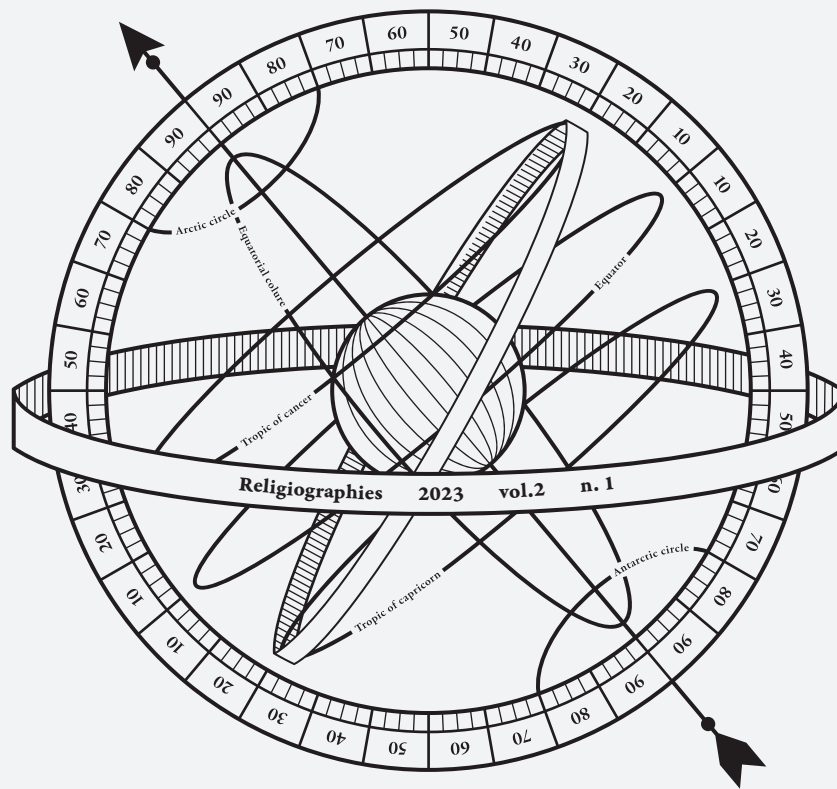


Religiographies



Special Issue
“Hans Thomas Hakl and His Library”
edited by
Marco Pasi

Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One

Bernd-Christian Otto



CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

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Keywords:

Hans Thomas Hakl, biography, Octagon library,
esotericism, intellectual history, history of magic

To cite this:

Otto, Bernd-Christian. "Hans Thomas Hakl: Three
Lives in One." *Religiographies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2023):
16–38.

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"Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl," *Gnostika* 38
(2008): 27–51, online available in English translation:
accessed July 8, 2021, <https://www.hthakl-octagon.com/interview/interview-englisch/>.

Abstract

Who is Hans Thomas Hakl, the man behind the Octagon library? Based on 10 hours of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in March 2021, the project "Hans Thomas Hakl: Three Lives in One" presents for the first time an extensive biographical account of the entrepreneur, scholar, publisher, book collector, and spiritual seeker Hans Thomas Hakl. As much of Hakl's work was driven by a "respect for the honest—I might even say honourable—losers in the clash of world views"¹ and thus a strong interest in marginalised and disputed topics, authors, and ideas, many of which manifested in the Octagon library, Hakl himself became somewhat of a disputed figure. This article hence aims at portraying a nuanced and multifaceted picture of the founder of the Octagon library, which seeks to transcend one-sided political or ideological perspectives.

Praeludium

In order to prepare the biographical sketches published here, I met Hans Thomas Hakl in late March 2021. Our meetings took place in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic and shortly after Hakl had completed a demanding course of chemotherapy for an outbreak of Hodgkin lymphoma that was diagnosed in 2020. Our meeting was of course affected by Hakl's physical condition—in addition to the chemotherapy, he had also received a shot of the Biontech/Pfizer vaccine on the day of our first interview—but his mind was nonetheless extraordinarily keen, sympathetic, and humorous. Indeed, it was striking to find the "man behind the library" in such a positive and open frame of mind whilst his body was battling such a severe illness. I would like to thank the Giorgio Cini Foundation for this special issue and for their courageous commitment to making Hakl's outstanding library publicly available.

The conversations on which this biography is based took place over three consecutive days, on each of which we spoke for three to four hours. The topics covered each day fell into three rough categories: Hakl's personal and economic life, his scholarly and intellectual life, and his pursuit of spiritual and "magical" matters. This biographical sketch is divided accordingly. Even though Hakl's life as a businessman and entrepreneur; as a lover, collector, scholar, and publisher of books; and as a spiritual seeker were, of course, heavily intertwined, it is still as apparent as it is impressive that the man lived "three lives in one." It therefore seems appropriate to deal with each in turn. The information in each part of the sketch is based for the most part on Hakl's personal reports.

Methodology

The following biographical sketch is based on 10 hours of interviews that were guided by the following methodology:

(1) *Preparation*. While preparing for the interviews, I read extensively through Hakl's written oeuvre, some autobiographical remarks and interviews already published, and additional relevant literature, such as selections from the *Octagon* volumes or the *Gnostika* journal. I then prepared a thematic scheme (the "interview guide") containing all the available biographical data and a long list of open questions, structured around Hakl's various interests and biographical trajectories.

(2) *Epistemology*. My guiding epistemological principle was an awareness that I could not simply "mine" biographical truths through interviewing Hakl, instead acknowledging that biographical narratives are generally construed, especially in interview settings, with all their potential limitations (interviewees may be driven by a conscious or subconscious desire to create an idealised image, by distortive or selective memories, or may even engage in deliberate attempts to deceive the interviewer). My greatest concern was Hakl's physical condition, the state of his memory, and his ability to speak comprehensibly. To my surprise, my experience of Hakl was of an open-minded and seemingly trustworthy interview partner who spoke freely even on controversial matters (e.g., on Evola, fascism, sexual magic, etc.), and there was no topic about which Hakl was reluctant to talk. It was, in fact, only Hakl's fading memory that occasionally hampered my attempt to understand his various biographical trajectories. In the aftermath of the interviews, Hakl's wife functioned as an additional corrective regarding various details. Notably, I attempted to not enter into the interview with preconceptions about Hakl's political agenda(s), and I also decided afterwards that the written outcome should be as neutral as possible with regard to Hakl's political or ideological viewpoints. My intention was to convey a nuanced and multifaceted picture of Hakl that seeks to transcend one-sided political or ideological perspectives.

(3) *Techniques*. Drawing on the prepared interview guide, I conducted an audio-recorded semi-structured qualitative interview² in German with a narratological focus on the three dominant aspects of Hakl's "life story". We agreed to devote each day to a different aspect of his biography, and I for the most part guided Hakl through the interview using prepared questions drawn from my interview guide, reacting creatively to replies with spontaneous follow-up questions.

(4) *Recording*. The interviews were recorded in Hakl's living room in Graz by two independent digital devices, while I simultaneously took extensive notes. In the aftermath, I compared my written notes with the digital audio recordings, which were of good quality, and partially transcribed the latter. Through this procedure, a written summary of the entire interview emerged, amounting to some 40 pages, which I shared with Hakl, along with the digital recordings, in accordance with standard ethical practices for academic interviewing. While reading the summary and listening to the recordings, Hakl himself felt the urge to compose a brief partial autobiography, which he shared with me, thereby correcting some of his own previous statements (as mentioned, Hakl occasionally struggled with his memory during the interviews, and ultimately remembered or re-checked divergent datings of events or other details in the aftermath). I then composed an independent three-part article on the basis of the digital audio recordings, my own written notes during the interview, my

own written summary, Hakl's autobiographical sketch, further autobiographical notes and interviews previously published by Hakl, and further literature written by both Hakl and other authors. Hakl read a first version of the present three-part article and provided some minor corrections and suggestions. Of course, I remain exclusively responsible for the narrative provided here. The present text was copy edited by Paul Scade.

Part I | Personal and economic biography

1 *Childhood and adolescence (1947–1965)*

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “There once was a young man who left home in order to buy lots of books, and even as an old man he hadn't got any wiser and still diligently kept buying them . . .” *The History of a Library and the Personal Reflections of a Collector*, in *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 2, *The quest for wholeness: mirrored in a library dedicated to religious studies, philosophy and esotericism in particular: esoteric and religious studies research by academic authors* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2016), 1–23, 11.

Hans Thomas Hakl was born on February 27, 1947, in Graz, Austria. An only child, he grew up in the southern part of Graz, close to the woods. Here, he often roamed about and climbed the trees as a child, forging the bonds of a pronounced love of nature that would accompany him throughout his life. Hakl's father was a manager in the payroll accounting department at the Austrian company Steyr Daimler Puch; his mother took on the role of homemaker. Hakl had a particularly strong connection with his father, rooted in admiration for his intelligence and courage. Hakl's relationship with his mother, by contrast, was sometimes strained. Whereas she was largely preoccupied with raising a “good child,” from his earliest memories Hakl's own opinions about what was proper departed significantly from hers.

Already as a young child, Hakl was very fond of books. In fact, “as a two- to four-year-old in the days before television, I was most easily kept quiet by the provision of a few books, which I apparently proceeded to leaf through from cover to cover and back again for hours on end. I would have been still happier scribbling in them, but my father—a great bibliophile—knew how to thwart the urge.”³ Hakl enrolled in primary school (*Volksschule*) at the age of five, and later attended a secondary school that focused on modern languages and mathematics (*Realgymnasium*). His school career was characterised by high talent (*Hochbegabung*) and the gift of an eidetic memory, with the result that the young Hans frequently felt unchallenged, to the point that he would regularly play chess with himself under his classroom desk to cope with the frequent boredom. Hakl also learned Jiu Jitsu as a young boy, which gave him a physical advantage over his comrades (later, Hakl would practice full-contact Karate).

A talent for languages also emerged during this period. Hakl first learned English through his father and then developed his understanding by devouring American Wild West dime novels by authors such as Zane Grey and Max Brand. By the time he was nine years old, he was nearly fluent. In secondary school, from the third year onwards Hakl was introduced to Latin (6 hours per week), through which he discovered his fascination for ancient philosophy, religion, myth, and old things in general. Hakl's gift for languages enabled him to pick up Italian with little effort in his teenage years as a result of his love for Italy and his reading of Italian romance novels (thus his advice for learning languages: do not focus on grammar but read texts imbued with emotions). At the same time, he started to learn French. At the age of seventeen, he won a local youth contest for translation from Italian, and the following year he won in the English category. Hakl wanted to compete in the French contest as well, putting to use the other language he had learned, but by the time the competition came around again he had just passed his eighteenth birthday and was no longer eligible.

Hakl's early love of books quickly extended beyond fairy tales, Karl May, Edgar Wallace, and foreign novels, so, as the shelves of his parental home were unable to satisfy his voracious appetite, he spent a lot of time in the library of his father's company. Around the age of twelve, Hakl began to monetise his talents by giving private lessons in Maths, English, and, later on, Latin. The money earned through this early entrepreneurial endeavour was usually spent on books. In fact, it was around this time that his urge to collect books, especially those with esoteric subject matters, emerged. This impulse was sparked by his accidental reading of Lobsang Rampa's *The Third Eye*,⁴ which was published as a serial novel in an illustrated magazine Hakl had come across in the family home. Enthralled by this allegedly authentic, but in fact "invented story of a fake Tibetan monk"⁵ and his opening the *ājñācakra*,⁶ Hakl craved more. He found his first source of esoteric books in an advert in one of his beloved Wild West novels for Thorson Publishers, the then-well-known English publisher of esoteric literature and books about alternative healing methods. The young reader soon ordered books about Tibet, India, Yoga, Buddhism, Theosophy, and even modern witchcraft. Hakl's "pursuit was aided by a [German] publisher at Freiburg im Breisgau, Hermann Bauer Verlag, which regularly sent out catalogues on esoteric books, and which I soon visited in order to rummage through its in-store offering."⁷ Hakl's journey as a book collector and a connoisseur of all things esoteric had begun.

