist terms, as it can reenforce the false idea that environmental concerns are a matter of individual responsibility. Instead, I prefer to see it as a methodology that encourages critical discourse on overconsumption and Capitalist modes-of-production, and supports a more pro-active, ecological and sustainable approach to life more generally.

Ideas and discourse on how to implement and experiment with DIY-Magic and Witchcraft are abundant online, across all types of platforms. For example, the site *Echo Zines/echopublishing²* specialises in sharing and providing links to a variety of zines that bridge the topics of DIY, feminism, witchcraft and punk culture. The Tumblr-blog *DIWitchery.com³*, run by activist witch Alex Wreck, is a dedicated and expansive collection of resources on DIY-practices, secular witchcraft, activism and more. Both written by Wreck themselves, or gathered from across Tumblr’s witchcraft community. Equally, when searching for “DIY-Witchcraft”, or similar terms, on popular online platforms (i.e. TikTok, Instagram or Pinterest), a lot more content can be found that seek to promote sustainability, artistic crafts and anti-consumerist behaviours within Magic^{*} practices.

To quote Ellie Castle (2025) once more:

*“Where commerce prioritises
 disconnection and ease, the craft
 insists on rythm, labour, and presence.
 Growing herbs, watching the moon,
 learning your local seasons;
 these are not instant acts.
 They are rituals of deep noticing
 that cannot be scaled or rushed.”*

2. *Echo Zines*: <https://echopublishing.wordpress.com/>
 3. *DIWitchery*: <https://diywitchery.com/>

Over the course of this project, the urgency of confronting our consumerist behaviours and unsustainable habits, as well as, highlighting the benefits of handmade crafts within contemporary practices of Magic*, including myown, evolved into the primary subject of my material research. Deeply inspired by the works of the practitioners that came before, I turned the focus of my *Protocols for Magic* towards DIY and craft methodologies.

Throughout various workshops, I tasked the participants to work with all sorts of mediums, such as beads, paper, clay, collage, as well as, repurposing found objects or residual waste. In the context of “doing Magic through crafting“, prioritizing low-cost, sustainable and accessible materials and methods, the practice of Magic was resituated not as a set of prescriptive techniques nor a list of items and materials to use. But rather, as a practice explored through intentionality, experimentation and personal creative expression.



This lead me to often incorporate a *craft-animistic*¹ approach in the development of the *Protocols* as a way to highlight material exploration and creative discourse as an integral part of one's (Magic) practice.

During moments of personal material research, I experimented with variety of other DIY-methods inspired by popular arts-and-craft techniques. Mostly focussing on crafts that require more time and effort than single-session workshops allow.

I collected parts of that material research in a small publication: *The Little Workbook on DIT-Magic*. It includes four *Protocols* that present simple yet creative methods to practice Magic through DIY, including some brief educational texts and illustrated step-by-step instructions.

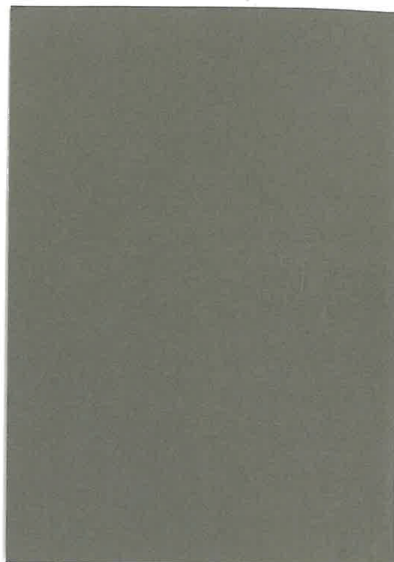
Snapshot made during the *Spell's n' Craft* workshop (January 2026), in which participants explored the craft of paper ornament cutting as a method to cast Magic through ornamental design, similar to the creation of sigils.

← |

1. *Craft Animism*: is a practice that encourages you to view your tools, your materials, your ingredients, as active participants in your making-process. While crafting, you are entering into a dialogue with the tools you are using. Whatever you set out to make becomes a negotiation between you and the material in front of you. Exploring your own and your “participants” possibilities and limitations.

A little workbook on DIY-Magic. Includes protocols for making talismans out of salt-dough, creating stickers as a form of ward-magic, making homemade seed-paper as a tool for ritual spell-casting, and how to use pebbles as protective companions.

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a little workbook on DIY-Magic



Salt dough Talismans?

You may know salt dough from your childhood, as it is an easy, safe and very affordable medium to create clay-like modeling medium. In fact, this DIY only uses four ingredients that everyone should have in their pantry: Salt, flour, water and a bit of vegetable oil! Combined, they may make a great protective talisman for your home.

