Origins of the Cthulhu Club

Nick Land

Captain Peter Vysparov to Dr Echidna Stillwell, 19th March 1949.

Dear Dr Stillwell,

I have been fortunate enough to encounter your ethnographic work on the Nma, which I have studied with very great interest. May I trouble you with an account of my own, which might be of relevance to your researches. During the recent Pacific conflict — (a peculiar oxymoron!) — I was deployed covertly into the Dibboma area of Eastern Sumatra. My mission — which was categorized under psychological operations — consisted basically of attempted cultural manipulation, with the aim of triggering a local insurgency against the Japanese occupation. I hope it will not distress you unduly if I confess that your work was a crucial resource in this undertaking, which involved intense — if patently exploitative — communication with dibboma witchcraft. My only excuse is that hard times require moral hardness, and even obvious cruelties, I was obeying orders, and accepted them as necessary. Beyond confirming your own conclusions, these activities brought me into proximity with phenomena for which I was cognitively ill-prepared.

What began as a merely opportunistic usage of Dibboma lore — conceived initially as native superstition — transmuted incrementally into a sorcerous war against the enemy garrison. In just two weeks — between March 15th — 29th 1944 — three consecutive Japanese commanders were incapacitated by severe mental break-down. In each of these cases the process of deterioration followed the same rapid course: from leadership dysfunction, through violent assaults on subordinate personnel, to berserk derangement and paranoid ravings, culminating in suicide. By the end of this period the order of the occupying forces had entirely disintegrated.

It would be dishonest of me to conceal the fact that the Dibbomese paid a devastatingly heavy price for this success. On the basis of this experience I cannot easily doubt that Dibboma sorcerors are in some way able to telepathically communicate extreme conditions of psychotic dissociation. It is with great reluctance that I accept such a radical hypothesis, but alternative explanations, such as poisoning, disease, or coincidence stretch credibility even further.

Yours, with sincere admiration,

Captain Peter Vysparov

PS. I cannot help noticing that the dates concerned — as also of this letter — are strangely Lovecraftian.

Dr Echidna Stillwell to Captain Peter Vysparov, 23rd March 1949. [Abridged].

Dear Captain Vysparov,

Thank you for your frank letter of the 19th March. I found it truly horrifying, and yet also fascinating. I appreciate that it cannot have been easy to write. I shall not attempt to hide the great distress your account caused me, adding as it does such a terrible episode to the modern history of these cruelly afflicted people. Whilst already suspecting that this ghastly war might have stricken the Nma yet further, it is crushing indeed to have my darkest thoughts thus confirmed.

I would be interested in learning more about the details of Dib-Nma sorcerous practice before attempting to respond to your hypothesis. Be assured that — after spending seven years amongst the Mu-Nma — I will not hastily judge anything you communicate as wild or fanciful. As far as the question of dates is concerned — which you indicate only elliptically — I assume that you are referring to what in Northern latitudes constitutes the Spring Equinoctial period — mid to later March — which is so emphatically stressed in Lovecraft's The Call of Cthulhu, and which also — coincidentally — comprises the intense-zone of Nma time-ritual. This complicity has long intrigued me.

As I am sure you are aware, Lovecraft had a peculiar obsession with the South-Seas, a thematic coalescence of almost hypnotic ethnographic fascination with the most abysmal and primitive dread. I have attempted to correspond with him about these issues, but found that this topic quickly punctured his thin-crust of supercilious New-England rationalism, exposing an undercurrent of heavily fetishized archaic terror mixed with extreme racial paranoia. When he began referring to the rich and subtle culture of the Mu-Nma as "the repugnant cult of semi-human Dagonite savages" I broke off communication ... Despite this unfortunate argument, I consider Mr Lovecraft's fictions to be documents of the greatest importance, and welcome the opportunity to discuss them further. In addition, my own Neolemurian Hypothesis intersects with his wider terrestrial and cosmic vision in a number of crucial respects, particularly insofar as nonhuman cultural factors are seen to play a decisive role in large-scale historical developments.

Captain Peter Vysparov to Dr Echidna Stillwell, 3rd April 1949. [Extract] [Dear Dr Stillwell]

I am afraid you are right to suspect that I have reserved certain aspects of my engagement with Dibboma sorcery, perhaps from fear of ridicule. What has so far been omitted from my sketch of telepathic psychosis — which I will now relate — is the source pathos, so to speak, or — in the words of the military officer I was then: the occult ammunition manufacture.

