Speculative Arts Research • Issue 4 • 11-23-2021

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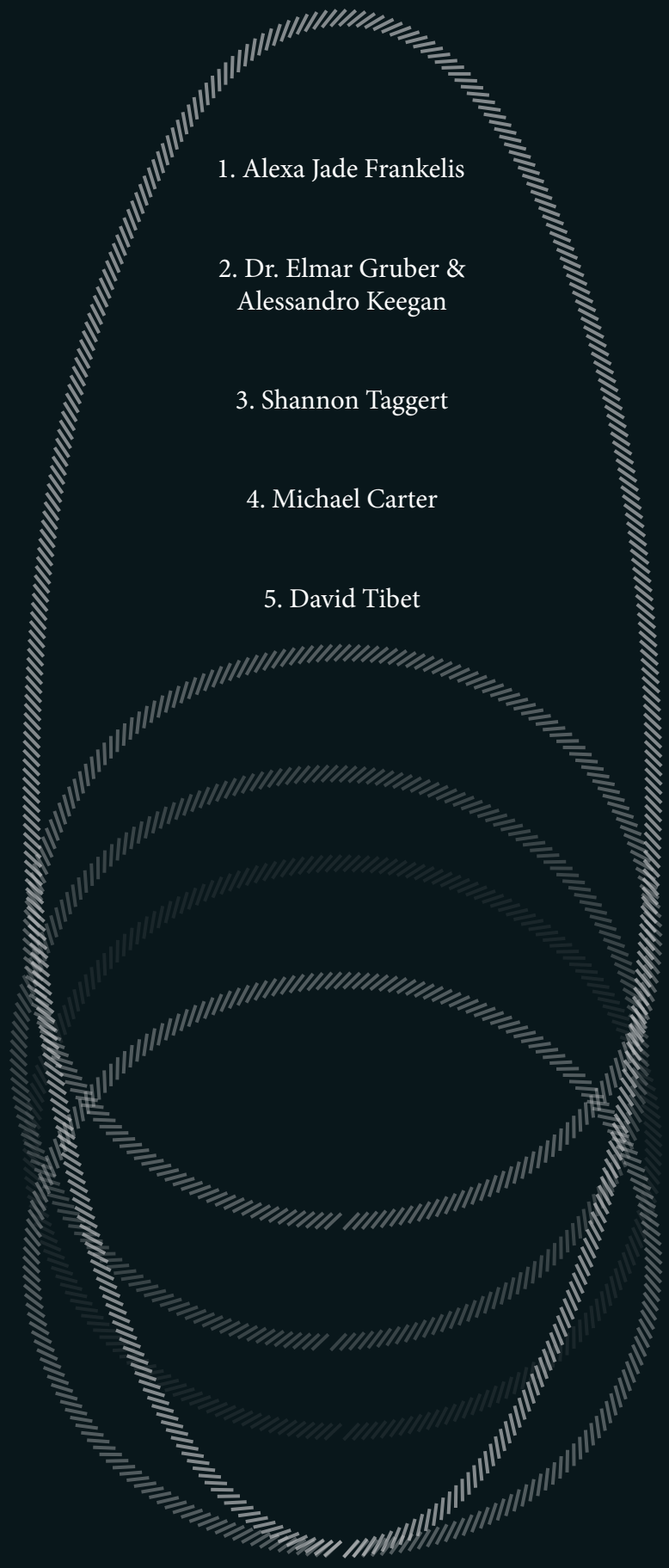
1. Alexa Jade Frankelis

2. Dr. Elmar Gruber &
Alessandro Keegan

3. Shannon Taggert

4. Michael Carter

5. David Tibet



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Four years ago, Speculative Arts Research published its first issue online. We now present you with our fourth issue, after much work and deliberation, filled with artists, writers, and thinkers that we think are more than worthy of your consideration.

Our goal, since the first issue, is to be a kind of window onto the vista of the mundus imaginalis, the "Eighth Climate", or the imaginal realm. This realm of the imaginal, in the sense that it was used by Henry Corbin, the French philosopher and scholar of Islamic studies, in a 1972 paper, is something that is real but not objective nor participated in by the mass mind of the greater society[i]. The imaginal can be visions, demons, celestial utopias in the sky, and similar phenomenon, that all act upon our world with real consequences but insists on remaining in the whispers of our mind or behind the invisible veil. Speculative Arts Research, to us, is when artists and scholars plunge into the well of the imaginal. SAR is a platform for the entire host of unreal, yet very real, things that might be otherwise hard to argue for in a culture that insist only on material existence and only places value on power and capital.