Ingredients - For a medium batch:
200g Salt
220 g Wheat flour
200ml Water
1TS Sunflower oil

Additionally, these ingredients hold symbolic and magical attributes. In many cultures, salt is believed to have protective qualities. And the anti-bacterial properties of salt preserves the dough. The water symbolises purification, as well as the source of life. Whilst sunflowers, which make common sunflower oil for cooking, stand for good luck and may banish negative energies. Wheat, on the other hand, can symbolize abundance and prosperity. As an agricultural staple in many parts of the world, the making of bread or baked goods is common in many folk-magical traditions.

These are some talismans in the shape of ornamental keys. Each has the birthstones of the people I gave them to.



Protocol..

1. Mix your salt flour in a big bowl. Then gradually mix in the water and a sip of oil. If it is too sticky, add 1 tablespoon of starch.

Your dough is ready to use!

2. Shape your dough into whatever shape you like!
(If you'd like to hang them, on a string or nail, add a little hole, but make sure the dough is thick enough around it, so it can hold it's own weight without ripping.)

You can add other materials, like stones, by gently pressing them into the dough. Smooth out the edges and let them dry in the dough.

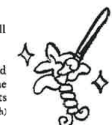
3. To dry: Place your talismans on a piece of cardboard or baking paper. Let them air-dry for at least 48hrs!

4. Once fully dry: You may paint and seal your talisman with acrylic paint and varnish.

Et voila!

In case your talismans break, or the stones fall off, here's my extra tip:

Add some transparent all-purpose glue followed by a few drops of heavy-duty superglue to the spot you'd like to glue, then press the parts together! (Many types of glue do not work on salt dough)



7

Seedpaper Spell-Sprouts?

This DIY may be a bit more labour intensive but it is doubly rewarding!

The first step is to make your own seedpaper. Seedpaper is paper that can be planted/composted and contains plant seeds.

Learning how to make your own paper is a nice way to repurpose and recycle all the scrap paper one accumulates over time. And the resulting paper can be used for all different kinds of crafts!

With your homemade seedpaper, you can make spell-sprouts on which to write/draw/create spells, that then can be buried in a pot of earth as a form of spell-casting ritual.

What you will need:

- Scrap paper
- Water
- a blender/Mixer
- fine grain strainer
- kitchen towels
- rolling pin
- Seeds

Disclaimers:

1. Avoid any glossy or coated papers, as they may contain plastics and other components that do not decompose!
2. Best inform yourself on seasonal and local plants. If you bury the paper in public areas, avoid invasive plants at all costs!



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Protocol for Seedpaper..

1. Rip/shred your paper into small bits. Add them to a bucket of water and let them soak for 24 to 48 hours.

2. Put the water-paper-mixture into a blender, or use a hand blender to create paper pulp.
Add some more water if needed.

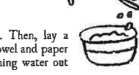
3. Drain the paper pulp in a fine strainer/ paper. You can press out some of the water using the back of a spoon.

4. Once most of the water has drained, add your seeds by mixing them into your paper pulp.

5. If you use a strainer, spread the paper pulp and seeds on a towel spread over a wooden cutting board. Then, lay a second towel on top and roll over the towel and paper pulp to flatten it out and press remaining water out of it.

6. Remove the top towel and let the paper dry in a safe spot for a few days.

Once fully dry: You can cut the paper into smaller pieces using a cutter or scissors!



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This small workbook also represents the first prototype in my incorporating of DIY-zine culture, a pillar of my personal artistic practice, into the projects development.

Another notable personal artistic practice of mine that I incorporated into *Protocols for Magic*, is the use of miscellaneous or found objects, and residual waste (also commonly referred to as “trash”). In both the first and last workshop, during the research period, participants were tasked to either bring a recently found object to craft with, or exclusively use found and repurposed materials during the workshop session¹.

In both instances, this lead to interesting discussions and insightful observations!



Reminder Talisman that reads “Rest, Heal, Mind & Body”.
Made of: Recycled paper, stone, scraps and leaves.

4 - 1

1. The workshop titled *Craft Animism & Trash Talismans* included the following note:
“In practice, crafting with trash, repurposed materials, found objects and so on, can sometimes be an effective method to “save” some things from ending in a landfill somewhere. However, crafting in general, can just as quickly produce more trash than one started with. As such, for this workshop, I’d like everyone to reflect what and how they are interacting with the tools and materials provided. And consider what sort of “new” trash this may produce.”