Not only did I learn of the Japanese command being wrecked by psychological cataclysm — both by conventional and decidedly nonconventional intelligence gathering processes — I was also witness to the assembly of the weapon itself. I had then — and still have — no doubt at all that the madness breaking out in the local Japanese headquarters was the very same thing that I saw brewing-up like a dust-vortex in the Oddubbite trances of a Dibbomese witch, who I came to see as my greatest tactical asset and most valued companion (in that order, I confess). It was an experience of soul-carving horror for me to witness this meticulously deliberated descent into the splintering of self — complete personality disintegration — which she somehow traversed, and which she called shattering the mirror of existence. I gathered that this expression originally referred to the surface of still water, but since the arrival of European colonists silvered mirrors have been highly treasured, and their pulverization invested with immense ceremonial significance. Dibbomese sorcery does not seem to be at all interested in judgements as to truth or falsity. It appears rather to estimate in each case the potential to make real, saying typically "perhaps it can become so" ...

Echidna Stillwell to Peter Vysparov, 19th April 1949. [Extract] [Dear Captain Vysparov]

Whilst respecting the candour of your account, I cannot but abominate the necessity that has led the Nma and their sorcerous abilities to be conceived and utilized as mere munitions in a conflict imposed upon them from without. From what I can reconstruct from your description it seems to mark a degeneration of Nma demonism and time-sorcery into mere magic, or the imposition of change in accordance with will, in this case the will in question being the overall policy and strategic goals of the US war-effort, microcosmically represented by your own — evidently gallant, competent, and persuasive — military office.

Forgive my lack of patriotic ardour, but it strikes me as an appalling indication of cultural decay and corrosive nihilism when a Dib-Nma witch allows herself to be employed as a crude assassin, however one evaluates the cause thus served. This is all a matter of deepest regret, although not — to my way of thinking — of individual culpability. As the Mu-Nma say in their bleakest moments: *nove eshil zo raka* "Time is in love with her own pain."

Your discussion of Oddubb-trance makes no mention of temporal anomaly. This surprizes me. The Mu had immense respect for those Dibba witches who they described as returning from the Oddubb-time to come, and the Mu-Nagwi or dream-witches often claimed to meet these back-travellers in the Vault of Murmurs, where they would learn about future times. They said, however, that this time is compressing, and soon ends, although I had not imagined the end to be so imminent. Remembering this omen returns me to abysmal melancholy, consoled only by another Mu-Nma saying: *lemu ta novu meh novu nove* "Lemuria does not pass as time passes." I shall try to think things thus. As you say — with the Dibbomese — *shleth hud dopesh* "perhaps it can become so"

Peter Vysparov to Echidna Stillwell, 7th May 1949. [Extract]

Here in Massachusettes we have been convening a small Lovecraft reading-group, dedicated to exploring the intersection between the Nma cultural constellation, Cthulhoid contagion, and twisted time-systems. We are interested in fiction only insofar as it is simultaneously hyperstition — a term we have coined for semiotic productions that make themselves real — cryptic communications from the Old Ones, signalling return: *shleth hud dopesh*. This is the ambivalence — or loop — of Cthulhu-fiction: who writes, and who is written? It seems to us that the fabled Necronomicon — sorcerous counter-text to the Book of Life — is of this kind, and furthermore, that your recovery of the Lemurodigital Pandemonium Matrix accesses it at its hypersource.

I hope it is superfluous to add that any directly participative involvement on your part would be most extravagantly appreciated.

Echidna Stillwell to Peter Vysparov, 28th May 1949. [Extract]

It is with some trepidation that I congratulate you on the inauguration of your Cthulhu Club, if I may call it such. Whilst not in any way accusing you of frivolity, I feel bound to state the obvious warning: Cthulhu is not to be approached lightly.

My researches have led me to associate this Chthonian entity with the deep terrestrial intelligence inherent in the electromagnetic cauldron of the inner earth, in all of its intense reality, raw potentiality, and danger. According to the Nma she is the plane of Unlife, a veritable Cthelll — who is trapped under the sea only according to a certain limited perspective — and those who set out to traffick with her do so with the very greatest respect and caution.

That her submerged Pacific city of R'lyeh is linked to a lemuro-muvian culture-strain seems most probable, but the assumption that she was ever a surface-dweller in a sense we would straightforwardly understand can only be an absurd misconstrual. It is much more likely that Cthulhu's rising — like that of Kundalini as it was once understood — is a drawing down and under, a restoration of contact with abysmal intensities. Why would Cthulhu ever surface? She does not need rescuing, for she has her own line of escape, trajected through profundity. Much of this relates to the occult teachings of the sub-chakras in zones of Indo-Lemurian influence.

Hyperstition strikes me as a most intriguing coinage. We thought we were making it up, but all the time the Nma were telling us what to write — and through them ...