Driven by his fascination for esoteric lore and Eastern religions in particular, in his early teenage years Hakl began to practise *Hathayoga* in Graz. His teacher was an eighty-year-old self-proclaimed Austrian Yogi, who had had undergone an operation on his nasal septum to enable him to publicly pull a snake from his nose through his mouth—Hakl regularly assisted him on stage. Hakl practised yoga and pranayama daily and diligently, albeit without undergoing any impressive experiences, and he even gave voluntary lectures about yoga for his friends. However, Hakl's intensive routine of yoga practice came to a halt around the age of 18, after his mentor was involved in an accident and had to stop giving classes.

2 Higher education and business career (1965–1989)

Hakl received his *Matura* (high school diploma) with distinction at the age of 18. Putting his sound grasp of languages to good use, he sought out work at international hotels during his vacations, finding jobs in Switzerland, England, and France. During the summer vacation immediately following his *Matura*, Hakl worked at the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz, where he was often assigned as the local guide for famous hotel guests—among them Greta Garbo and Eliette von Karajan. The next summer, in 1966, Hakl worked at a plush hotel on the British island of Jersey. While visiting London, Hakl stumbled across the famous Watkins bookshop and began to hunt out works by Aleister Crowley, which he found fascinating due in part to Crowley's provocative and luciferian habitus (at that time, as Hakl recalls, first editions of Crowley's works were sometimes available for less than ten pounds).⁸ This first visit to England also gave Hakl the opportunity to acquaint himself with various new religious movements, such as the Hippies (Hakl was and remained uninterested in drugs and entheogens), the Children of God, and the Hare Krishnas. However, despite his interest in their views, Hakl did not join any of these groups, with the exception of a short stint as a member of the Children of God ("I was never attracted to becoming part of a group. When all say the same, I become sceptical"⁹). At a symposium during this period, Hakl also encountered Jiddu

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Lobsang Rampa, *The Third Eye: The autobiography of a Tibetan lama* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956).

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Hans Thomas Hakl, "Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness," in *Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation A Dialogue between Ethics, Law, and Culture*, ed. Olimpia Niglio and Eric Yong Joong Lee (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 48–62, 49.

6

Lobsang Rampa was a British author born Cyril Henry Hoskin (1910–1980). *The Third Eye* was his debut novel, with eighteen further novels following until 1980. Hoskin / Rampa is an interesting figure in the history of Western esotericism: even though he was never in Tibet and his works thus raised authorship controversies, he was nonetheless influential in creating a fascination for Tibet within and beyond esoteric circles, even prompting some of his readers to become professional Tibetologists (see Lopez 1998, 112).

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Hakl, "There once was a young man," 12.

8

Hakl, "There once was a young man," 12.

9

Personal communication from Hans T. Hakl (Graz, March 2021). My translation.

Krishnamurti, by whom he was deeply impressed. This was the only period in Hakl's life when he lived completely as a vegetarian. As Hakl often preferred to expend his resources on books rather than meals, he willingly reduced his food rations and even accepted the consequence of occasional hunger if it helped him to buy an interesting book instead.¹⁰ The most precious of these he carried around in his backpack, unwilling to leave them unattended in case they should be lost or stolen. Sometimes, after spending all of his money on books, Hakl gave public lectures in Hyde park in his free time, hoping that someone would be sufficiently interested to invite him to share a meal with them.

After his schooling finished in 1965, Hakl studied law in Graz. While finding little to interest him in the subject (apart from occasional courses on the philosophy of law or old Roman law), he chose law for the entirely strategic reason that it would allow him to achieve a doctorate with the minimum of effort. As in his schooldays, the combination of an eidetic memory and a talent for learning made the study largely effortless and he was able to complete the course without actually visiting the university, apart from the two days per term on which he attended the first and last lecture.

At the age of 20, Hakl decided to take up a well-paid job in parallel to his studies, working for his father's company, Steyr Daimler Puch, in the sales department serving Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries. In order to meet the prerequisites for the position, he spent 30 days working to add Spanish to his portfolio of languages. Despite working full-time from this point onwards, Hakl was awarded his university degree and doctorate in law at the age of barely 21 (in 1970), receiving the title of *Dr. iuris* (including canonical law). Hakl was never interested in working in the realm of law, and he in fact never did, but his juridical knowledge was to provide substantial benefits when his commercial career began to flourish later on.

In 1972, Hakl served for one year in the Austrian military. This was an enjoyable period for the young man, who was able to exercise and test his physical strength in addition to his intellectual prowess. Hakl particularly enjoyed the challenge of orienteering and impressed military superiors with his extensive knowledge of astrology. His assignment as an aide to the commander of the military headquarters in Graz meant that his time for sports was strictly limited; the commander was writing a handbook on military tank tactics at the time and Hakl's skills with a typewriter were much in demand.

1972 was also the year in which Hakl married his wife Franziska, whom he had met at Steyr Daimler Puch. Hakl quit his job at his father's company and briefly worked as an export manager for a company named Famulus, which had specialised in electrical and household goods. However, this position was short lived. Spurred on by his long-standing love of Italy, Hakl decided to move to Milan with his newlywed wife in 1973, where he soon took up a position in an Italian import-export company. At the same time, Hakl began to build up an export firm of his own. Legal restrictions on foreign currency in Italy meant that Hakl had to travel abroad on a weekly basis to carry out the necessary transactions. To resolve this problem, he founded a subsidiary in Switzerland, where all currencies could be exchanged freely. There, he became acquainted with two Swiss entrepreneurs, Werner Hausheer and Charles Pierre Schöbi, who had already built up successful companies in Switzerland. The three men decided to merge their respective firms and expertise to found a trading company named

HHS (standing for Hakl, Hausheer, Schöbi). Over the next two decades, HHS enjoyed great commercial success, gradually expanding to control 14 subsidiaries operating in 13 different countries. In 1976, Hakl moved to Zurich with his wife to focus on the expansion of HHS. The city would remain his primary home until 1991.

Hakl's involvement in HHS was economically very lucrative, but also demanding and time-consuming. In the company's heyday, Hakl would spend up to three weeks out of each month travelling the world to oversee operations, typically flying between 200,000 and 250,000 miles each year. HHS focused on importing and exporting a large variety of goods, with a particular focus on the Far East, where offices were opened in Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and India, and business relations were established with mainland China. While building up an HHS subsidiary in Taiwan in the late 1970s, Hakl learned Chinese through language tapes and with the aid of Chinese assistants working at the subsidiary. He remembers his time in Taiwan with particular fondness: he was young, felt smart and strong, and was surfing on a wave of economic success.

Hakl explains the great success of HHS as the result of various factors. Among these were his and his partners' solid understanding of emerging import-export markets, their expertise in modern languages (which between them extended to German, English, Italian, French, Spanish, Swedish, Chinese, and also some Japanese and Russian), their excellent contacts in the Swiss banking sector, and, not least, their strategic utilisation of gourmet restaurants for holding business meetings. For this reason, the company also invested in a luxury restaurant in Pero, Italy (near Milan), and in a wine company, although these two particular investments were rather less successful than expected.

As his commercial career thrived, from the late 1970s onwards Hakl often combined his personal interests with his business activities. While he rarely discussed his private undertakings and esoteric interests with his business partners, he often tried to make the best out of business trips and pauses in his work schedule. For instance, in the late 1970s Hakl spent a few days meditating in a Taiwanese Zen monastery, an opportunity that was only possible because his Chinese was already quite advanced at that time (Hakl did not continue the pursuit of meditative paths later in life). On many of his trips, Hakl also visited local bookstores and antiquarian booksellers—such as the Watkins bookshop in London, the Samuel Weiser bookshop in New York, the Librarie du Graal and the Table d'Émeraude, both in Paris, the Libreria Aseq and the Libreria delle Meraviglie, both in Rome, or the Caves Book Shop in Taipei, to name just a few—in order to enlarge his collection.¹¹

From the late 1970s onwards, Hakl also began a secondary career as a scholar and translator, initially focusing on the writings of Julius Evola (see below, Part II). Hakl claims never to have been a workaholic, but as he was rarely interested in amusements such as the theatre, cinema, or television, he tended to spend his free time in the evenings and weekends translating and editing the works of Evola or working on other publication projects. Despite working full-time for his company, Hakl was thus able to translate and publish three books from Evola's corpus over the course of the 1980s.¹² During a working trip to Italy in 1972, Hakl also briefly met Evola for one-and-a-half hours in the latter's private apartment in Rome. The encounter was not overwhelming, but the memory is nevertheless one that Hakl holds close to his heart.¹³

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Octagon, 2:48–62, 50.

12
Julius Evola, *Revolte gegen die moderne Welt*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl published anonymously (Interlaken: Ansata, 1982); Julius Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl - aka H. T. Hansen, Band 1, *Praktische Grundlegung der Initiation* (Interlaken: Ansata, 1985); Julius Evola, *Die hermetische Tradition*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl - aka H. T. Hansen (Interlaken: Ansata, 1989), orig. title *La tradizione ermetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1931).

13
“Unfortunately there is nothing sensational to relate. I was received by his housekeeper, who escorted me to him. I can no longer remember whether he was in bed or in a wheelchair, but at any rate he looked wretched—sick, exhausted and embittered. But mentally he was fully alert. I told him about my high-flown plans to publish the monographs of the Group of Ur in German as soon as my circumstances would permit, and this obviously pleased him, [but he would not believe I could really do it; amendment by H. T. Hakl, 2021]. [. . .] In response to my further question whether there were any initiatic groups in the present day, he merely shook his head. He knew of none. After perhaps an hour and a half the conversation was over. Evola wanted and needed to rest.” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl”.

Starting in the 1980s, Hakl became an enthusiastic hiker and thus explored large parts of his natural surroundings, especially in Switzerland and Austria, usually accompanied only by his dog (see also below, Part III). Hakl also explored select mountain areas in Taiwan, deliberately neglecting warnings of poisonous snakes and other dangers, driven onwards by a feeling of invulnerability. One of his life dreams—a hike from Northern Sweden to Northern Africa (Morocco)—remains unfulfilled at the time of writing.

3 Early “retirement” and its ramifications (1988–)

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 19f.

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 18.

In 1988, Hakl decided to sell his shares in HHS. He had contemplated the possibility already in previous years both because times had become harder for the import-export business and because he was no longer motivated by further expanding either the company or his personal wealth. When an interested buyer appeared on the scene with a good offer, his decision was made quickly, and his partners soon agreed as well. Hakl remained at the company for an additional year to instruct the new owners, but from 1989—aged 42—he essentially lived from the fortune he had made through the sale of his company and from his investments. Hakl and his wife Franziska made a round-the-world-trip in 1989 and then decided to move back to Austria, to their hometown of Graz, where they acquired a large estate. The move from Switzerland to Austria, which took place in 1991, also gave Hakl the opportunity to reunite the fragmented parts of his book collection, which had by now become quite substantial but was distributed across several locations. In 1993, Hakl built an Octagon-shaped extension on his newly purchased estate in Graz, inspired by the Castel del Monte of Friedrich II in Apulia.¹⁴ Thanks to the sale of his company, Hakl could now afford to add the rarest and most costly of volumes to his collection.¹⁵ For instance, one of the most precious items in the Octagon library is a fully illuminated 1598 printing of the *Aureum Vellus*, for which Hakl spent 50,000 Deutsche Marks (roughly €25,000) in 1990.