In the first workshop, I asked the participants to find and bring an object they found outside, prior to coming in. And as I hoped to achieve, multiple people reported that this “exercise” made them much more aware of their surroundings, sometimes causing a heightened feeling of awe and excitement while walking outside (urban environments). With one person expressing that this simple task itself felt like “a bit of Magic”.

In the last workshop, which focused on crafting talismans out of residual waste, I tasked the participants to create speculative symbolic associations to various examples of common household trash, before using some of that same trash to craft. Besides being a great ice-breaker during that session, I observed how this exercise shifted the discussion from “the factual impact of our waste production” to a more interpersonal and intimate exchange on how the participants perceived trash, their personal consumer habits and material culture overall.

--> *According to the participants: Plastic symbolizes eternity, and cardboard symbolises both fragility and versatility. While electronic waste represents lost potential and textile waste abundance and greed.*

To summarize the main points of this chapter; Magic and Witchcraft-related beliefs and practices have become increasingly mainstream and popular in Western culture.

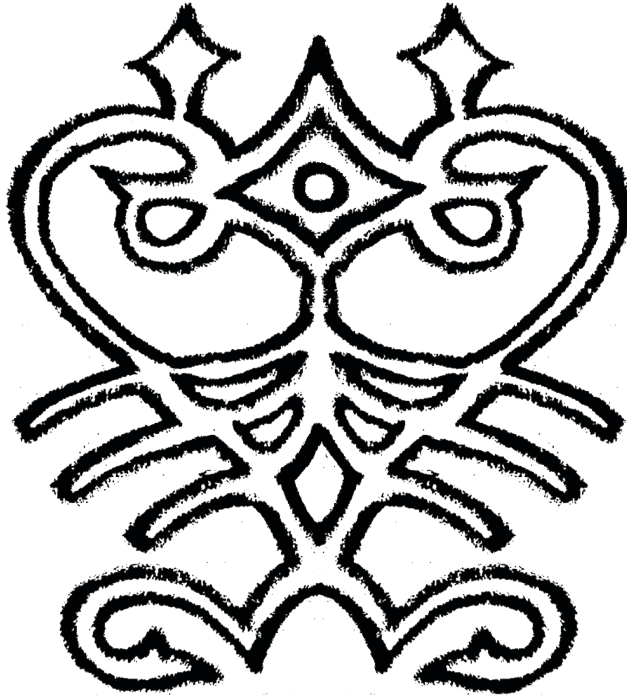
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However, the so-called “mainstreamification” and “aesthetisation” of Magic* has lead to many parts of previously “niche” practices and belief systems to be absorbed and exploited by our modern consumerist culture and Capitalist modes-of-living. Through what Ellie Castle (2025) calls the “consumerist dilution of spiritual practices”, practitioners and non-practitioners alike are contributing to the environmental degradation and socio-economic impacts caused by Capitalist overconsumption.

While it is important to recognize that the escalating matter of environmental destruction, climate change and natural resource depletion is a complex issue that requires (immediate) actionable solutions on a multitude of fronts, I have found that there is a noticable shift towards more critical attitudes regarding overconsumption emerging within modern Magic* practitioners and communities.

Through the example of DIY-Magic, contemporary Witches, and Magic* practitioners more generally, are seeking to form more sustainable and ecologically-minded practices. With growing numbers of practitioners using their online platforms to actively share alternative modes-of-practice.

The problems outlined above have strongly impacted the methodology of my project and my own personal practice of Magic. And while DIY-methods cannot possibly solve the greater systemic problems on their own, by promoting an explicitly anti-consumerist attitude towards Magic*, I attempt to positively contribute to the ongoing discussions regarding the sustainability and environmental impact of Western Magic* practices.



Chapter Tree:

Magic vs. Fascism

In this final chapter, I return to analyse the idea of Magic's survival and its connection to Western ideology in more detail. I discuss how movements like Wicca, Paganism and New Age are perpetuating neo-colonial attitudes. And, how environmentalist concerns, as the ones discussed in chapter two, are being used to entice Western Pagans and Occultists into new radical right politics. Finally, I look at the concepts of Anarcho-Occultism and Magic Resistance as potential tools to counter these concerns.

To begin with, I would like to come back to the idea of a 21st century "Magic revival" mentioned in the previous chapter, and highlight important points made by academics critical towards this notion.

