

Take Back the Night

ban electricity

Peter Lamborn Wilson

2004

Electricity was known to the ancients. Archaeologists found primitive batteries in Crete—probably based on lost Mesopotamian or Egyptian prototypes. Clearly the old mages kept it a deep secret. Franklin didn't discover it, he appropriated it from Hermeticism and gave it to the very politicians and merchants deemed "profane" and kept in the dark by real alchemists for millennia.

Franklin may have stolen the secret from some Gentian Rosicrucian in Philadelphia, someone like Johannes Kelpus the Sage of the Wissahickon. Nor should the Hell Fire Club be considered innocent of true secrets: nor should the Royal Society be considered untainted by occultism. Newton, Boyle, Priestly, Erasmus Darwin—all crypto-hermeticists. Why not their pal Franklin'?

Electricity was meant to be a rare mysterious luxury known only to acupuncturists, illusionists, & philosophers. The Frankenstein Moment might've been avoided. (GE's motto: "Science brings good things to life.") Genies that escape their bottles threaten to destroy Earth. As it stands, electricity—which still eludes exact definition and cannot be "explained"—has polluted most of the world with a constant angst—inducting humummmunmm—and a universal leprosy of mystery-banishing light. The opposite of the Dark Age is the Lite Age.

It's the absence of electricity that's become a luxury now rather than its almost omnipresence. Every recording is the tombstone of a live performance.

Live by lamplight and you live with the strength and silky texture of a million years of organic life. Live with electricity, and you live face-to-face with a TomorrowLand that never quite arrives.

Some people like Black-Outs—consciously because they enjoy seeing things fucked up (many children feel this way); perhaps unconsciously because the vast regional web of inorganic vibration—the constant tension of the panopticonal mantra—the filth of dead light and noise (mostly subliminal) suddenly dies with a moan. Other people fear Black-Outs—for the same reasons. It depends on your relation with night, with darkness and primitivity.

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