Prof. Kai Hassinger's ALTERNIUM

A couple of key principles before we dive into things:

1. Magic is social and part of society. It just fucking is.

2. The Magimundi manages itself by Othering certain groups and creating intractable hierarchies. The Magimundi as it is, in other words, serves the Rich and Powerful.

3. To rebel against hierarchies, one must invent new ones. That's right: To do otherwise sends us plunging into bad-shit anarchy and the Tyranny of Structurelessness.[1]

4. So how the fuck do we dismantle the awful shit in the world around us while also not throwing the snipe out with the snipe-bathing solution?

5. We understand that we are part of a history of ideas and struggles much greater than ourselves.

6. We participate in that history by understanding all of the relevant ideas, weighing them, and acting on our principles.

7. Our principles are those things that we'd do even on pain of death. Those principles transcend ourselves. Cool, huh?

8. Principles can be augmented with rationality, but in the end they are not rational. They are *feelings*. They are *beliefs.*

9. The more we know about what ideas we stand for and what ideas manifest themselves through our actions, the better we know whatever the fuck our life means when we stand up for one cause or another.

10. We are disembodied limbs, floating through history, only able to partially glimpse the role that we play in larger systems. Those systems still need to be understood.

11. In any given situation, there is always an Easy Way Out and an interested group who'd love it if you took it... and suffered the full consequences of your actions. Don't take the Easy Way Out unless you're prepared to face them all. And be exploited.

12. It's highly likely that we're all hypocrites anyway. Becoming a full-fledged magus is learning how to minimize — and live with — your own hypocrisy and failings.

<div align="right">

-K.H.

</div>

---

[1] If you'd read your Jo Freeman, you'd know that the Tyranny of Structurelessness creates informal structures: star systems, popularity contests, unelected elites, and general ineffectuality as a group. These oppress us just as much as formal hierarchies that Other certain groups. Sorry.

Intellectual History of the Alternium

I. "The concept of the *political* concerns who possesses the right to determine who is a person and who is an exception, or what are *states of exception*. All ethics stem from the *political*, and are used to decide who and what are worthy of attention and indifference in our system. The *exception* is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything. In the exception, the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition. The *sovereign* in this system decides the exception. Sovereign actions trump democracy. All actual functioning democracies still require the rule that equals are equals, but that unequals will not be treated equally. Therefore, democracy requires first homogeneity and second the elimination or eradication of heterogeneity."

—C. Schvitt
[Former Theory & Ethics Instructor Turned Gorecaster]

II. "You know the best way to achieve equality in the New World Magischola? Separation between Mundanes, Mixed, and Unsoiled has been proposed. But the minute we [Mixed and Mundanes] take our wands and enforce our own boundaries, they'll take those wands away. See, the Unsoiled are more afraid of separation than integration. Separation means that they put you Mundanes away from them, but not far enough for them to be out of their jurisdiction; separation means you're gone. And the Unsoiled will integrate faster than they'll let you separate. So we will work with you against the unequal Magimundi system because it's criminal, because it is absolutely destructive, in every way imaginable, to the minds of the magi who have to be exposed to that type of crippling education. That's all."

—The Q
[Esteemed Organizer and Astromancer Rhetorician]

III. "The sad truth is that most evil is done by those who never make up their minds to be good or evil. They are instead ensconced in the systems around them, and then those systems speak through them. But all actions are committed by *somebody*. There's always someone responsible. Action without a name, a "who" attached to it, is meaningless. ... How do we win? Dedicate yourself to the good you deserve and desire for yourself. Give yourself peace of mind. You deserve to be happy. You deserve delight. The hard part is to discern what *you* are beneath all of these various systems of institution and identity."

—H. Ardenta
[Persecuted Intellectual and Philosopher]

IV. "Look at the notion of 'tradition.' It confers this special temporal status to a group of phenomena both successive and similar. It allows a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for origin. There are, in fact, more ideas on earth than magi imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than the elite think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them. Ideas do not rule the Magimundi. But it is because the Magimundi has ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not passively ruled by those who are its leaders or those who would like to teach it, once and for all, what it must think."

—M.M. Foqua
[Renegade Marshal and Iconoclast Theorist]

V. "There are two fictions that govern our time, and those are the *rule of law* and the *code of ethics*. The former exists to assure subjects that they will be handled as persons, rather than as exceptions to personhood. The latter exists to assure subjects that they are individuals with choices, rather than constituents of a mass of feeling and social side effects. What the 'ark' of power contains at its center is the state of exception — but this is essentially an empty space, in which a person's action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life. This does not meant that the machine, with its empty center, is not effective."

—A. Gambon
[Discredited Imperial Magischola Ethics Professor]

VI. "Magic theory produces ideological conclusions that frequently serve no further purpose than to justify the power of the reigning elite. It can therefore be said that reigning theories of ethics[2] justify elite power and its means of exploitation. If these means were to be challenged by the underclasses, *states of exception* are invoked to re-assert the elites' power, and these are justified through fictions of democracy and collaboration. The Poor are kept Poor to maintain the lifestyles of the Rich, and we rationalize this through all the institutional means at our disposal. To think ethically is therefore to think *systemically* — about who benefits from a given state of affairs, about who resists, about who winds up silenced."

—K. Hassinger
[Professor of Magic Theory & Ethics, New World Magischola]

---

[2] Cf. Leadwale's semantic theory as articulated in the oft-cited text *Arcanium narum.*

Prof. Hassinger's Official Responses to Extant Theories

1. The nature of magic (El Amara): Magic is created through social belief, but we <u>must</u> attend to the power structures infusing social reality. The dreamer vs. sleepwalker distinction also inherits fundamental fallacies from Leadwale — the *active/passive* dichotomy seeks to distinguish "true" magi persons vs. those who exist in a state of exception.

2. Arcanium narum (Leadwale): Leadwale is right about semantics, e.g. Leadwale's Admonishment (I.C.): we *have* to change the *language* if we are to take power back. But language also pushes back on us, both ideologically as well as institutionally. Section II is, however, utter garbage — there is no mind-body distinction, and "active/passive" language, while useful in getting young students to harness their powers, winds up performing a sorting function among the students, as well as sorting between humans, magi, and other sapient creatures. This Othering has proven the basis of many of our social problems today. Reading this section makes you feel very smug about your capabilities, especially if you come from a privileged background, and inflicts hostile individualist ideology on those who are less fortunate. Section III essentializes and naturalizes highly contingent sets of laws, traditions and social practices that have no basis in magical truths whatsoever. He *is*, however, correct in the last part of III.D — the act of interpretation is the most precious of origin points. We must see meaning, in order to see the systems that produce that meaning. Section IV is the part in which Leadwale secures the social order and bends over backward to prove his party loyalty to the Unsoiled. His discourse of "primates" (IV.B) invokes sapience as a binding distinction of personhod. Magi as rule, "primates" as exception. Finally, the world *is* composed of symbols (IV.C) but he seems to only want to affirm those of the ruling class.

3. Magical theory selection of topoi ... ethical challenges (Contreras): It is important to situate Contreras' work as moving toward a systems-theoretical approach without directly questioning notions of the *political*. In this capacity, he would prefer to confer objects and systems a neutral "consciousness" than to interrogate how their very design conforms to dominant regimes of power and exploitation. Nevertheless, the ethical case studies — barring the rational observer that they necessarily imply — work as exercises for the mind in keeping students thinking about multiple stakeholders and systems of power at work in everyday and exceptional decision-making. Just know that your decisive moment will *not* involve rationality.

—K.H.