Starting off; anthropologist, writer and specialist in occult history, Amy Hale (2019a) argues that simply using terms such as "revival" creates a potentially damaging misrepresentation of the actual historic development of Western Magic. She explains that a general interest in Occultism, Esotericism or witchcraft-like practices, never waned within Western populations; regardless of whether academics, the media, or pop culture paid it any mind. Hale (2019a) also expresses critique towards people often characterising

Wicca or Neo-Paganism as the only vanguards of modern Magic practices making it into the 21st century; pointing out that things such as tarot, astrology, or other forms of divination, have long, and continuously, been practiced alongside traditional religions. But that they are often overlooked, for the simple fact that many people do not always perceive such practices in religious terms, or as being esoteric or occult in nature. Despite their new found associations with modern Witchcraft and “revived” Magic practices. (Hale, 2019a)

In other words, things we frequently categorise as “Magic” today, in actuality, are often a broad range of disconnected traditions, practices, and ideas.

As Hanegraaf (2016) puts it, “our” concept of Magic (and adjunctly, Esotericism and Occultism) has become a sort of “wastebasket” for all types of associated ideas and practices that do not neatly fit the category of religious tradition, but still in some ways include aspects of spirituality, superstition or supernatural belief. (Hanegraaf, 2016)

I think this is a very important point to keep in mind, in regards to our overall definition of Magic so far. (And the reason I add the “*” to signal when I use “Magic” as an umbrella term, i.e. “magic-adjacent”)

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Which brings me to Hale’s (2019a) main point: The idea of a supposed “revival” of Magic potentially hides a very white-centric and Westernized view on the magical practices that did survive into modern era Europe and North-America. This reflects in the way most media outlets, reporting on a supposed revival of Magic, only feature white people, or specifically include examples of white women engaging with or expressing interest in Magic. Hale (2019a) argues that this often ignores the ethnic, racial and cultural minorities, within Europe and North-America, who have continued to practice magic-adjacent traditions, and contributed to Magic’s survival in their own right, despite forced Western hegemonisation. A tendency that in turn, has continued to devalue and erase the impact and cultural contributions of marginalised communities to Western cultural production. (Hale, 2019a)

This is one of the reasons I tend to disagree with ideas such as Charlesworth’s (2022), who, in his article *The Return of Magic in Art*, frames today’s “magical revival” as something of an act of solidarity with marginalized indigenous cultures and beliefs and as a conscious critique towards Western politics and “modern” modes-of-living. While I agree that this may be true to a certain extent, or should be the norm, I also think it is a bit of a romanticised interpretation of a phenomenon that is shrouded in, what Laurel Zwissler (2026) refers to as, an “inherited colonial gaze”.

In *New Age, Wicca, and Paganism* (2026), Laurel Zwissler describes how these three movements, which tend to draw a majority white and middle-class audience, often inadvertently recreate Western colonial dynamics and extractive attitudes when constructing their beliefs and practices.

A phenomenon that she attributes to the fact that, due to the long history of cultural repression of pagan and non-Christian traditions, across the Western colonial world, a lot of contemporary neo-pagan and spiritual movements rely on reconstructed and/or “borrowed” cultural practices. Often either basing themselves on archaeological records, religious and anthropological

studies, or existing traditions from cultures around the world. (Zwissler, 2026) The mix-and-matching of cultural practices and religious beliefs is something that can be observed in New Age spirituality in particular. Characterised as a combination of a wide range of beliefs, often freely taken from non-Western cultures, the New Age movement is frequently criticised for its penchant for cultural appropriation. (Zwissler, 2026) Although Pagans and Wiccans are guilty of it, too. (Zwissler, 2026; Gottlieb, 2017)

To name just four widespread examples of cultural appropriation, common in the aforementioned movements, and all of Western esoteric and occult culture, are the use of white sage and palo santo, as well as, the idea of dreamcatchers and spirit animals. All four examples stem from different indigenous North and South-American cultures that are considered “closed cultural practices”.

In short, they aren’t meant to be practised by “outsiders” or the uninitiated. Meaning that extracting and freely adopting these practices, which removes them from their original cultural context, constitutes cultural appropriation and can be viewed as offensive to the cultures they stem from. (Gottlieb, 2017) In addition, the white sage (*Salvia apiana*) that is sold across the globe as a spiritual good, is a wild plant that can only be found along the coast of Southern California and Baja California, Mexico. Its existence is being threatened by over-extraction, urbanisation and illegal poaching. The use and immense popularity of white sage in Western cultures is actively impacting the spiritual and cultural practices of the indigenous populations that are fighting to preserve it. (Ramirez and Small, 2020) One more ironic example of how Western Magic* claims to revere nature and ancient traditions while doing the opposite.