Since his “retirement” from regular employment in the late 1980s, Hakl has dedicated his time to expanding his book collection, to reading (which becomes more and more difficult for an enthusiastic book collector as the collection grows), to his editing and publishing activities, to traveling and hiking and, not least, to maintaining his capital through on-going reinvestments. The latter task is not to be underestimated, given that one of the most difficult things for a wealthy person to achieve is to maintain their wealth. Up to the present day, Hakl continues to spend several hours each day on this work. Since the early 2000s, this task has become increasingly difficult due to changes in the global economy. Indeed, during the financial crisis of 2007–2008 Hakl lost a significant portion of his capital assets, which, in turn, affected his book collecting endeavours.

During the early 1990s, Hakl underwent a pronounced midlife and identity crisis, partly due to a fundamental fear that had emerged during his previous experimenting with lucid dreaming (see below, Part III). Hakl attempted to handle this crisis through hiking and, later on, through the practice of Qi Gong. Over the past decade, Hakl has suffered from various health-related problems. In 2011, Hakl had two strokes, which he attributes in hindsight to a period of extraordinary stress. From 2015 onwards, Hakl developed polyneuropathy, an apparently incurable disease that affects the peripheral nerves, causing them to die off gradually. This condition has made it increasingly hard for Hakl to use his extremities, impacting his ability to walk and write. In addition, an outbreak of Hodgkin lymphoma

was diagnosed in 2020, for which Hakl underwent a demanding course of chemotherapy. At the time of writing (July 2021), the treatment appears to have been successful. Initially, Hakl attempted to cope with this succession of bodily calamities by means of Qi Gong practice, acupuncture, and other alternative healing methods (in addition to conventional medicine). However, the limitations to his physical mobility have become so severe in recent years that he could only choose to endure his situation with patience and serenity. While doing so, his wife Franziska—whose love, tolerance, and assistance has been a great support to Hakl over the past decades—has remained his calm and calming anchor, for which Hakl feels a sense of deep gratitude and admiration.

Part II | Intellectual and scholarly biography

Praeludium

This second part of Hakl's biography focuses on Hakl as a reader, thinker, publisher, writer, and collector. It seeks to answer the following questions: What were his intellectual interests—which inevitably manifested themselves in his library—and how did these change over time? To what extent did these interests have repercussions for his activities as a publisher? And what were Hakl's motivations and intentions as a writer? The following sketch will examine each of these questions in a concise form, concluding with some biographical notes on the material manifestation of Hakl's mind: the Octagon library.

1 *Intellectual interests and influences*

As outlined above (Part I), Hakl's interest in esotericism, as well as his journey as a collector, began around the age of twelve or thirteen, sparked by his reading of Lobsang Rampa's *The Third Eye* and his discovery of Thorson Publishers. Driven by his early fascination with Eastern religions, Hakl began to practice Yoga in his teenage years. During a public yoga class, Hakl became acquainted with one of the leading Graz-based theosophists, who introduced him to his circle of friends. Through this group and its reading suggestions, Hakl gradually discovered which subjects truly interested him and which he found rather uninspiring. The first category encompassed, at that time, Yoga, Tibet, India, Eastern religions, and everything related to magic; the second category included theosophy, anthroposophy and what could generally be termed "New Age thought."

Hakl was an avid reader with wide interests from early in his life and was, thus, able to draw inspiration from a plethora of literary figures and influences, only some of which can be described here. Around the age of thirteen or fourteen, Hakl first encountered Friedrich Nietzsche and was struck by the poetic and powerful wording of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. He immediately attempted to write a work of similarly powerful diction, but came to the conclusion after several "miserably failed"¹⁶ attempts that his goal was not attainable (consequently, he destroyed all the related manuscripts). Subsequent influential readings included Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the part entitled *The Grand Inquisitor*, in particular, had a deep impact on Hakl's worldview; Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*), which Hakl would study repeatedly throughout his life; Hermann Hesse's work, which Hakl devoured wholesale, with *Demian*, *The Glass Bead Game*, and *Siddharta* leaving the greatest

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Personal communication (Graz, March 2021).

Othmar Spann (1878–1950), an influential conservative Austrian philosopher, sociologist and economist, was professor for national economy and social science (Nationalökonomie und Gesellschaftslehre) at the university of Vienna between 1919 and 1938. His work covers a wide range of topics, but he is today most well known for his support of the so-called “conservative revolution” and in particular his ‘universalist’ approach (universalistisch-idealistische Gesellschaftslehre) which was decidedly anti-modernist, anti-liberalist, anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and anti-individualist (Maaß 2010); a member of the German Nazi party NSDAP from 1930 onwards, his ideas were hence influential in the authoritarian movement of “Austrofascism” (Jezussek 2009).

Ramana Maharshi, *Gespräche des Weisen vom Berge Arunachala: Gesamtausgabe*, aus dem Engl. übertr. und hrsg. von Erich Wilzbach (Interlaken: Ansata-Verlag, ²1989); Ramana Maharshi, *Die Suche nach dem Selbst: ausgewählte Gespräche*, als Einführung ein Beitrag zum hundertsten Geburtstag von Sri Ramana Maharshi, hrsg. und eingel. von Lucy Cornelssen (Interlaken: Ansata-Verlag, ³1995).

Mircea Eliade, *The myth of the eternal return*, trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955).

Mircea Eliade, *Techniques du yoga* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); Mircea Eliade, *Le Yoga : immortalité et liberté* (Paris: Payot, 1954); Mircea Eliade, *Patanjali et le Yoga* (Paris: Éd. du seuil, 1962).

Hans Thomas Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos: unbekannte Begegnungen von Wissenschaft und Esoterik: eine alternative Geistesgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bretten: scientia nova, 2001), revised, expanded and renamed second edition: *Eranos. Nabel der Welt. Glied der goldenen Kette. Die alternative Geistesgeschichte*, 2. wesentlich erweiterte Auflage (Gaggenau: scientia nova, ²2015), trans. in English as *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

Hans Thomas Hakl, “‘I know Antaios and disapprove of it. What it cultivates is not religio but magic!’ A short history of the magazine ANTAIOS,” *Aries* 9/2 (2009): 195–232.

Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram Press, 1929), 1f.

Noam Chomsky, *Necessary illusions: thought control in democratic societies* (London: Pluto Press, 1989).

Even though Benoist’s political positions have been multi-faceted and malleable, he is often considered a spearhead of the French political movement of “Nouvelle Droite” (New Right).

impressions; Goethe’s *Faust* and Novalis’ *The Novices of Sais*, as well as the latter’s thoughts on magical idealism; Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who introduced Hakl to the philosophical movement of German idealism, and thereby also to the work of Othmar Spann, who, according to Hakl, had developed a new form of holistic economy and philosophy which captured his imagination.¹⁷

Hakl also read Sigmund Freud in his teenage years and was enthralled, partly because of Freud’s splendid parlance, but the more so because Freud satisfied Hakl’s great interest in the topic of sexuality. Inevitably, Carl G. Jung followed, and, even though Hakl initially understood little of what Jung had to say, a fascination with his concepts of *individuation* and *coincidentia oppositorum* remained throughout his life. This interest was later to manifest itself in a huge collection of works on psychology—with a particular focus on the works of Jung and his disciples—in the Octagon library. Hakl was also deeply touched by the writings of Ramana Maharshi, and Maharshi’s method of self-enquiry became a permanent companion throughout Hakl’s life (later, the Ansata Verlag would publish the collected works of Maharshi: Maharshi 1989 and 1995).¹⁸ On the topic of religious literature, Hakl was also inspired by Shankara and the *Tao Te Ching*.

Another crucial author from early on was Mircea Eliade. While reading Eliade, Hakl was often not only intellectually inspired, but also spiritually touched, as if he were transported into a different world (e.g., while reading *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*).¹⁹ Hakl often had the impression that he intuitively already knew what Eliade was writing about in the moment of reading it, particularly with regard to the notions of *Eternal Return* and *illud tempus / in illo tempore* (the latter concept also lay the ground for Hakl’s later works on Evola, René Guénon, and the Traditionalist School). With Eliade’s works, Hakl frequently felt as if he was reading religious literature rather than historical scholarship. In hindsight, Hakl distinguishes four “Eliade phases” in his life: the first phase pertains to his adolescent fascination with Yoga, through which he became acquainted with Eliade’s various works on the topic (e.g., Eliade 1948, 1954, 1962);²⁰ the second phase coincided with Hakl’s delving into the works of the Romanian historian Ioan Petru Culianu; the third phase occurred while working on the Eranos meetings and on his monograph *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*;²¹ the fourth and final phase was sparked by Hakl’s work on the journal *Antaios*, with Ernst Jünger and Mircea Eliade as nominal editors.²²

Hakl had similar sensations of “reading mysticism” through his engagement with various other authors (on his *satori* experience while reading Alan Watts, see below, Part III), including those with rather questionable reputations, such as Aleister Crowley. In fact, Hakl was sometimes deeply touched by Crowley’s poetry, as, for instance, by his *Io Pan / Hymn to Pan*.²³ Through Crowley, Hakl was also introduced to Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*. This work evoked a different kind of “reading mysticism,” in that Hakl felt so deeply drawn into the poem that it was as if he embodied Don Juan himself.

Hakl considers Noam Chomsky and Alain de Benoist to be two other important thinkers who have inspired him, the first especially through his political work *Necessary Illusions*,²⁴ the second through his learnedness and literary productivity, especially in the realm of politics.²⁵ Hakl also recalls reading George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “systematically every five years.”²⁶ Yet among all these influences, the author who clearly had

the greatest impact on Hakl's thinking was Julius Evola. Hakl first read Evola in his late teenage years, but his fascination with the writer took off around the age of twenty, when he met the German magical practitioner Adolf Hemberger and began his journey into the world of magical groups and fraternities (see below, Part III). Around this time, he also read Henry Birven, who frequently points to Evola's work as a must-read for the magical practitioner.²⁷ The experience of reading Evola, especially the first volume of his *Introduction to magic (Introduzione alla magia)*, evoked a deep yearning for autarchy and independence in Hakl, characteristics that also reminded him of his father. Through Evola, Hakl realised that he was in search of something extraordinary, the transcending of the regular boundaries of the human condition, or even self-perfection, and that Evola seemed to provide unique insights into and practices for achieving such a goal. Eventually, Evola also led Hakl to studying further protagonists of Italian esotericism, such as Giuliano Kremmerz, Massimo Scaligero, Tommaso Palamidessi, and Arturo Reghini.²⁸ As a consequence of this interest, the Octagon library today hosts one of the most comprehensive collections of Italian esoteric literature in the world. The library also reflects Hakl's related and decade-long interest in the so-called "Traditionalist school," represented by thinkers such as René Guénon, Julius Evola, Titus Burckhardt, and others.²⁹ Due to these interests, and even though Hakl's intellectual biography is obviously multi-faceted, he would by some be considered a conservative or traditionalist thinker.

