



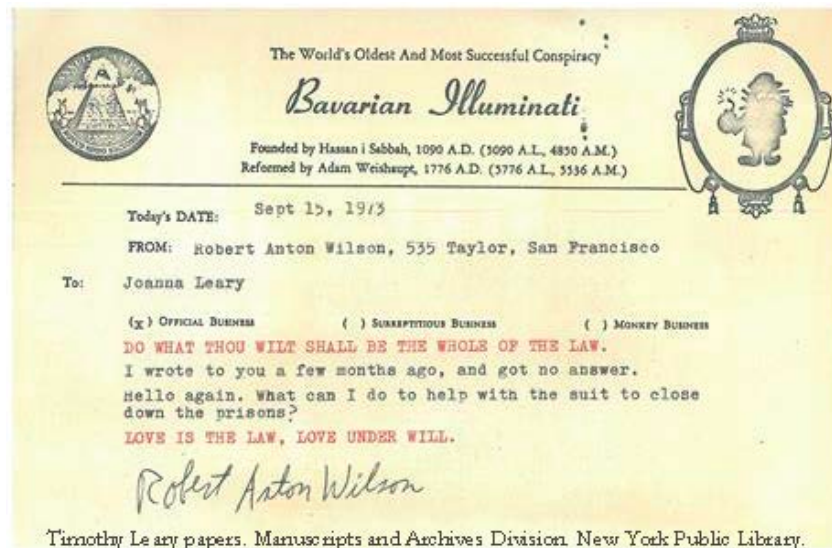
## ARCHIVES

## Short-Term Research Fellowship: Timothy Leary as Illuminatus!

by J. Christian Greer

September 8, 2014

The [Manuscripts and Archives Division](#) at the New York Public Library has proof that Timothy Leary was in the Illuminati. Or, if he was not an 'illuminated' one himself, there is evidence in the [Timothy Leary papers](#) that he was in correspondence with representatives of this mythically ambiguous organization from the time of his incarceration in Folsom onwards. Identified, at the top of their stationary, as 'The Bavarian Illuminati: The World's Oldest Most Successful Conspiracy,' the group responsible for the letters was neither Madame Blavatsky's Ascended Masters, nor 32nd degree Freemasons. They were members of a ludic, minority religion called The Discordian Society. Chief among this group of metaphysical pranksters was amateur historian of esotericism, self-proclaimed witch, and novelist [Robert Anton Wilson](#), who, throughout his career, co-opted the seemingly irrepressible cross-cultural meme of the Illuminati to illustrate and promote his interpretation of Discordianism.



Timothy Leary papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.  
*Robert Anton Wilson (RAW), letterhead of the Bavarian Illuminati, Sept 15, 1973*

Preserved in the Timothy Leary papers are large segments of an

epistolary exchange between Leary and Wilson, the 'Illuminati Primus,' in which Wilson discusses at length the "Discordian mysteries," Aleister Crowley's "magick," and Gurdjieff's self-observation techniques. Having only met him in person a handful of times before Leary's incarceration at Folsom, Wilson's admiration for Leary was nonetheless a hallmark of his writing. Indeed, even before their prison-letter exchange Wilson had integrated Leary and his work into his own occult philosophy, and by extension, Discordianism's complicated myths. It was the prison letter exchange, though, that laid the foundation for their decades-long friendship, during which they co-authored books, developed a psychologized form of esotericism termed "the 8-Circuit Model of Consciousness," and collaborated on "stand-up philosophy" tours throughout the United States. Financial difficulties prohibited the Robert Anton Wilson estate from maintaining a posthumous archive, and thus the Leary papers at NYPL represents not only an essential resource for Wilson's work, but also acts as one of the few repositories of Discordianism's material history.



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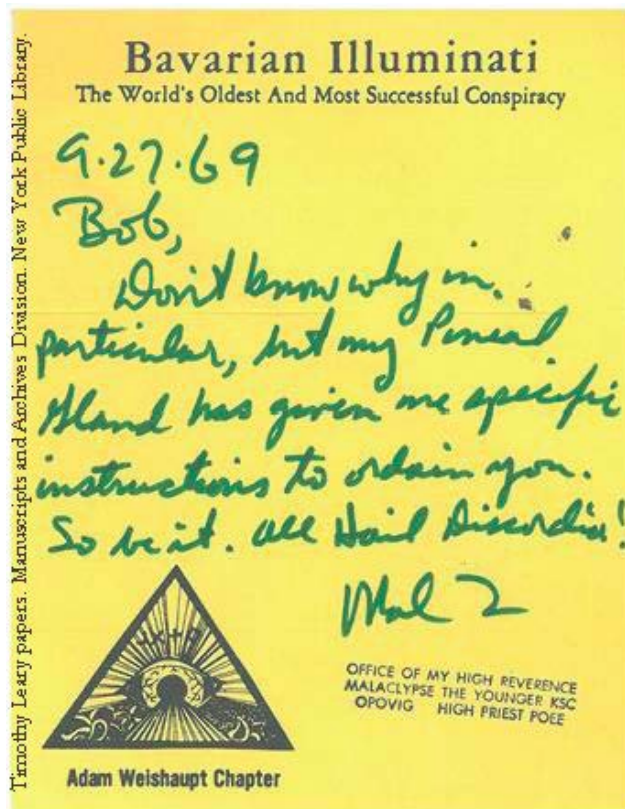
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*RAW ordained, Adam Weishaupt Chapter, 9.27.69*