22

The few examples I listed represent a general trend in which Western practitioners often view other non-Western cultures as an available resource ready to be mined for personal gratification and profit. (Zwissler, 2026) And instances of cultural appropriation fittingly illustrate the power imbalances that continue to be upheld by Western Esoteric and Occult culture — An entire industry built on overconsumption and the Capitalist exploitation of stolen beliefs, practices and traditions of non-Western cultures. (Gottlieb, 2017)

However, the rampant consumerist and neocolonial attitudes within Western Magic currents are just one side of the coin of how these contemporary movements are currently re-enforcing racist and white-supremacist ideology. The other side is the frightening rise of right-wing and fascist ideology within Western Paganism and Occult movements.

As Amy Hale details in *The Pagan and Occult Fascist Connection and How to Fix It* (2019b), there exists an “uncomfortable compatibility” between today’s Pagan and Occult movements, and the fascist ideologies of right-wing politics. (Hale, 2019b) This “compatibility in ideology”, Hale (2019b) directly connects to the emergence of a new radical right in the past decade. Described as a sort of mass rebranding campaign spearheaded by an offshoot branch of the Western right-wing political sphere, proponents of the “New Right” sought to distance themselves from traditional conservative

and neo-liberal politics by marketing the movement as the modern, progressive and intellectual version of the traditional right-wing political establishment. (Hale, 2019b) This image change was, to a large amount, brought about by the New Right's adoption of ideas and political agendas that are more commonly associated with progressive and/or left-leaning ideas. Some relevant ones being anti-capitalism, identity politics, environmentalism and the critique of modernity. (Hale, 2019b)

And yes, all of these represent many of the concerns I have voiced so far. That is why addressing the following problems is important.

A large portion of what is considered “traditional” Western Occultism already tends to lean towards more conservative ideas and values.

In her text *Occulture: Secular Spirituality* (2020), Patricia MacCormack explains that although many contemporary occultist groups often claim to be anti-religious, they still end-up reproducing the same hierarchical structures and power relations found in traditional religious institutions. Including the stereotypical white-heterosexual-male leading figure. At the same time, their beliefs and practices often reflect, what MacCormack (2020) calls, “abstract semicapitalistic ideologies”, i.e. a stark focus on self-oriented rituals for the pursuit of dominance, wealth and sexual control.

Additionally, while publicly presenting as politically neutral on the surface, many of these groups are full of machismic and nihilistic nationalists, who either claim no apparent political affiliation, or openly promote right-wing neofascist ideas. (MacCormack, 2020)

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Traditional conservative values already have one foot in the door. But today's politics of the New Right may align even more with some of the West's Magic cultures.*

“Occultism”, derived from the Latin word “occultus” meaning “hidden” or “secret”, is often considered the more academic and intellectual counterpart to Western Esotericism. (White, 2026b) Occultism as a whole is commonly associated with the idea of “the intellectual in search of hidden knowledge”, reflected in the way many Occultists tend to perceive themselves as part of some special underground elite in possession of the world's covert truths. This sometimes materializes as a general distrust or disavowment of academic and scientific establishments, even sometimes veering into conspiracy theories (e.g.: anti-semitic conspiracy theories). (MacCormack, 2020)

All of these characteristics make the Western Occult movement highly compatible with the New Right's image as an “edgy”, more intellectual and anti-establishment version of traditional right-wing ideology. This has resulted in a increase of New Right adherents in the traditional Western Occult movement. (Hale, 2019b)

However, the New Right isn't just exploiting the compatibility it has with “edgy” Occultist, it is also actively pandering to the Pagans! By adopting talking points common in climate change activism, the New Right has presented itself as anti-consumerist environmentalists and cultural protectionists. And this aligns well with the nature worship and revivalist traditions of Western Neo-Paganism. (Hale, 2019b)

But the so-called New Right's "green front" acts as a facade to disguise their deeper more insidious agenda!

As Hale (2019b) describes, right-wing environmentalist narratives form an "entryism" to their more radical ideologies. In other words, they act as a gateway to right-wing ideas, "paving the way for compassionate sounding anti-immigration arguments couched in the rhetoric of heritage, environmentalism, nationalism, protectionism, and small-scale local development." (Hale, 2019b)

All of that, doubled with the already established prevalence of racist rhetoric and anti-semitic conspiracy theories, has made Western Occultism and Esoteric culture, as well as Paganism, a fertile breeding ground for radical right-wing ideology. (Hale, 2019b)



24

"Fascism is for losers"

- sticker on the right.

Ward Sticker. The ward sticker is a type of banishing magic. It's magical message grows in strength by spreading lots of stickers across an area.
This sticker reads: "Here, hate withers. Here, love roots." or alternatively, "Hate withers here. Love roots, here".

But how can these pervasive tendencies be addressed and potentially countered?