2 Hakl's "Taoist" world view

Before dealing with Hakl's publishing and writing activities in greater detail, it will be necessary to sketch out a basic world view that Hakl has held throughout his life, and which he would today call "Taoist."³⁰ For Hakl, final truths do not exist, nor can they be grasped by any means. Accordingly, there is no absolute benchmark or yardstick for deciding which perception is "right" and which one is "wrong," as any such judgment is dependent on its temporal, cultural, discursive, and personal context. If there is something that comes close to an absolute truth, it would for Hakl need to rely on a form of *coincidentia oppositorum*—a coincidence of opposites (Hakl derived this term from Carl G. Jung, who in turn adopted it from his reading of Nicholas of Cusa).³¹

As a consequence (and because of his legal studies), Hakl became a strong advocate of a saying drawn from ancient Roman law: *audiatur et altera pars*—"The other side, too, must be heard." Hakl believes in this necessity with regard to both esoteric and economic contexts. In particular during his time spent working in Far Eastern countries (see above, Part I), Hakl regularly found it necessary to take account of weird or otherwise surprising standpoints and beliefs held by his employees or business partners. Hakl thus made a habit of always including opposing perspectives in his considerations. Sooner or later, he knew, one pole would evoke the other, and if the one was too dominant for too long then the other would re-emerge with even greater force. Hakl considers this pattern to be at work in cultural history as well: Manichaeism or otherwise dualistic frameworks and worldviews which systematically exclude the opposite will not survive in the long term, he holds. Such views may be thought out brilliantly and they may even be culturally successful for a while, but they are not wise (that is, equilibrated) and thus they cannot be long-lasting. According to Hakl, such "Taoistic" thinking prevents the emergence of one-sided

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"Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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"The works of Dr. Henri Birven were essential reading for me. His lucid writing style stood in stark contrast to his overbearing personality, at least according to those who knew him. At any rate, through him I became better acquainted with French occultism (Lévi, Papus, Joanny Bricaud; amendment by H. T. Hakl, 2021), etc.), which Prof. Hemberger had already recommended to me. He also led me to Julius Evola, and thereby indirectly to other representatives of the "Italian esoteric school" (which remains for me one of the most interesting and profound esoteric schools worldwide) such as Giuliano Kremmerz, Arturo Reghini and Massimo Scaligero—and also to Tommaso Palamidessi." Hakl, "There once was a young man," 14.

28

Especially the latter, Arturo Reghini, belongs, like Othmar Spann (mentioned above) and Julius Evola, to pre-WWII right-wing intellectualist milieus which supported fascist ideas and movements; on Reghini see Lloyd 2006.

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On this influential perennialist and anti-modernist current see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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On the following, see also "Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

31

David Hendersen, "The Coincidence of Opposites: C. G. Jung's Reception of Nicholas of Cusa," *Studies in Spirituality* 20 (2010): 101–13.

“I too find much to reject in Evola. I could mention his numerous unambiguously racist outpourings, especially in the newspaper *La Vita Italiana*, which are clearly unacceptable. But there is also his distinctly Manichean way of thinking, which is what lies behind his sharp separation of tradition and modernity, north and south, man and woman, Ario-Roman and Semitic. Then there are his conspiracy theories and his anti-emotionalism. His occult view of world history, which he took partly from Theosophy and which he develops in the second part of *Revolt against the Modern World*, does not appeal to me any more than the similar cosmologies of Helena Blavatsky or Rudolf Steiner.” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

For this reason, Hakl believes, Evola and his followers were instrumental in furthering J. R. R. Tolkien’s success in Italy.

“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

ideologies and is thus the opposite of linear thinking, which uniformly leads in one direction—until it eventually collapses.

For Hakl, one type of—typically Western—linear thinking is the assumption that man is actually able to fully understand and control his natural and cultural surroundings. This assumption apparently contradicts the way that nature actually works, which is specifically non-linear and rather wavelike or undulating, or, on closer examination, often also spiral-patterned. An example for Hakl is the way in which human life evolves from childhood through to old age, with its many changes, cycles, and reiterations. For Hakl, combining “Taoist” with “spiral” thinking is thus the ideal way to approach life, as such an approach always remains open to alternative vistas by enabling one to grasp with humility how often one has changed one’s own perspectives through the course of one’s life. This approach also facilitates human relations and dealing with potential conflicts. Of course, Hakl does not negate the enormous cultural significance of Aristotelian logic—*tertium non datur*: “a third option (apart from right or wrong) does not exist”—which may work perfectly in mathematics or in the realm of technology. Nevertheless, Hakl considers such a logic to be largely impractical when it comes to its application in the realm of human life.

A result of this view is that Hakl differentiates between *Wissenschaft* and *Menschenschaft*, both of which he considers to be necessary and, indeed, complementary. The key is to remain open to both options and to decide flexibly which one to apply when and in which context. Taking this approach leads to an understanding of truth which may appear to be inherently contradictory, as no truth claim will ever be unambiguous and unconditionally valid over time. For instance, from a philosophical perspective Hakl is deeply sceptical towards Christianity. In particular, the Christian concept of God appears to be peculiar and largely implausible to him, while he considers the devil to be a necessary and complementary part of God. Yet, as a cultural and historical motor, he appreciates many aspects of Christianity. Hakl does not consider himself to be a “pagan,” but nevertheless feels that the world is deeply animistic. Hakl’s “truths” are often collisions of contradictions. Thus he also criticises Evola on this basis for often arriving at Manichean or dualistic conclusions, in which opposites clash but find no equilibrium.³²

Hakl’s views on truth are the source of his general message—one might even say vocation—as an author, editor, publisher, and translator: “fight against one-dimensionality.”³³ Hakl does occasionally enjoy provoking, yet it is not simply a matter of *épater le bourgeois* (shocking the bourgeois). Rather, his concern is with spreading food for thought and ultimately initiating processes of insights and change, which may or may not be painful. For Hakl, this falls in line with his “Taoist” approach that “controversial books have their place in the world—indeed even grossly erroneous books, because they show the ways that don’t work. And frankly, I would also like to express my respect for the honest—I might even say honourable—losers in the clash of world views.”³⁴ This motivation also underlay his decade-long work on Evola. Hakl was fascinated by Evola as soon as he had read (in the late 1960s) the first volume of his *Introduction to magic*, which imprinted completely novel ideas about magic in Hakl’s mind. He was thrilled by Evola’s “clear formulations, his sharpness of mind, his arresting images (Evola has been called the “master of myths”)³⁵ and finally his eminently practical advice.”³⁶ Hakl felt that, at least in the

realm of magic, Evola knew what he was talking about, and that he wrote without false pretences, exaggerations, mythologisations, or pomposity. Hakl never intended to defend Evola's fascist and totalitarian ideas, but he did strive for a comprehensive historical understanding of the Italian author, no matter how ambiguous and disputed he may have been. Hence, Hakl kept a keen eye on Evola scholarship as soon as he had advanced to become one of its leading experts (i.e., from the mid-1980s onwards), and he continued to publish on Evola in order to prevent the esoteric Evola from extinction through a one-dimensional or otherwise ideological focus on the political Evola alone.³⁷

3 Hakl as a publisher: *Ansata*, *Gnostika*, *Octagon*

Hakl's parallel life as a publisher began around 1978, when he acquired shares in the esoteric publishing house *Ansata Verlag*, which had begun its publication activities in 1975 with a German translation of Papus' work on kabbalah. While Hakl's original goal was to preserve the *Ansata Verlag* from bankruptcy, he retained his shares until 1995 and thereby left an imprint on the German esoteric book market that spanned almost two decades. The *Ansata Verlag* published Hakl's works on Evola in the 1980s,³⁸ which led to recurrent polemical attacks against both the—at that time pseudonymous—author (Hakl aka H. T. H. or Hansen) and the publishing house.³⁹ What is more, Hakl's regular (monthly) meetings with the director of the *Ansata Verlag*, the bibliophile Paul A. Zemp (d. 1995), provided an enduring boost for his expanding library.⁴⁰ Through Zemp, Hakl became acquainted with a large number of publishers from Europe and overseas who regularly sent Hakl their new releases. After Zemp's sudden passing away in 1995, Hakl gave up his shares in the *Ansata Verlag*, which has since become part of Penguin Random House. Since the mid-1970s, the *Ansata Verlag* has published several hundred books on manifold esoteric topics.

Hakl remained in the publishing business after giving up his shares in the *Ansata Verlag*, turning his focus towards work on a journal instead. In 1996, Hakl founded, together with Wolfram and Hildegard Frietsch, the journal *Gnostika*, where he led the editorial team until 2009. Afterwards, he stayed as a consultant while the Frietschs took over the leadership. The goal of *Gnostika* was not only to systematically build bridges between insider and academic perceptions of a vast range of esoteric topics, but also to publish, often for the first time, rarities from the *Octagon* library. Between 1996 and 2020, the *Gnostika* team published 66 issues.⁴¹

In 1996, Hakl and Hildegard and Wolfram Frietsch also founded the *Archiv für altes Gedankengut und Wissen* (AAGW), a book series dedicated to rare and unusual texts (from the *Octagon* library). This project suffered somewhat from the simultaneous emergence of the World Wide Web,⁴² leading to AAGW being embedded into the publishing structure of *Gnostika* (both projects today share a website: <https://www.aagw-gnostika.de/>). At present, some fifteen books on different esoteric topics and traditions have been published in the AAGW series. The same team is also responsible for the book series *epoché*, which has by now published nine works, including, recently, Henri Birven's *Gustav Meyrink als magisch-esoterischer Dichter*⁴³ and Julius Evola's *Der Yoga der Urkraft: Tantra, Kundalini und Unsterblichkeit*.⁴⁴

Finally, between 2015 and 2018, Hakl edited a series of four major volumes that focus on the *Octagon* library. This series was published by Hildegard Frietsch's publishing house, *scientia nova*, through which Hakl

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"It was not a question of defending Evola's political ideas but rather presenting the historical facts and setting them in the context of their time. If this could not be done, then the 'esoteric' Evola would also be dead for the foreseeable future." "Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

38

Evola, *Revolté gegen die moderne Welt*; Evola, *Gruppe von Ur, Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band 1; Evola, *Die hermetische Tradition*.

39

"In an address at the Frankfurt Book Fair Umberto Eco complained in thunderous tones that in the Frankfurt bookshops, instead of books by (the Marxist) Georg Lukács, he had found Evola, Guénon and Gurdjieff. Probably hardly any of the journalists present knew who these three people were, but they knew immediately that one was supposed to be against them and very soon they also knew that *Ansata-Verlag* was exhibiting a book by Evola. I was approached by various journalists and had to explain things [...] Prompted by the statements of Eco and others, many booksellers suddenly ["without having read anything by Evola"]: amendment by H. T. Hakl 2021] accused *Ansata* of propagating Fascist ideas. Furthermore they threatened to stop all sales of *Ansata* books unless we took this wicked Evola out of our programme. This was a hefty threat for a small publishing house, especially as they demanded an immediate decision from us. But we did not want to give up so easily. So, after considering the situation carefully and assessing our powers of resistance and our bank balance, we decided to carry on." "Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl."

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"My partner Paul A. Zemp—who unfortunately died far too young—initially also compiled occult mail-order catalogues; he had a comprehensive bibliographic knowledge from which I naturally profited. In addition he knew all the essential German, English, American, French and Italian publishers in the field of esotericism, who offered him their texts in the hope he would also bring them onto the German market." Hakl, "There once was a young man," 16.

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Their table of contents can be found online, accessed June 29, 2021, <https://www.aagw-gnostika.de/gnostika/>. The jubilee number 50 of *Gnostika* was special in that it hosted a range of well-known academic authors such as Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff, Joscelyn Godwin and Marco Pasi (who occasionally also wrote contributions in other issues).

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"We envisaged beautifully bound and carefully produced, numbered editions to make the worth of

the books tangible as well. With the advent of the free accessibility of such texts on the internet and a simultaneous downturn in economic circumstances this model had to be relinquished. On the other hand, however, our aspirations for dissemination were served in the best conceivable way by the advent of the internet, even if it is human nature to place little value upon something that costs ‘nothing.’” Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 21.

43

Henri Birven, *Gustav Meyrink als magisch-esoterischer Dichter. Zur Einführung in die Probleme seiner Romane*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl (Gaggenau: H. Frietsch Verlag, 2020).