## The Discordian Society

The Discordian Society was founded in 1958 and remained an entirely provincial, albeit vibrant, metaphysical in-joke amongst only a handful of people until the late 1960s, when it was introduced to Robert Anton Wilson. As the most active evangelist for the diminutive Discordian Society (which totaled no more than thirty people when Wilson joined), Wilson's ground breaking *Illuminatus!* (1975) trilogy, co-authored with Robert Shea, transformed this minority religious society into a broad-based, yet decentralized movement known as Discordianism. Openly written as a Discordian recruiting manual, the *Illuminatus!* trilogy continues to be regarded as a cult classic for conspiracy buffs, science fiction fans, and occultists. Wilson incorporated Leary into this series of novels as both a Discordian philosopher and an Illuminatus Primus, thus integrating him, and his ideas on metaphysical psychology, into the fabric of Discordianism.

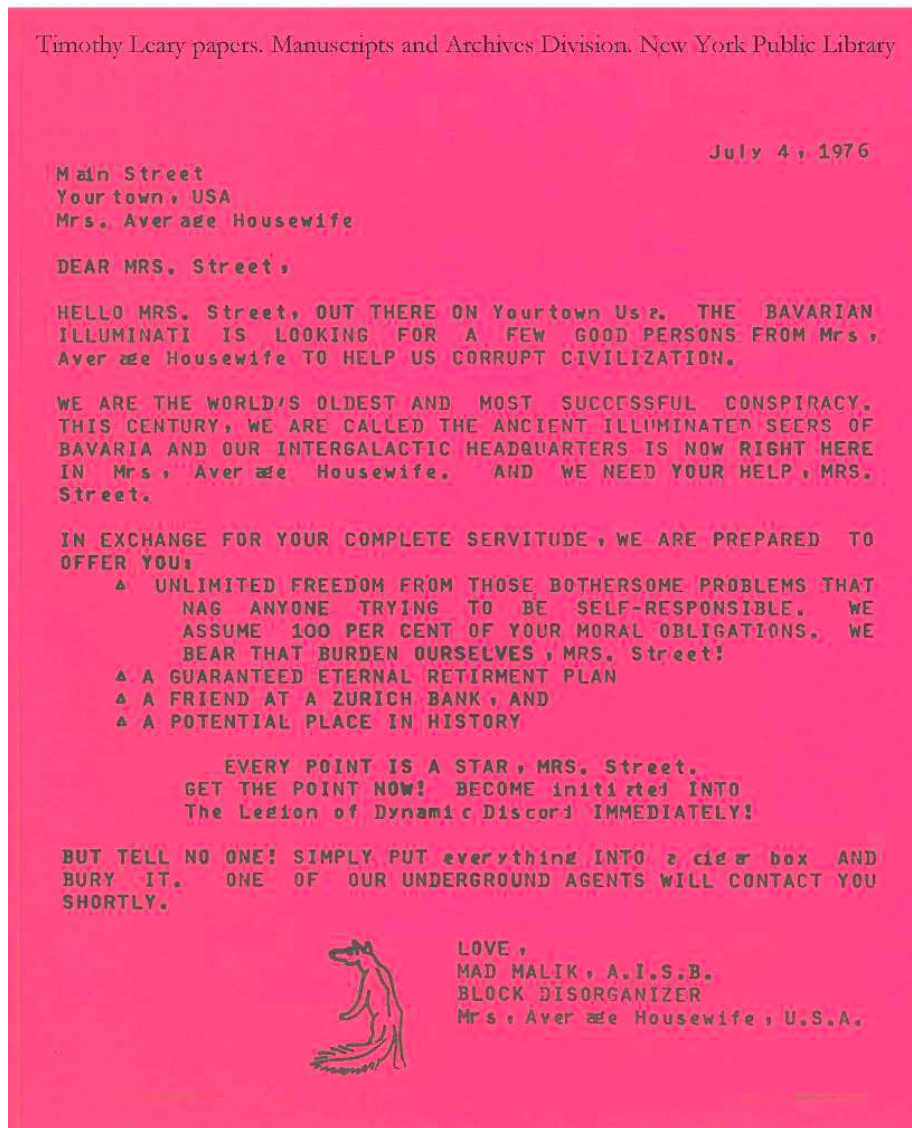
"To choose order over disorder, or disorder over order, is to accept a trip composed of both the creative and the destructive. But to choose the creative over the destructive is an all-creative trip composed of both order and disorder. To accomplish this, one need only accept creative disorder along with, and equal to, creative order."