The first step is to become drastically more cognisant and astute at recognizing right-wing propaganda when it appears. From Hale's (2019b) extensive list of key points, I summarize the following:

- ★ Inform yourself on the “traditions” you are engaging with! Where do they originate? What people does that tradition “belong” to? And who is potentially profiting from or may be exploiting these traditions and practices?
- ★ Become able to distinguish between matters surrounding cultural exchange, notions of heritage and ancestry, especially in relation to systemic oppression, and the potential ways the Right subverts these subjects to further white supremacist ideology.
- ★ Pay close attention to the way nature and the idea of what counts as “natural” or “traditional” is being discussed! Ideas promoting a supposed “natural order” or a “more authentic past” often hide fascist and conservative ideals.

The need for Magic* practitioners, and people in general, to become more aware of the issues discussed throughout this essay, is one of the main motivating factors that has driven my research.

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In search of more sustainable and ethically-grounded Magic practices, able to oppose the potentially nefarious political entanglements of modern Magic*, I found the following, and final examples:

Anarcho-Occultism, as the name suggests, combines the main principles of Anarchist thought with the concept of Occultism. It superimposes and recontextualizes the idea of occult knowledge and practice through the lens of anti-authoritarianism, non-hierarchical organization, mutual aid, self-sufficiency, autonomy, sustainability, and social justice. Merging the concept of Magic with political ideology. (Babcock, 2013)

It is difficult to find direct mentions of Anarcho-Occultism outside of Jay Babcock's 2013 article *On Anarcho-Occultism, this Capitalist planet and Counterpower*, who links the overall concept to the work of The Center of Tactical Magic (short: CTM), an influential US-American organisation that merges art, political activism and magic in what they call “tactical magic” practices. (Center for Tactical Magic, 2006)

However, the concept of Anarcho-Occultism, in theory, contains many aspects related to the topics discussed so far. It's anti-authoritarian and non-hierarchical approach to Occultism breaks with the traditional organizational structures found in many contemporary occultist groups. It's emphasis on social justice, sustainability and mutual aid represents an oppositional stance to the neo-colonial, exploitative and white Euro-centric attitudes that haunt Western Magic* culture.

I would argue that applying an anarchist lens to the practice of Occultism, and Magic overall, subverts the idea of uncovering "hidden" knowledge to the wider social, cultural and political aspects of modern Magic*.

In practice, Anarcho-Occultism could facilitate the breaking down of obscured hierarchical power dynamics, wherein the elitism and gatekeeping prevalent in Western Occultism gets transformed into a more equitable form based in free knowledge exchange and shared resources.

Babcock (2013) describes, how past Occult movements could be ascribed to exhibit anarchist tendencies. To illustrate, he mentions how they frequently challenged institutional power, societal norms and the overall notion of modern materialist hierarchies. And, how they sometimes promoted egalitarian, self-validating networks, and alternative forms of social organization. (Babcock, 2013) While I'm certain this may still be the case for many Occult movements today, another potentially interesting movement within contemporary Magic* I have come across, and which has gained prominence in recent years, is that of Resistance Magic.

Resistance Magic, can broadly be described as the employment of Magic and Witchcraft as a tool for political action. (Lazoroska, 2020)

In Magic For The Resistance — Rituals & Spells for Change (2025), Michael M. Hughes describes Magic Resistance (or alternatively, Resistance Magic) as a type of Magic that uses magical concepts and techniques "to resist or impede dangerous or oppressive political and social movements". (Hughes, 2025, p.9)

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Hughes (2025) continues to explain that Magic for Resistance does not just act as a tool for self-defence or the defence of others, but directly promotes "progressive, inclusive, liberating, and empowering political, environmental, economic and social causes" (Hughes, 2025, p.9)

Additionally, Hughes (2025) does not explicitly assign supernatural power to Magic, but defines his view of Magic in similar terms to that of Participatory Consciousness. As such, Resistance Magic finds its effectiveness through engaging with the self and the world around you. Moreover, Hughes (2025) is overtly critical towards the idea of viewing Magic as a fix-all to any political issues. He clearly states that any form of Magic is useless without also engaging in political action and organizing. (Hughes, 2025)

What makes both the idea of Anarcho-Occultism and Resistance Magic interesting is their explicit use of political language. Unlike many other practices of Magic* and sub-movements I have come across, they do not diminish the political context in which Magic* (still) exists today, through vagueness or feigned neutrality. I strongly believe that such vagueness often results in diluting the necessary explicitness to discuss these issues in their entirety. Occulting the political entanglements of Magic and the issues they cause within modern Magic* movements. *Pun intended.*

And that is something I would like to avoid in my own project.

To summarize; Whilst a general "revival" of Magic practices has taken place within Western culture, much of today's Esoteric and Occult movements are inadvertently recreating and re-enforcing the very ideology of Western supremacy and neo-colonial extractivism that sought to erase them.