44

Julius Evola, *Der Yoga der Urkraft. Tantra, Kundalini und Unsterblichkeit*, Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Hans Thomas Hakl, aus dem Italienischen von Ferdinand Leopold (Gaggenau: H. Frietsch Verlag, 2020), orig. title *Lo Yoga della potenza* (Torino: Bocca, 1949).

45

Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*; *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 1, *Die Suche nach Vollkommenheit im Spiegel einer religionswissenschaftlichen, philosophischen und im besonderen Maße esoterischen Bibliothek* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2015).

46

Hakl, *Octagon*, vol. 1; *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 2, *The quest for wholeness: mirrored in a library dedicated to religious studies, philosophy and esotericism in particular: esoteric and religious studies research by academic authors* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2016); *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 3, *La ricerca della totalità: riflessa in una biblioteca dedicata alla Storia delle religioni, alla filosofia e, soprattutto, all'esoterismo: studi di esoterismo e religione, contributi di autori accademici* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2017); *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 4, *La recherche de perfection: dans une collection d'ouvrages dédiée, en particulier, aux travaux sur la religion, la philosophie et surtout l'esotérisme* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2018).

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Personal communication (2021).

48

Jafe Arnold, review of *Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness, Mirrored in a Library Dedicated to Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Esotericism*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, *Gnostika* 66 (2020): 87–102, 89 (publ. first in French in *Politica Hermetica* 33 [2019]: 290–301).

49

The same introductory text is published in translation in all other volumes. Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 21.

50

Evola, *Revolte gegen die moderne Welt*.

51

See Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band 1; Julius Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, ed./trans. Hans Thomas Hakl – aka H. T. Hansen, Band 2, *Schritte zur Initiatio: Theorie und Praxis des höheren Bewusstseins* (Bern: Ansata, 1997); and also his contribution to the English translation of

also published his monograph on the Eranos meetings.⁴⁵ Acknowledging Hakl’s multilingual approach, the four volumes (each of which addresses different topics) are each written in one of his four most frequently used languages: German, Italian, English, and French. The series was thus entitled *Octagon: Die Suche nach Vollkommenheit / The Quest for Wholeness / La ricerca della totalità / La recherche de perfection*.⁴⁶ The idea for this series emerged when Hakl had already begun to suffer as a result of his deteriorating physical condition (see above, Part I) and felt that the Octagon library needed to be made publicly available as a legacy for the future study of Western Esotericism (and the humanities more generally). The goal of the *Octagon* series was thus to grasp and reflect upon major aspects of the Octagon library. Accordingly, Hakl invited 91 contemporary academic scholars—many of them “dear friends”⁴⁷—to write about selected texts or traditions that have formed part of the library over the decades. “The immense swathes and depths of biographical, historical and philosophical ground explored by several dozen authors across the nearly 2000 total pages of the Octagon series”⁴⁸ can be interpreted as an *hommage* to the breadth and depth of the Octagon library itself. As Hakl mentions in his introductory chapters,⁴⁹ a side-goal of the *Octagon* series was to find an institution that would be willing to take responsibility for the Octagon library and to make it publicly available after Hakl’s decease.

As the reader is most certainly aware, Hakl’s search for such an institution was successful. Hakl had already conducted negotiations with various universities regarding a potential endowment for his library, but for various reasons none these negotiations had arrived at a satisfactory solution. As a result, Marco Pasi initiated contact with the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, which was about to create a new research centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities (*Centro Studi di Civiltà e Spiritualità Comparative*) and was looking at the possibility of expanding its library. After several meetings with Francesco Piraino and Pasquale Gagliardi, and supported by various positive assessments of the Octagon library by leading experts, a formal contract was signed on October 3, 2019, that regulated the endowment of the Octagon library after Hakl’s decease. Despite the costs involved in the transport and maintenance of the books, and the necessary architectural adjustments required on the island of San Giorgio island to host such an extensive library, the Giorgio Cini foundation was more than willing to make it possible. Hakl is particularly grateful to Marco Pasi and Edi Minguzzi for their support in this process.

4 Hakl as an author: Evola, Eranos, and other topics

As has already been mentioned (see above, Part I), Hakl began working as an author and translator from the early 1980s onwards, beginning with his German edition and translation of Julius Evola’s *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, published anonymously by the Ansata Verlag as *Julius Evola: Revolte gegen die moderne Welt*.⁵⁰ Hakl actually wanted to translate and publish Evola’s works on magic first (these were ultimately published from 1985 onwards).⁵¹ However, as he was engaged full time running his thriving company, HHS, he did not have the capacity to take on such a time-consuming task in parallel, and thus decided to publish the “easier” work, *Revolt against the Modern World*, first (there was already a German translation from 1935 to provide a starting point for the new version).

While Hakl had already published a few articles in the early 1970s

(in the periodical of the German Ordo Templi Orientis), among them a small piece on the magical practices of Paschal Beverly Randolph,⁵² his edition of Evola's *Revolte gegen die moderne Welt* was his first major publication. As the book was also quite successful from a commercial perspective (the recurring polemical attacks notwithstanding), he and Paul A. Zemp decided to publish additional works by Evola through the Ansata Verlag. In 1985, Hakl's German translation of Evola's *Introduzione alla Magia quale scienza dell'Io*⁵³ appeared, followed in 1989 by his German translation of Evola's monograph on the Hermetic tradition.⁵⁴ In 1997, Hakl published the second volume of Evola's *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*.⁵⁵ Hakl's work on Evola is the topic of a different article in this special issue (authored by Francesco Baroni), to which I refer the reader for further details on Hakl's views and interpretations of Julius Evola.

Hakl's work on the Eranos conferences took shape from the mid-1990s onwards, culminating in his acclaimed monograph *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*, first published in German in 2001 (transl. into English in 2013 as *Eranos, An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*), with a revised and expanded (as well as renamed) second edition appearing in 2015. If he was not already considered so, this work marked the point at which it could not be denied that Hakl was a serious scholar credited as such in academic circles. Hakl had stumbled across the topic of the Eranos meetings rather coincidentally, as he realised through his on-going book purchases that many of his most esteemed authors (such as Rudolf Otto, Walter F. Otto, Karl Kerényi, Mircea Eliade, Carl G. Jung, Gershom Scholem, Joseph Campbell, and Henry Corbin) had participated in the conferences.⁵⁶ Hakl had, of course, purchased the Eranos yearbooks and, while wondering why there was so little secondary literature on Eranos, decided to write an article on the topic. This article gradually grew into the 468-page monograph that finally appeared in 2001 (the expanded 2015 version has 648 pages). Hakl thoroughly enjoyed the research he carried out for this monograph, as through it he got to know many interesting scholars personally, including Jan Assman, Moshe Idel, Annemarie Schimmel, Giovanni Casadio, Magda Kerényi, and Erik Hornung.

Beyond Evola and Eranos, and despite his parallel lives as an entrepreneur (see above, Part I), publisher, book collector, and spiritual seeker (see below, Part III), Hakl's written oeuvre is extensive and cannot be outlined in full detail here. Between the early 1970s and 2021, Hakl wrote and substantially revised one monograph,⁵⁷ translated four major works of Julius Evola,⁵⁸ edited, apart from the Octagon series, a special article collection on his 60th birthday (which includes a bibliography as well as an extensive analysis of soft healing measures against hypertension),⁵⁹ wrote several dozen articles on a vast range of esoteric currents, practices, groups, and practitioners (topics include the Fraternitas Saturni, the Gruppo di Ur, the Ordo Templi Orientis, sexual magic, occult Nazism, Adonism, neopaganism, Tantrism, alchemy, and practitioners such as Nicholas Flamel, Papus, Eliphas Levi, Hans Freimark, Aleister Crowley, Adolf Hemberger, Franz Sättler-Musallam, and Maria de Naglowska), numerous fore- and afterwords, encyclopaedia entries, and review articles, and also a large number of book reviews, interviews, notes, and commentaries published in *Gnostika*.⁶⁰ It is notable that Hakl changed his publishing strategy in the mid-1990s: whereas all of his previous publications (not just his works on Evola) had been published under his pen name H. T. Hansen (or H. T. H.)—a name he had chosen to “keep his peace” despite working on a disputed author

vol. 2 from Evola's *Introduction to Magic* (Hans Thomas Hakl, “Foreword,” in Julius Evola, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin, vol. 2, *The Path of Initiatic Wisdom* [New York: Inner Traditions International, 2019], XI-XXXIII). On the Gruppo di Ur, see further Hans Thomas Hakl, “Julius Evola and the UR Group,” in *Aries* 12/1 (2012): 53–90. All three volumes are now available in English translation: see Julius Evola, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Guido Stucco, vol. 1, *Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 2001); Evola, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin, vol. 2, *The Path of Initiatic Wisdom* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 2019); Julius Evola, *Introduction to Magic*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin, vol. 3, *Realizations of the Absolute Individual* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 2021). Hakl's planned German translation of the third volume of Evola's *Introduzione alla magia* has not yet materialised because of his poor health, however (see “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”; personal communication [2021]).

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Hans Thomas Hakl (aka H. T. H.), “Psychologie der astrologischen Deutung,” “Die wahre Magie ist ein Akt der Liebe,” “Wahre Magie trägt bei zum ‘Werde was Du bist,’” “P. B. Randolph und seine Arbeiten,” *Der Illuminat* (Frankfurt/Main, ca. 1970), unpaginated.

53

Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band I.

54

Evola, *Die hermetische Tradition*.

55

Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band 2.

56

Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 17.

57

Hakl, *Der verborgene Geist von Eranos*; Hakl, *Octagon*, vol. 1.

58

Evola, *Revolte gegen die moderne Welt*; Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band 1; Evola, *Die hermetische Tradition*; Julius Evola, Gruppe von Ur, *Magie als Wissenschaft vom Ich*, Band 2.

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Hans Thomas Hakl, “Die wahre Magie ist ein Akt der Liebe” – 3 Aufsätze und Bibliographie von Hans Thomas Hakl zum 60. Geburtstag, AAGW Sonderausgabe 3, (Sinzheim: AAGW Archiv für Altes Gedankengut und Wissen, 2007).

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Hakl's complete bibliography can be found on his website: last access July 1, 2021, <https://www.lthakl-octagon.com/bibliografie/>.

“I used this pseudonym—which was quite transparent and never involved any secrecy—for a very simple reason: I wanted to be left in peace. I was an independent businessman and had good partners whom I didn’t want to bother with my esoteric interests.” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

“Prof. Antoine Faivre intervened. I had agreed to write a review of a book by Oskar Schlag for the journal *ARIES*, of which he was the co-editor. Then, when I said I wanted to write under the pseudonym of H.T. Hansen, he categorically refused. He insisted that *ARIES* was a scholarly journal and no pseudonyms were permitted. That was the turning point. From then on I began to write under my real name—even though I felt a bit naked at first and took a while to get used to it. This happened just in time for the launch in October 1996 of *Gnostika*, which carries my real name. Today I’m grateful that it turned out this way.” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.” The review in question is Hans Thomas Hakl, “Rezension zu Oskar R. Schlag, *Von alten und neuen Mysterien*,” in *Aries* 20 (1996): 94–98. Reprint in Peter R. König, *Noch mehr Materialien zum OTO* (München: ARW, 2000).

“Thus it came about that I was present at the founding of the Palladian Academy, whose aim was to bring together a circle of friends, consisting largely of “advanced” and academically trained scholars of esotericism from various different countries. We wanted to meet every year and have each participant give a talk on some esoteric theme [not barred by university boundaries; amendment by H. T. Hakl, 2021].” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

This first meeting was initiated by Joscelyn Godwin.

Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 21.

“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl”; Hakl, “There once was a young man”; Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62.

In the early 1990s, shortly after Hakl sold his shares in HHS (see above, Part I), “the idea arose of assembling as many first editions of the fundamental works in this sector as I could.” Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62, 50. Another strategy was to “to buy ‘all’ the works of my favourite authors in order to ‘completely’ possess them.” Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 14.