PRINCIPIA DISCORDIA or HOW I FOUND  
GODDESS AND WHAT I DID TO HER

*RAW, 1973*

As a modern-day ludibrium, Discordianism has presented itself as a new religion disguised as a complicated joke. Discordianism styled itself as a decentralized, guerilla army set against the allied forces of mass-conditioning, as marshaled by dogmatic religion, Capitalism, and the culture industry. Eschewing armed revolt, Discordians singled out culture as their primary theatre of action, as they believed that societal control was exercised according to the way in which reality was defined. Discordianism asserted that reality was a negotiable, neurological construct and that all ideas were tools effective only for (self)creating the most desirable "reality tunnel" possible. Hoaxes, zen-style paradoxes, and surrealist absurdity functioned as Discordianism's liturgical language, as they were utilized to breach conventional notions of reality so as to attain a 'gnostic' state of awareness. As Wilson explained it, the Discordian religion was based on 'guerilla

ontology' or reality hacking. Wilson's popular interpretation of Discordianism, largely indistinguishable from Discordianism itself, borrowed heavily from Leary, and on numerous occasions, Leary was (erroneously) credited with penning both the central Discordian text, *The Principia Discordia*, and the *Illuminatus!* trilogy.



## Operation "OM"

One of the earliest and most wide-spread Discordian hoaxes was known as "Operation Mindf\_ck" (hence "OM"). One aspect of "OM" was that Discordians would pose as bizarre groups such as the Bavarian Illuminati, or the John Dillinger Died For Your Sins

Society, in extended letter campaigns aimed at “mindf\_cking” their recipients out of their “reality tunnels” and into higher levels of awareness. Using various letterheads and rubber stamps to make their letters look official, Discordians would target paranoid political groups like the John Birch Society with messages that confirmed these conservative groups’ most outlandish accusations. It was at the height of OM that Wilson was granted permission to send letters to Leary at Folsom, and, being such a close correspondent with Wilson, Leary came into possession of “Golden Age” Discordian material now a small part of the archival collections at NYPL.

*The New York Public Library's Short-Term Research Fellowships [[www.nypl.org/short-term](http://www.nypl.org/short-term)] support scholars from outside the New York metropolitan area engaged in graduate-level, post-doctoral, or independent research with a demonstrated need to conduct research in the Library's archival and special collections. The fellowships support research in the humanities including but not limited to art history, cultural studies, history, literature, performing arts and photography.*

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### **Hail Eris**

All hail Discordia

Submitted by  
Jay (not verified)  
on September  
10, 2014 -  
1:32pm

**REPLY**

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### **so. that's that then.**

so. that's that then.

Submitted by so  
(not verified) on  
September 10,  
2014 - 2:19pm

**REPLY**

**The  
Ullumintati**

Submitted by  
Adam  
Weishaupt (not  
verified) on  
September 11,  
2014 - 12:01am

Your are joking, right?

**REPLY**

**->< Hail  
Eris-><-**

Submitted by  
A.Zenarchist.Sw...  
(not verified) on  
September 14,  
2014 - 2:55am

->< Hail Eris-><- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29175870>

**REPLY**

**Thank The  
Brotherhood**

Submitted by  
Guest (not  
verified) on  
November 8,  
2014 - 7:00pm

Good news to everyone reading this comment. I want to share my testimony on how i belong to the world famous illuminate fraternity society, and how i have become more famous, by acquiring huge wealth, riches and fame. Here is how my life changed. A friend of mine that was very rich, wealthy, famous and successful. On one beautiful day, he said to me that he is going to help me, that he is going to show me the way to be successful in life. So i was very happy, i never knew he was a member of the great illuminate society. So i was initiated to the world famous illuminate society, and few days later, i was awarded a contract worth millions of Dollars. Right now as i speak, in my business i am doing very well, i travel round the world on business deals, i am now the one that help people to become a member of illuminate, before life was so hard for me and my family. If you want to belong to us today? Send us an email now>  
greatilluminatekingdom666@gmail.com and your life will change for good. Mr Carter  
Morison

**REPLY**

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