The fervent destruction of natural resources, and appropriation of cultural practices of non-Western people stands as a pervasive issue in modern practices of Magic*, and the Capitalist industries build on Western Esoteric and Occult culture. At the same time, the "New Right" has constructed right-wing pipelines, that exploit rising environmental concerns and divisive immigration politics, to entice a growing amount of Europe's and North-America's Pagans and Occultists into a "rebranded" fascist movement.

These facets found in contemporary Magic* culture, including the subjects discussed in chapter one and two, represent a far-reaching web of problems that should concern all modern Magic* practitioners.

However, although no form of Magic could possibly solve these issues on its own, concepts such as Anarcho-Occultism and Magic Resistance seek to address these concerns by merging the practice of Magic with more explicitly political stances and actionable goals. Both concepts represent relevant examples in my project's search for Magic practices that can counteract the pervasiveness of fascist, neo-colonial, and extractive ideologies within Western Magic* culture.

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Through applying frameworks such as Anarcho-Occultism and Resistance Magic, the false myth of Magic's political neutrality could be countered, while initiating the realisation that the most threatening occult forces are the oppressive systems and ideologies we encounter and unknowingly propagate everyday.



5-1
*"Talisman to move on": A talisman to move on that reads: "The universe gives and takes."
 Made of: lost/found keys, scrap fabric and a wooden bead.*

Conclusion

How would you define Magic now?

A concept inherently linked to our subjective and participatory perception of reality?

Or, a mere aesthetic, selling us the symbolic idea of an enchanted world-view?

Or rather, a virulent pipeline that draws people into fascist conspiracy theories?

The primary goal of this research was to construct a comprehensive outline of the various concerns and challenges I perceive in Western Magic* culture, today. And, to analyze how these concerns emerged, connect to each other and in what ways they are being perpetuated. Although, it also bears mentioning that the information I have compiled, so far, is but a fraction of a complex web of intersecting factors. Many more factors I couldn't possibly all include.

I believe that to address each concern, within the practice of Magic, we first have to grasp the intricacies of these issues before actionable solutions can be formed. Therefore, all alternative approaches to Magic discussed must come secondary to a fuller comprehension of the context these practices exist in.

Recapitulating the main points of this essay;

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To deconstruct the neo-colonial gaze embedded in our modern perceptions of Magic, we first must build an understanding of the past and current historical contexts that have produced it. And most probably, gradually cut it loose from the so-called Magic-Religion-Science triad.

Concepts such as the theory of Participatory Consciousness can support a more hollistic view of Magic, both from an academic perspective and as a practitioner.

To counter the ecological and socio-cultural impact of overconsumption, produced by the Capitalist commodification of Magic as an aesthetic, we categorically must change our consumer habits. Replacing frivolous overconsumption with more purposeful and sustainable options. Not only practitioners, but all of us. And although individual action cannot solve the large-scale systemic structures that uphold and perpetuate these problems, practices such as DIY-Magic can act as tools of resistance to counter exploitative Capitalist norms.

While neo-colonial attitudes and consumer culture are relatively normalized, and therefore often persist, covertly in our everyday actions and biases; overtly fascist and right-wing ideology is gaining ground within Western magic-adjacent movements at a frightening rate. Most notably, Western Occultism and Paganism. To combat the propagation of right-wing pipelines, one can begin with understanding how political movements, such as the New Right, are adopting messaging commonly associated with the green and/or left-leaning political sphere. Using environmental concerns, nature conservation and anti-Capitalist narratives, among others, to draw in nature-worshipping Pagans and conservatively-aligned traditional Occultists.

For all of these points to be effective, we also must initiate and encourage discourse surrounding these concerns, beyond our own personal practices. All of these points must be considered and incorporated in the practice of Magic. Even if all of these points may exceed the subject of practice and belief. Because all of the concerns modern Magic culture faces today transcend the matter of Magic itself.

Based on these conclusions, I am proposing the following approach to Magic:

A progressive and future-oriented practice of Magic should be of explicitly political, anti-fascist, anti-Capitalist and anti-consumerist nature.

The applied definition of Magic should not claim to offer direct solutions nor should it falsely attempt to provide universal truths. Instead, Magic should be viewed as a tool for the practice of self-reflection, of creative expression and transformative gestures.

The symbolic and aesthetic potential of Magic should be used as a source of personal meaning-making, but never be exploited for nefarious means.

This Magic practice should employ the power of personal subjectivity as a conduit to generate compassion and care for others.

This practice of Magic should encourage participation, collaboration and deep connection. As much as it should allow for confrontation, disagreement and silence.