“In order to become somewhat of an expert in this field it was of paramount importance to be multilingual, not infrequently demanding some knowledge of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew. That is why Octagon contains so much literature in foreign languages.” Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62, 50.

Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 16.

such as Evola, and thus also to protect his economic career⁶¹—in 1996 Hakl began to use his real name (with an intermediate period of some two years during which he used both his real name and his pen name). This shift in strategy was suggested by Antoine Faivre, who had animated Hakl to publish in the kind of “scholarly” volumes that would not usually accept authors using a pseudonym.⁶²

5 *Hakl’s involvement in the emerging academic study of Western esotericism*

The 1980s and especially the 1990s saw the gradual institutionalisation and proliferation of the academic study of Western esotericism. Hakl was involved in this process in various ways, including through his book-collecting endeavours, his activities as a publisher, his contribution of articles to novel scholarly journals such as *Aries* and *Politica Hermetica*, his personal networking, and, not least, his involvement in the so-called Palladian Academy. This grouping could be considered as both an implicit successor of the Eranos meetings as well as an implicit predecessor of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism. The Academy emerged in the mid-1990s as an attempt to create a network of mutually friendly scholars and experts working on esoteric currents⁶³ and included some of today’s most well-known scholars of Western esotericism, including Antoine Faivre, Joscelyn Godwin, Wouter Hanegraaff, Jean-Pierre Brach, and Marco Pasi, among others. The idea was to meet once a year to discuss esoteric topics and exchange ideas in an informal manner. From 1997 onwards, Hakl organised and took part in various meetings of the Palladian Academy, the name of which was derived from the location of the first meeting in a villa built by the renowned architect Andrea Palladio in Northern Italy.⁶⁴ Later on, Rosalie Basten (who invested a substantial part of her personal wealth into founding the Institute for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, located in Amsterdam) would often host the group in her chateau in Southern France.

For some time, Hakl had also had the idea of founding or hosting a form of “Platonic Academy” as an affiliation to the Octagon library, much like the Medici family had fostered the Renaissance of esoteric traditions in early modern Florence.⁶⁵ However, this project never materialised, and Hakl continued to pour his energy into the Octagon library itself.

6 *The Octagon library*

Hakl has written about the emergence and structure of the Octagon library on several occasions,⁶⁶ so I will only add some personal information here that might be missing from the already-existing narratives. As may have become clear by now, the Octagon library more or less represents Hakl’s mind, his textual inspirations and worldviews, his intellectual and scholarly interests, his collecting strategies (such as hunting first editions, striving for completeness, or the addition of rarities),⁶⁷ as well as his multi-language approach.⁶⁸ As a general principle, “the collection developed from my reading, for footnotes and bibliographies always exercised an immense fascination over me.”⁶⁹ For instance, Hakl’s decade-long work on Evola inevitably led to significant expansions of the library, as Evola tends to cite *en passant* large amounts of literature from a multiplicity of disciplines, yet often without precise references. Hence, Hakl “had” to buy and study all of Evola’s references in order get a thorough understanding of Evola’s reasoning and inspirations (including further literature with diverging opinions and some fifty monographs published on Evola in various

languages). Through this process, the Octagon library gradually embedded entire sections on art (futurism and dadaism), philosophy (Plato, Pythagoras, Schelling, Fichte, Nietzsche, existentialism), ancient religions (especially Rome, Mithras, Gnosis), esoteric traditions (alchemy, freemasonry, spiritism, magic), Buddhism, Islam, Tantrism, sexuality, politics, fascism, and racial theories (Evola had written numerous books and articles on all of these diverse fields). Hakl estimates that, through his reading of Evola alone, some two to three thousand books had to be added to his collection.⁷⁰ A similar process took place in the late 1990s when Hakl was working on the Eranos meetings. Hence, Hakl admits, “some readers will also search in vain for the unity that underlies this collection. That unity does not exist, for if anything I am ‘polytheistically’ disposed, and the only coherence exists within my own person. And I am manifold.”⁷¹ On the other hand, to quote from Julia Iwersen’s *Octagon* contribution, the “syncretistic” or “eclectic” “method underlying esoteric religiosity is the same as the principle of any book collection: just like a library, and almost always with the help of such, esotericism thereby seeks to trace truth by juxtaposing sundry truths.”⁷²

Hakl has written on several occasions about his systematic collaboration with book hunters such as Nick Schors, Todd Pratum, Robert Gilbert, and Wolfgang Kistemann, who provided indispensable support for the creation and enlarging of his collection,⁷³ so this aspect need not be covered here in further detail. According to Hakl a “good” price for a specific book is never fixed but rather a matter of feeling, dependent on the current situation of the market. Over the past decades, the book market has changed considerably, with a major shift taking place around the turn of the millennium. As a result, Hakl’s most “‘bountiful’ period of book collecting as well as an especially intensive acquisition of periodicals came to a near end. Rare books had become too expensive, and I too had to be more economical with money (I didn’t wish to continue in business due to my esoteric studies). Hence I limited myself to filling any possible gaps in my holdings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century esoteric literature, as well as acquiring new publications.”⁷⁴ The internet has had advantages as well as disadvantages for Hakl’s book collecting endeavour. A significant number of booksellers and antiquarians have gone bankrupt since the late 1990s, due to the globalisation and increased competition induced by the internet. At the same time, rarities have become much more expensive due to increasing pressures on the demand side of the market. However, despite the changes it has wrought, Hakl has always appreciated the emergence of the internet, partly because it has granted easier access to catalogues and has facilitated the search for books more generally.

In hindsight, Hakl would argue that his “collecting mania” was, for the most part,⁷⁵ driven by his intellectual curiosity. Most books he wanted to read from early on were not available in public libraries, especially when it came to foreign-language books, and as his curiosity seemed almost infinite, he had no other choice but to buy them. However, rather sooner than later Hakl’s collecting strategies and habits underwent a process with its own internal dynamics, especially from the moment at which the volume of his collecting reached a pace at which he was increasingly unable to actually read the books he so urgently needed to acquire. “A somewhat vampiric desire for ‘completeness,’ which after all can never be fully satisfied, often comes along as well. Friends know my saying: ‘I don’t possess the library, the library possesses me.’”⁷⁶ In this regard, Hakl also interprets his collection from the viewpoint of the “law of attraction.” Despite

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 16.

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 9.

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“Ein Merkmal der Beliebtheit, die der Esoterik hier und da zum Vorwurf gemacht wird—ihres ‘Synkretismus’ oder ‘Eklektizismus’ oder auch zu ihrer Toleranz—ist, dass sie sich mit Büchern jeden Inhalts abgibt: etablierten heiligen Schriften neben modernen Offenbarungstexten, Erbauungstraktäthen, philosophischen Abhandlungen, Ratgebern für alle Lebenslagen, Weltliteratur, Trivilliteratur und Schund. Auch die esoterischer Religiosität zu Grunde liegende Methode ist dieselbe wie das Prinzip einer jeden Büchersammlung: Ebenso wie die Bibliothek und fast immer mit ihrer Hilfe will die Esoterik der Wahrheit dadurch auf die Spur kommen, dass sie verschiedene Wahrheiten nebeneinander stellt.” Iwersen, Julia, “Bibliotheksgenie und verborgene Geister – Der Leser als Schamane,” in *Octagon*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, vol. 1, *Die Suche nach Vollkommenheit im Spiegel einer religionswissenschaftlichen, philosophischen und im besonderen Maße esoterischen Bibliothek: esoterische und religionswissenschaftliche Forschungen von akademischen Autorinnen und Autoren* (Gaggenau: scientia nova, 2015), 26–49, 35; Arnold Jafe, review of *Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness, Mirrored in a Library Dedicated to Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Esotericism*, ed. Hans Thomas Hakl, *Gnostika* 66 (2020): 87–102, 91–92 (publ. first in French in *Politica Hermetica* 33 [2019]: 290–301).

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“In order to acquire truly rare and ancient books you must have personal contacts with booksellers who specialize in the so-called art of book hunting. They travel continuously around the world to visit auctions and bookshops, as well as their old clients, to find the treasures they are searching for. Because I owe them so much, I will name a couple of them, although most of them have gone out of business in this modern world of the Internet. The most renowned of them was probably Nick Schors of Amsterdam, who to a great extent is responsible for the richness of the libraries of the likes of Joseph Ritman, C. G. Jung, Antoine Faivre, and Gershom Scholem. These book-hunters had an enormous knowledge in their field and consequently I learnt a lot from them. Besides Nick I just name a few others out of pure gratitude. There was Todd Pratum from Oakland, USA, who found for me not only manuscripts from secret societies but also mimeographed lectures of C. G. Jung and first editions of Robert Fludd and Athanasius Kircher. In the UK I recall Robert Gilbert of Bristol (a specialist in Freemasonry and occult orders). In Germany there were Wolfgang Kistemann (Gold- and Rosicrucianism and Alchemy) and Volker Lechler. In France one must name Dervy Livres, La Table d’Éméraude and Alain Marchiset, and in Italy both Bruno Bertozzi of Genoa and Laszlo Toth of Milan.” Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62. See also Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 14f.

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 19.

“But why on earth does somebody amass so many books? Because they wish to err on the side of caution and have everything verified? Because they are under the impression they own the knowledge accumulated therein, although at the very most one can only claim to own printed paper bound in parchment? Because it is socially acceptable to do so? In other words: due to insecurity? There’s surely more than a mere grain of truth to that.” Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 20.

Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 20–21.

Hans Blüher, *Werke und Tage: Geschichte eines Denkers* (München: List, 1953), 217.

“Here the Latin aphorism Nietzsche so beautifully elucidated comes to mind: ‘aut libri aut liberi’ (‘either books or children’). That doesn’t necessarily imply chastity, but certainly renunciation of the nurturing instinct so disrespectfully described by Nietzsche as ‘lay eggs, cackle, brood’—a source of joy on the one hand, but highly energy-consuming on the other. As I was not destined to have children, so only books were left to me.” Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 20.

“Besides all the splendour and joy, there are also pensive or even melancholy points when one devotes oneself to collecting books: life passes by still more quickly. But one first realises this only in old age, when it is already (almost) too late. The time expenditure for collecting is so massive (reading catalogues and offerings, ordering, making payments, compiling book lists, classifying) that one hardly finds the time for sociability or conversations with family and friends in the course of the year. And precisely because I collected so many books, only a little time remained for reading, and I was completely unable to pursue many of my interests. The classic paradox of the collector.” Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 22.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “‘Ad loca secretiora’: Rejected Knowledge and the Future of Libraries,” in *Octagon*, vol. 2 (Gaggenau: scientia nova Verlag Neue Wissenschaft, 2016), 25–34, 33.

Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62, 51–52.

Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 21.

Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62, 52.

eventually feeling impelled or possessed by his library, he has never really clung to his books. Rather, they seemed instead to come to and cling to him; Hakl alludes to Hans Blüher’s concept of “bibliomagic” (see, e.g., Blüher)⁷⁷ for his ability to almost “magnetically” attract the books that needed to be conjoined in his library. Against the backdrop of the Latin aphorism *aut libri aut liberi* (“either books or children”), Hakl also considers his childlessness as a factor that has impacted the development of the Octagon library.⁷⁸

Yet, book collecting comes at a price. The time investment is enormous (not to speak of the monetary commitment) and takes a significant amount of life energy away from many other things, such as spending time with one’s family or friends, or the pursuit of other, non-literary, interests (in Hakl’s case, one example is his pronounced love for classical music and literature).⁷⁹ Nevertheless, for Hakl books represent something that is much bigger than oneself, and with regard to the Octagon library—which is, in Wouter Hanegraaff’s words, a “massive memory bank of rejected knowledge, with many materials that are simply impossible to find anywhere else”⁸⁰—Hakl felt the urgent need to “preserve the sort of wisdom I regard as important in our modern world, where technology and materialism reign supreme and which needs a compensatory balance of humanity and spiritual knowledge.”⁸¹ At the time of writing (July 2021), the Octagon library comprises almost 50,000 books and some 200 running metres of journals (ca. 14,000), correspondence, autographs, and other materials. Hakl concedes that, “although I am surely not a ‘knower’ myself, nor a ‘scholarly’ writer in my chosen field (I studied law), I nevertheless wish to pass on the ‘torch’ by preserving valuable foundations of this knowledge beyond my death.”⁸² His enduring hope is that “the collection will take a life on its own.”⁸³

Part III | Spiritual and magical biography

Praeludium

In contrast to the first and second parts of Hakl’s biography published here, which focused on the personal and economic dimensions of his life (Part I) and on his intellectual and scholarly activities (Part II), this third part is of a somewhat different nature, and it is also more intimate. Hakl’s library cannot be understood from the perspective of his economic and intellectual background alone. Rather, one also needs to take into account his spiritual development, his involvement in esoteric practices and groups, and, ultimately, his fascination with magic. These topics form the subject matter of this third part of Hakl’s biography.

1 Adolescent experiences

In hindsight, Hakl considers his adolescent years as “those happy days” during which he still managed—that is, he actually had and took the time—to read every book he acquired. And if there were practical exercises described in these books, he would often try them out. Apart from his early yoga practice (see above, Part I), one of Hakl’s first systematic exercises was drawn from self-help books that teach the acquisition of wealth through imagination techniques. From his early teenage years, Hakl had felt a strong urge to acquire wealth, partly driven by the desire to buy as many books as possible and to

have enough time to study them (a side motivation was, he admits, to heighten his ability to attract interesting women). He therefore began to read biographies of successful and wealthy people and families—such as the Rothschilds—and, inspired by mid-20th century self-help authors such as Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, and the economist Peter F. Drucker, attempted to follow in their footsteps.⁸⁴ Over the course of roughly two to three years during his late teenage period, Hakl engaged in daily imagination practices that focused on the acquisition of wealth. In hindsight, one might argue that, in Hakl's case, the effects claimed for these practices have at least not been falsified.

Hakl continues to believe in a particular “law” when it comes to the acquisition of wealth. For Hakl, the fundamental necessity for becoming wealthy is to remain completely free from greed. As soon as one is greedy (as manifested through, for example, saving too much or exploiting other people), one becomes dependent and anxious, and one thus remains trapped in emotional—that is, unfree—considerations and decisions. For Hakl, dependency is the precondition for achieving nothing at all, be it in the realms of wealth, friendship, success, or women. Hakl claims that it was through reading Julius Evola's works that this point became decisively clear to him: Evola's recurring advice for achieving success in any given realm is to remain neutral, and the more so when it comes to power. Power only comes to those who remain completely indifferent to it, that is, to those who will not actually use it.⁸⁵

One of Hakl's most intense spiritual experiences happened early in his life. Hakl was, unsurprisingly, fascinated by Buddhism and he even voluntarily left the church at the age of 18 (Hakl had been baptised as a Catholic) after his reading of Georg Grimm's pioneering German works on Buddhism. At that time, Hakl considered Hinayana Buddhism to be the ideal religion. One day—his mother's “laundry day,” Hakl recalls—he read Alan Watts' bestseller *The Way of Zen*⁸⁶ and suddenly underwent something that in that very book would have been classified as a *satori* experience: “Before the experience I had the ordinary perception that every meadow was green and that the sky was blue. After the experience, the meadows were indeed still green and the sky was still blue, but with a special intensity. As it were, I had ‘completely’ understood why this was so and could not be different in any other way.”⁸⁷ This intense experience lasted for two to three days, and it changed Hakl's life quite fundamentally. Apart from the fact that he suddenly felt completely detached from the quarrels with his mother (who was particularly stressed on that day due to her laundry work), Hakl, from that moment on, understood Eastern and esoteric literature in a much deeper and much more intuitive manner without any intellectual effort. All mysteries felt as if they had been resolved.

2 *Magical groups*

During his teenage years, Hakl had also begun to read books on magic and, out of curiosity, practised some of the exercises he found in those books, such as the lesser pentagram ritual. One of his initiatory readings was Herbert Döhren's (aka H. E. Douval's) *Bücher der praktischen Magie*⁸⁸ which gave him a first impression of the practicability of magic. A few years later, Hakl was particularly “inspired by William Gray and his book *Magical Ritual Methods*. Here I found a down-to-earth explanation of magic, which one could apply without feeling ridiculous.”⁸⁹ Hakl's journey into the world of magical groupings and fraternities began in 1967, when Dr. Klingsor's (aka Adolf Hemberger's) book

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 12.

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Hakl asked me to cite Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* for passages that clarify his own standpoint towards wealth:

“I am without possessions,” said Siddhartha, “if this is what you mean. Surely, I am without possessions. But I am so voluntarily, and therefore I am not destitute.” “But what are you planning to live of, being without possessions?”

“I haven't thought of this yet, sir. For more than three years, I have been without possessions, and have never thought about of what I should live.”

“So you've lived of the possessions of others.”

“Presumably this is how it is. After all, a merchant also lives of what other people own.”

“Well said. But he wouldn't take anything from another person for nothing; he would give his merchandise in return.”

“So it seems to be indeed. Everyone takes, everyone gives, such is life.”

“But if you don't mind me asking: being without possessions, what would you like to give?”

“Everyone gives what he has. The warrior gives strength, the merchant gives merchandise, the teacher teachings, the farmer rice, the fisher fish.”

“Yes indeed. And what is it now what you've got to give? What is it that you've learned, what you're able to do?”

“I can think. I can wait. I can fast.”

“That's everything?”

“I believe, that's everything!”

“And what's the use of that? For example, the fasting - what is it good for?”

“It is very good, sir. When a person has nothing to eat, fasting is the smartest thing he could do. When, for example, Siddhartha hadn't learned to fast, he would have to accept any kind of service before this day is up, whether it may be with you or wherever, because hunger would force him to do so. But like this, Siddhartha can wait calmly, he knows no impatience, he knows no emergency, for a long time he can allow hunger to besiege him and can laugh about it. This, sir, is what fasting is good for.”

Kamaswami conducted his business with care and often with passion, but Siddhartha looked upon all of this as if it was a game, the rules of which he tried hard to learn precisely, but the contents of which did not touch his heart. He soon saw that Siddhartha knew little about rice and wool, shipping and trade, but that he acted in a fortunate manner, and that Siddhartha surpassed him, the merchant, in calmness and equanimity, and in the art of listening and deeply understanding previously unknown people. “This Brahman,” he said to a friend, “is no proper merchant and will never be one, there is never any passion in his soul when he conducts our business. But he has that mysterious quality of those people to whom success comes all by itself, whether this may be a good star of his birth, magic, or something he has learned among Samanas. He always seems to be merely playing with out business affairs, they never fully become a part of him, they never rule over him, he is never afraid of failure, he is never upset by a loss.” (Hesse 1922 ed. Pullen [ebook], 67–71).

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Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Pantheon,

1957).

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Personal communication by Hans T. Hakl (Graz, March 2021). My translation.

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H. E. Douval, *Bücher der praktischen Magie*, 12 vols. (Freiburg i. Br.: H. Bauer, 1954–1956).

89

“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl”; William G. Gray, *Magical Ritual Methods* (Cheltenham: Helios Book 1969).

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Dr. Klingsor, *Experimental-Magie. Ein Leitfadens magischer Praktiken u. Beschwörungsrituale* (Freiburg im Br.: Bauer, 1967).

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Adolf Hemberger, *Documenta et Ritualia Fraternitas Saturni*, 17 vols. (Gießen: author's edition, 1970); Stephen Flowers, *Fener & Eis : die magischen Lehren des deutschen Geheimordens Fraternitas Saturni* (Wien: Edition Ananael, 1993).

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No scholarly research has yet been carried out on Hemberger, apart from a brief note published by Hakl in *Gnostika* (Hakl 1998), some notes by Peter König (König 1998) and Marco Frenschkowski (Frenschkowski 2007, 175f.), and an unpublished paper given by Hakl at one of the meetings of the Palladian Academy.

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Hakl, “Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,” 48–62, 50. See further “Still today I have in my safe-keeping his handwritten diaries with numerous alchemical experiments. Without doubt, Worel decisively influenced me. He was already around eighty years old when I first met him; I was impressed not only by his precious books, but still more by the fact people constantly visited him. Their purpose was to speak with him concerning his studies, and in so doing hold one or another rare book in their hands. [. . .] I could only visit him once a week, for perhaps two hours at a time. He simply had too much to do and too many visitors. He surely didn't suffer from the slightest trace of loneliness in his old age, nor from a shortage of significant younger (and hence invigorating) acquaintances. Moreover, because he readily wrote to well-known authors and collectors as well as magical orders in the German-speaking lands, he had a lively exchange with such people. Back then it was already clear to me: to own an important library is to possess an antidote to the frustrations of aging.” Worel's library was auctioned in Munich after his death. Hakl oversaw the process at the behest of Worel's widow. Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 12–13.

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On Schlag, see Antoine Faivre, “Schlag, Oskar Rudolf,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1040–42.

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Hakl, “There once was a young man,” 13.

Experimentalmagie appeared.⁹⁰ Despite the book being a rather unsystematic and conjuration-focused hodgepodge of many different practices and rituals, Hakl was fascinated by its sigils, glyphs, and symbols, and also by its frequent allusions to existing magical groups (Hemberger would later publish 17 volumes of—partially contested—material from the Fraternitas Saturni, thereby creating media attention and controversies;⁹¹ Hemberger also published privately printed books on other magical orders in the form of hectographs). Hakl immediately wrote to the publisher and asked whether they would connect him with this mysterious “Dr. Klingsor” (a pseudonym Hemberger had taken from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzifal*).

Hemberger was an interesting figure in the history of German occultism in his own right.⁹² From 1972 to 1990, he was full Professor of Theory of Science at the University of Gießen, and lectured on, among many other topics, economics, politics, psychology (especially psychosomatics), freemasonry (including student's fraternities), and hypnosis. He was also one of the first academics to systematically collect the documents and rituals of magical orders, many of which would have been lost without him. Hemberger functioned as Hakl's door opener to the illustrious world of magical groups. Shortly after Hakl's initial letter, Hemberger visited Hakl in Graz and introduced him to Karl Worel, who, according to Hemberger, was the “last” practising alchemist and also the owner of an extensive esoteric library of some five thousand books and magazines. From Worel, whom Hakl frequently visited, he learned “that you will never be lonely if you possess an important library. Interesting people continue to visit you, if only to hold one or another rare book in their hands.”⁹³ When Hakl subsequently visited Hemberger in Germany, Hemberger introduced him to Guido Wolther (Frater Daniel), who was the grandmaster of the Fraternitas Saturni at that time, as well as to Walter Englert, head of the German Order of Illuminati. In both cases, Hakl was allowed to explore their respective libraries and to attend various invocation and evocation rituals (these did not, however, impress Hakl much). Later, Wolther would sell original material from the Fraternitas Saturni to Hakl, which now forms part of the Octagon library. Through Hemberger, Hakl also became acquainted with Ellic Howe, who was at that time one of the leading specialists of esoteric traditions, especially that of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and with William G. Gray, one of the most famous British ritual magicians of the mid-20th century. Gray suggested that Hakl should follow Gray's spiritual teacher, a man from Austria, but Hakl was neither interested in pursuing a magical career nor had the time to do so due to his busy schedule running HHS. As a result, Hakl's connection with Gray was friendly but (unfortunately, in Hakl's view) short.

