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Occult in Dark Times

Working Titles is an online journal run by doctoral candidates in the Ph.D. programme Art and Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. By “working titles” we hint at the journal’s main objectives: To serve as a platform for the presentation of research carried out through any practice – from oil painting to anarchist urban plumbing – and to facilitate the self-publishing of practice-based working papers. Contributors submit their works to a non-blind peer review by those they deem suitable, regardless of their academic affiliation, and based on friendship and trust.

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Rendition: Stochastic Method in Six Parts

Yvonne Salmon

Abstract

My poem <Rendition: Stochastic Method in Six Parts> is concerned with a magical working that is believed to have failed. Despite the best efforts of the practitioner, a spell may feel as if it has not worked as intended or not worked at all. We can be forgiven for losing faith in our magic, in our power: just look at the state of the world. However, the thrust of the poem moves beyond this bleak judgement. It describes how the spell in question did indeed succeed. It operated – as is actually so often the case with magic – according to its own schedule and its own purpose.

Rendition: Stochastic Method in Six Parts

I

Flick the wick twice, once for reversal—
or so it was told, thick-lipped & stale,
the tonic fault lines burnt into parchment
(*it should have worked—*)

II

Sprigs split under breath's solvent,
ash smirks up the ribs of the glass.
Breach-point registered,
a lapse in force: gesture fell short.
A field left untethered.

III

But the world clicks, off-beat; a spindle
half-wrenched,
cobwebbed at the margins. The delay
hums.

IV

(... you did not feel it, but the ink ran ahead.)

V

By night the register shifts: smoke bent
into the name it was given.
Not now but after,
turning its edge,
the slipstream catches the wrist.

VI

No failure, only refraction—
the spell
took the long way around.

Yvonne Salmon FRSA FRGS FRSPH FRAI is an academic, artist and writer. She directs the Alchemical Landscape project and chairs the Counterculture Research Group at the University of Cambridge. She is a member of BAFTA (Scotland) and a major solo exhibition of her moving image work, painting and photography <For Those Who Don't Want to Be Found> took place in Cambridge in 2024. Recent publications include <Certain Circles> a study of queer sixties literature included in <The Sixties: A Decade of Modern British Fiction> (Bloomsbury) and <Territories>, a book of texts from her expanded cinema works (Contraband Books).