This approach to Magic should allow for multiplicity and diversity, but still be capable to hold on to its deepest convictions, with empathy.

Always.

Here, love roots. Here, hate withers.

31
|----->





32

— Young me dressed as a magician.

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Glossary

Correspondences - In Magic, correspondences act as symbolic links to use in rituals, spell-work or other magical actions. Correspondences tying certain ideas or meanings to certain materials, such as gemstones, plants, colors, etc.

Esotericism - Esotericism encompasses a wide range of religious, and non-religious beliefs and practices. It developed as a distinct classification within 19th century Europe, merging ideas from the Kabbalah, alchemy, ceremonial magic and astrology, among others. Nowadays, it also includes many Western spiritual movements, including Wicca and New Age spiritualism. (White, 2026a)

Occultism - “Occultism”, derived from the Latin word “occultus” meaning “hidden” or “secret”, is often considered the more academic and intellectual counterpart to Western Esotericism. Occultism as a whole is commonly associated with the idea of “the intellectual in search of hidden knowledge” (White, 2026b)

Modern Satanism - Modern Satanism established itself as a new religious movement during the 1970's, through the founding of the first *Church of Satan*, by Anton LaVey, in the UK. Modern Satanists are largely considered atheists, and generally do not worship or believe in Satan as a literal entity, as believed by Christians. Instead, they view the literary and mythological figure of Satan as a symbol of freedom, defiance and anti-authoritarianism. (White, 2026d)

New Age Spirituality - “New Age is a general term for noninstitutionalized movements, members of which often prefer terms such as “spirituality” and “self-actualization” to “religion,” that focus on energies outside the human body as sources of healing and guidance, as well as potential obstacles to such goals. These sources include nonembodied entities, alien life forms, crystals, and geological powers focused at special sites around the globe but are not usually interpreted as deities.” (Zwissler, 2026, p.2)

Paganism - The term “pagan” or “paganism” originated in the early days of Christian religious expansion, as a term used by Christians to designate non-Christians and/or that practiced polytheistic religions (non-Abrahamic religions). (White, 2026c)

1.2. **Neo-Paganism** - Neo-Paganism is an umbrella term used to describe many forms of modern day cultural and/or religious practices, traditions and beliefs that are derived, or (re)constructed, from ancient pagan/pre-Christian cultures. (White, 2026c)

Perception - “Perception itself is an inherently relational, participatory event.” (Abram, 2005) As David Abram writes in *Animism, Perception, and Earthly Craft* of the Magician, perception is an active process, not a passive contemplation. It is based in a mutual exchange. We do not exist apart and untouched by the world around us. And, we do not merely live within it, we are active participants of the big collaborative effort that makes up the “it”. We perceive as much as we are perceived.

Practice - A practice is an intentional and iterative process, based on a conscious, continued and reflexive application of ideas, values, methods and materials within a field (in the case of my project, the intersecting fields of Magic and Art) with the goal of building a coherent “body of work” or methodology based on personal ethos. Hence, I believe that to speak of the practice(s) of Magic in terms of rigid rules and traditions somewhat diminishes Magic’s inherently experimental nature and transformative capacity..

Sigilism - Sigilism refers to the practice of creating sigils, magical symbols/drawings made to cast Magic. Nowadays, it can also refer to an art-style, especially as style in tattooing.

Wicca - Wicca is a Neo-Pagan religion that emerged in the UK during the 1950’s. It’s religious beliefs and practices combine pre-Christian European traditions and modern forms of Witchcraft. (White, 2026e)

Witchcraft - Like Magic, the term Witchcraft has eluded singular definitions. In a contemporary context, the practice of “witchcraft” is most often used as an umbrella term to describe a particular framework or attitude to the practice of Magic, or “the craft of a witch”, more than a defined set of rules or traditions. Similar to how “Paganism”, or Neo-Paganism, is used to denote a variety of religious belief systems and practices, rather than one unified religion. (Obscure Clouds, 2019)

1.2. ***Witchcraft s. Wicca*** - Although sometimes conflated with Wicca, which is a theist Neo-Pagan religion (the belief in one or multiple Gods) that incorporates witchcraft as a central part of its religious beliefs and traditions, Wicca is but just one interpretation of what Witchcraft can mean. Witchcraft can take on many forms, religious or non-religious, spiritual or non-spiritual. However, most modern witchcraft practices are considered Neo-Pagan in their nature, meaning they are new practices, beliefs, traditions, rituals, etc., that are based on, and/or inspired by what are considered ancient pagan traditions. (Obscure Clouds, 2019; White, 2026e)

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