Hemberger also introduced Hakl to Oskar Schlag from Zurich, head of the Hermetische Gesellschaft in Switzerland at the time. Schlag was a well-known figure in German-speaking esoteric milieus due to his extensive library and his skills as a medium and psychotherapist.⁹⁴ Hakl developed a long-standing connection to Schlag (“For over twenty years I met him regularly in his house for conversations about books; I learnt a great deal from him.”⁹⁵ Both lived in Zurich and Hakl frequently bought items from Schlag's extensive collection of esoteric books (whose 22,000 volumes are today situated in the university library of Zurich).⁹⁶ Eventually, Hakl was invited to Oskar Schlag's (nameless) magical order and its temple, where he also got to know Rüdiger Dahlke and Thorwald Dethlefsen, two well-known protagonists of German-speaking discourses on

alternative healing, reincarnation therapy, and channelling.⁹⁷

Hemberger also connected Hakl with Joseph Grasser, who led a branch of the Martinist order in Paris (Les Stephanios) and for whom Hakl eventually translated various medieval Latin texts in exchange for photocopies of some rare works of Aleister Crowley (Crowley's sexual writings, in particular, were not publicly available at that time). Through Hemberger, Hakl also became acquainted with a branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis in Stein, Appenzell, and with its leader, Joseph Metzger. Hakl was allowed to inspect and study in the group's extensive private library,⁹⁸ and he also partook in a Gnostic mass, although he found this rather unimpressive. Hemberger also had a magical group of his own to which he had given the name C72. Without ever having undergone any formal initiation, Hakl was appointed by Hemberger as O.H.O. (Outer Head of the Order). Hakl occasionally partook in some of its rituals and evocations, of both demons and good genii. However, as Hakl continued to pursue other magical interests at the same time, Hemberger eventually decided to ritually dismiss him from the order—an event which some of Hakl's friends still today consider to be related to his physical maladies (Hakl does not share this belief). Yet, Hemberger and Hakl never engaged in direct conflict or strife, and Hemberger later introduced Hakl to a Swiss branch of the Martinist order. Hemberger also continued to assist Hakl in his book-collecting endeavour "by naming acquaintances from the most diverse magical orders who were willing to sell to me."⁹⁹ However, according to Hakl, Hemberger's life ultimately came to a sad end, as he became increasingly frightened and alcohol-driven due to a combination of debt and his on-going demonic evocations.¹⁰⁰

This period of his life—which lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1970s—was remarkable in several respects. During this time, Hakl was directly introduced to the leading figures and circles of important groups (the Fraternitas Saturni in Germany, the German Order of Illuminati, the Ordo Templi Orientis in Switzerland, the Martinist order in Paris and Switzerland, Oskar Schlag's group, and Hemberger's C72), either by Hemberger himself or by other contacts. Even though Hakl never underwent any formal initiation into any of these groups (apart from a brief initiation ritual for Oskar Schlag's group), he was embraced by their leaders or leading circles, granted access to their temples and libraries, and allowed to partake in some of their group rituals. While this would surely have been the height of fantasy for many practitioners of the time, Hakl was generally unimpressed by both the leaders of these groups as well as their exuberant ceremonies. He found friends in these groups and willingly learned about their ideas and practices, but he never had any extraordinary experiences in any of the rituals he attended, never felt that the groups' leaders were particularly spiritually advanced (even though he might have felt a general sympathy for them), and never found anything in these groups that convinced him to become a formal member and pursue a magical career. On the contrary, he usually found their rituals to be contrived and histrionic, and he was neither afraid of nor did he actually believe in their effects. Perhaps the most important consequence for Hakl of knowing these groups and practitioners was that he gained access to their libraries and thus to a huge volume of rare or even unique documents. As, ironically (according to Hakl), practitioners of magic are notoriously often short of funds, during this period Hakl made many good deals for the expansion of his book collection.¹⁰¹

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Hakl later published a critical statement on Oskar Schlag in *Aries* 20 (see Hakl, "Rezension zu Oskar R. Schlag, Von alten und neuen Mysterien," 94–98) in which he points to Schlag's ambivalent character and employs Jung's notion of *Pseudologia Fantastica* in order to explain why Schlag had narrated at least three very different versions of his own biography.

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On Dahkle and Dethlefsen, see various contributions in Hakl 2015.

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"I was able to inspect another bounteous esoteric library at the Swiss O.T.O. in Stein/Appenzell. There it was Frau Borgert, Frau Aeschbach and also Hermann Metzger himself who allowed me to delve into and peruse the order's large collection." Hakl, "There once was a young man," 13.

This library is now part of the *Collectio Magica et Occulta* of the Kantonsbibliothek Appenzell Ausserrhoden in Trogen: see Hakl 2021, 50.

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Hakl, "There once was a young man," 12.

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More details are provided in Hakl's unpublished paper presentation at the Palladian Academy.

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Hakl, "Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness," 48–62, 50.

Personal communication (“Kasperletheater”: Graz, March 2021). This also relates to Hakl’s personal experiences with ritual magic, which were in total rather disappointing, and Hakl recalls that he was usually too impatient to await its potential effects. His general impression was thus that he could not find in Western ritual magic what he was looking for.

“The reason for that lay partly in my sceptical attitude towards esoteric leaders and movements, and partly it had to do with chance happenings in my life. Precisely because I knew so many esotericists, I saw how relative their knowledge was. During my ‘hippy’ time in England, drifting through the London parks, I consorted with several different groups—the Children of God, the Hare Krishna people, and various others. Every time I consorted with one of these groups I learnt a great deal and made friends, but I was never really satisfied. I was always looking for some over-arching knowledge that would transcend and subsume all of these individual paths.” “Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

Werner Zurfluh, *Quellen der Nacht. Luzides Träumen und Reisen außerhalb des Körpers. Neue Dimensionen der Selbsterfahrung* (Interlaken: Ansata, 1983).

Hakl was certainly a charismatic man at the time, but he would generally ascribe his mysterious “success” in these groups to his good reputation (especially as conveyed by Hemberger), to his apparent business success, and also to his relative “disinterest” in their teachings and practices (recall that Hakl was an aficionado of Evola from his early twenties, and he thus tended to consider the type of ritual magic that he encountered in these groups to be a form of “puppet theatre”).¹⁰² Due to his knowledge of a wide range of literature, magical groups, and practitioners, Hakl had also developed a deeply relativistic perspective on spiritual truth(s) (see above, Part II), a perspective that made him notoriously sceptical towards unverifiable claims, and that would have made it difficult for him to become entrenched in any particular magical path. What Hakl was looking for throughout his life—this also functioned as a guiding principle in the compilation of his book collection—was a superior knowledge that would encompass and transcend the truth claims of individual spiritual paths.¹⁰³ In this regard, Hakl’s search remains inevitably unfulfilled, but at least with regard to the issue of magic, Hakl’s reading of Julius Evola apparently “relativised” most of the practical approaches that he encountered throughout this life.

Around 1980, Hakl’s interest and involvement in magical groups ceased. Apart from a brief episode in a newly founded “hermetic” group in Zurich in the late 1980s, Hakl did not engage in further magical activities from the early 1980s onwards (even though Hakl continues to meet and communicate with practitioners down to today). The episode in the late 1980s involved a “secret” group founded by Oskar Schlag, which Schlag had urged Hakl to join in previous years. Hakl finally agreed to participate, as many well-known practitioners were said to be involved, and he attended a few of its meetings over the course of roughly one year. However, he was again neither interested in nor impressed by the group’s ceremonies, robes, and other rigmarole. After the sale of his shares in his Zurich-based company HHS (see above, Part I), Hakl decided to leave the group and to focus on his library and scholarly endeavours instead.

3 *Lucid dreaming and further practices*

A quite distinct chapter in Hakl’s spiritual biography pertains to his experimentation with lucid dreaming. Hakl had come across lucid dreaming techniques in the mid-1970s, through his contact with Paul A. Zemp (Ansata Verlag) and, through Zemp, with Werner Zurfluh. Zurfluh’s vivid descriptions of his nightly lucid dreaming experiences, which he would later publish with the Ansata Verlag,¹⁰⁴ made a great impression on Hakl, who began to experiment with the technique in his late 30s. For roughly one year, between 1975 and 1976, Hakl systematically practised lucid dreaming and thereby achieved a certain degree of control over his dreams—that is, he managed to consciously shape their contents. However, after many positive experiences, Hakl dreamed that he had died, suddenly confronting him with an existential fear of death. The dream faded slowly, but the fear remained.

The repercussions of this episode were quite severe. Even though Hakl soon refrained from his lucid dreaming practices, he could not shake off the necrophobia that had arisen through his lucid dreaming. As a consequence, he suffered from significant sleep disturbances in the years that followed. Interpreting this episode in hindsight as a potential doorway towards an experience of ego-lessness (sparked by a preceding existential fear of death), Hakl presumes that he unfortunately failed to stride

through the door that opened to him. Instead, he had to learn to live with the fear, which became a steady companion for at least a decade. He attempted to do so primarily through extensive hiking from the early 1980s onwards, driven by the belief that nature is the greatest healer. He also ascribes the emergence of a profound midlife crisis in his late 40s to the fact that he never actually managed to overcome this fear. Hakl was never willing to accept or have faith in a personal spiritual teacher, who might have been able to help him, and had in fact rejected various offers from such potential teachers over the years.

Even though Hakl delved deeply into the history of Tantrism through his work on Evola (see above, Part II), he had never actively engaged in Tantric practices. Another of Hakl's life-long interests (which also manifested itself in his library) relates to sexuality, and to sexual magic in particular. Hakl has collected material on sexual magic for over thirty years, and, if not for his health, would have attempted to write an extensive work on the topic.¹⁰⁵ Yet from a practical perspective he neither had impressive experiences of or evidence for the practice of sexual magic, despite his occasional experimentation with it during the 1970s. In the late 1990s, Hakl began to practise Qi Gong with a teacher in Graz,¹⁰⁶ which he enjoyed very much as it also reflected his Taoist perspective (see above, Part II). Unfortunately, his polyneuropathy has also put an end to this practice in recent years.

In sum, Hakl's life has been characterised by a pronounced spiritual striving, but when it came to his occasional dabbling in esoteric practices, he was only seldom touched by, let alone satisfied with, their effects or results. Even though Hakl had some profound spiritual experiences—foremost, his *satori* experience at the age of eighteen, but also his lucid dreaming experiences in his late 30s—he never had the sense that he had found what he was searching for in any particular spiritual group or school, apart from a certain attitude to or awareness of life that he derived from his reading of Evola and other admired authors such as Ramana Maharshi (one might say that Hakl was mostly a “reading-mystic”: see above, Part II). In contrast, from early on in his life, Hakl had everything he ever needed from a material perspective: he jetted around the world on first-class tickets, he was economically extremely successful, he was now and then accompanied by a lovely wife who facilitated his various careers with her full support, and he managed to pursue his life-dream—the building up of a huge library of esoteric (and other) books—with great success. Hakl's life-long search for some “ultimate” spiritual truth may remain unfulfilled,¹⁰⁷ but future visitors to his collection will benefit from the fact that Hakl successfully managed to channel this search into his library—thus creating a profound legacy that will fertilise the study of Western esotericism for decades to come.

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“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl”; Hans Thomas Hakl, “The Theory and Practice of Sexual Magic, Exemplified by Four Magical Groups in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

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“Interview mit Dr. Hans Thomas Hakl.”

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As he ironically admits in the title of an autobiographical sketch in 2016b: “There once was a young man who left home in order to buy lots of books, and even as an old man he hadn't got any wiser and still diligently kept buying them . . . ?”