We have previously never intended to create issues revolving around a theme, but the submissions we received for this issue seem to revolve around mediumship and spiritualism in art. Shannon Taggert, who has allowed us to publish and excerpt from her 2019 book Séance, is a photographer and writer who has delved into the subject of spiritualism, faith, and technology for many years. There is a beautiful ambiguity at the heart of Taggert's images, where blurs of smoke, double exposures, trails of light, and plasmatic orbs disrupt our ability to determine the genuine paranormal intrusions from the deception of our own eyes. David Tibet, an artist, poet, and musician who is perhaps best know as the founder of the experimental music group, Current 93, has contributed a series of drawings centered on a passage from the Hebrew book of Job, a passage about the wandering of Satan on earth. Though scriptural in origin, Tibet's art floods from him only when a divine inspiration strikes, the paintings and Hebrew words coming through him and onto the paper in an automatic state. Michael Carter, a Los Angeles based artist, has contributed a critical essay on esoteric spirituality in art and its manifestations as both image and action. Alexa Jade Frankelis, a New York based scholar of art history, has contributed a deeply researched essay on Spiritualism's impact on Surrealism, its entwinement with evolving technology, and its implications for modern art. For my own contribution, I have contributed an interview with Dr. Elmar Gruber, a psychologist and art collector based in Germany, whose devotion to the study of mediumistic art has been a personal inspiration for me.

It may be something in the air, a spirit of the times, a viral thought spreading through these days of upheaval and change, that so much of the interests of the artists and writers for this issue coalesce around the spiritual, invisible world and how to access it. Hopefully there is some underground tremor that is swelling in the mystical life of the world that will erupt and deliver us soon, because we probably need it. It is my hope that you are inspired and intrigued by the offerings of this issue.

-Alessandro Keegan

[i]Corbin, Henry. "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal." Baha'i Studies, http://www.bahaistudies.net/asma/mundus_imaginalis.pdf.

The Ghostly Other: A Study of the Relationship Between Spiritualism, Psychoanalysis, and Surrealism Through Reflections of Mortality

Alexa Jade Frankelis

During the nineteenth-century, death was a present theme in writings about spiritualism and mediums, which revived interest in metaphysical texts due to quickly developing media and communication technologies during the Second Industrial Revolution. With technologies that either suspended time visually or allowed people to communicate with others almost instantaneously through coded electrical messages, a new belief system developed as responses to these new modes of communications. Like technologies that crossed boundaries and connected humans in a way that no one had ever experienced before, this belief system had dared to test how far and with whom one can communicate. Instead of using these technologies in their practice, they adapted some of the principles of these devices into themselves, so their bodies could serve as an autonomous conduit between the living and dead. Spiritualists claimed to commune with the souls of the deceased through clairvoyance and mediumship, which used trance and hypnotic tactics from Emanuel Swedenborg and mesmerism in the eighteenth-century. Although the exploration of what constitutes time and space has been an abiding subject since the beginning of recorded history, a profound interest continued into the turn of the twentieth century. It became not only a discourse of philosophy, but crossed over into the realms of scientific experimentation, mysticism, and art. In the Tertium Organum from 1912, P. D. Ouspensky explores the Kantian idea that space/time is non-existent and unmeasurable, so it cannot be proven within a quantitative context. Proceeding from these foundations, Ouspensky further discusses other metaphysical topics, like the belief of other non-visible dimensions, and psychoanalytic topics relating to a 'higher form of consciousness'. Following a similar path of philosophical thinking, as noted by David Lomas, "The surrealist concept of the marvelous, and indeed the very notion of the surreal itself, are heavily indebted to a belief encouraged by popular science that the boundaries of the real are infinitely extendible." It was this inquiry into the uncanny that first attracted Breton to access the unconscious through automatic practices adapted from the methodology of telecommunication technologies. This utilization of automatic techniques, in the areas of spiritualism, psychoanalysis, and surrealism revolved around producing an uncanny or ghostly other: the "other" being repressed within the individual (self).

I. Paraphysical Communications

The subject of death and the technological development of photography are closely linked, and the niche subject of spirit photography and spiritualism are also inextricably integrated.1 Ten years following the first photograph being produced in France in 1838, The Modern Spiritualist Movement is thought to have begun the same year as the Suffragist movement, in 1848. In the rural town of Hydesville, New York, two sisters, Maggie and Kate Fox, were reportedly able to communicate with the ghost of a dead peddler through rapping on the surfaces of their room. These "Rochester Rappings" may be considered the first forms of automatic writing, although no pencil or paper were used.2 While the practices of Victorian Mourning were more concerned with materialism, photography of the 1860's offered an outlet for the "immaterial" parts of death, like "…auras and apparitions…and the spirits of the deceased," and capturing the communications with these spirits during seances, being attributed to being the "...material man-

ifestation of spiritualism. " Differing from William H. Mumler's first spirit photographs in 1861, spirit photography would later transform the photo studio into a subliminal, pictorial (dream-like) space by others (with no clear distinction between the sitter and the apparition) or into an extension of the uncanny space of the seance room (see figure 1, right). With photography supplementing the visual evidence of spectral existence, it only offered one type of proof of a medium's capabilities but did not showcase any communications with the spirits. Rhodri Hayward writes on automatic writing that:

"...spiritualists relied on a series of practical techniques, using their bodies to try and demonstrate the distance b tween the inspired message and their personal concerns. In practices like automatic writing and trance speech, the inspired words of the speaking mouth or the moving hand could only be distinguished from the medium's subjective responses through a rhetorical performance which severed the familiar relationship between mortality and the body."

Automatic processes served as "a miniature representation of death" because, based on recounts from mediums at the time, when entering a subliminal state, they were giving up all consciousness, as they acclaim, to a deceased's soul. Or perhaps they entered the unconscious, unknown to them in the mid- to late nineteenth century, with neurology still developing as a medical science. For this reason, spiritualism was viewed both as a new belief, and as a new mode of science, since séances were frequently conducted for scientific and mystical purposes, while spirit photography was consistently reproduced. As argued by Stephen Andriopoulos, the word 'medium' itself was firstly associated with recent devices like the telegraph, since it serves as a mode of audible contact between people separated by long distances. A clairvoyant individual is correlated to these technologies by presenting "...messages from the (temporal and spatial) beyond..." through their own bodies and by exploring uncanny qualities/effects with their mind. It is for these grounds that both the séance room and photography became enmeshed with scientific studies, blurring the lines of what would be considered a laboratory and conducting otherworldly transmissions.

II. Spiritualism or Hysteria: The Séance as a Laboratory

Neurologists and psychologists, such as Jean-Martin Charcot, had no interest in the supernatural workings of spiritualism, but rather studied the automatic techniques of mediums. It appeared to doctors that these clairvoyants were able to access unknown parts of the mind, which might promote the understanding of, or create a future cure for, certain neurological diseases. Scientists had viewed automatism as a return to primal instincts, laying the foundations for psychoanalysis, which would later be discovered by Sigmund Freud as repressed traumas in an unconscious mind due to its being conditioned by society and authority figures during its development. Although Charcot adapted the techniques used by spiritualists, he believed there was nothing more detrimental to the already fragile state of a predisposed hysteric mind than to entertain it with "the belief of the marvelous" or subject it to supernatural forces through "excessive religious experiences." In his first lecture at the Salpêtrière on nervous diseases, he went into great depth on the case of one family living on a secluded military base. The whole family became engrossed in performing séances, which first started with the wife who was looking for a way to break up the tedium of military life, but then extended to her husband and children. The children, who were predisposed to nervous tendencies, reached their breaking point once actively participating in weekly séances, and they unleashed into hysterical fits both during and following the séance. Charcot believed that the séance environment induced these hysteric tides,

and, although it is known that men were mediums too, the majority were women, so hysteria was defined as a disease that affected the minds of young women. Similarly, as spiritualists wished to capture their interactions with spirits in photographs, Charcot (along with photographer Paul-Marie-Léon Regnard) created an entire catalogue of images categorizing patients' various somnambulic states induced by hypnosis to try to cure their hysterics. These images eerily resonate with images from early séances in which the patients' automatic gestures and empty stares imitated the same uncanny quality as spirit photography (see figure 2, right).

Due to Charcot's idea that the act of conducting a séance was connected to the health of one's mind, it would lead his contemporaries to research séances in the laboratory. Théodore Flournoy, Edmund Gurney, and Frederic Myers would be some of the first researchers to explore the connections between subliminal consciousness and its relation to parapsychology. Myer established the séance to be a transformatory space, being "...a theatre of the spirits into a laboratory of the subliminal." Gurney and Myer viewed the medium's "hysterical" communications and visions of spirits to be "crisis apparitions" brought on by trauma of high mortality rates of the mid- to late nineteenth century in both Europe and North America, and lesions on the brain inducing literal hallucinations. Gurney had gone even further by stating that automatic writing was activated by subdued memories/emotions of deceased loved ones that are always within us, but not necessarily present in our conscious mind. Building upon Gurney's and Myers' studies, Fluronoy attributed this trance-like expression of repressed thoughts to what he coined as cryptomnesia, the entry of hidden knowledge from the subliminal part of the mind during the moment of trance. In the 1880's taking all this research into account, Pierre Janet tried to cure patients of this psychological trauma by utilizing automatic writing to uncover the suppressed memories, in the hopes of preventing hysteric fits.

The "occult methodologies" of trance and automatic writing appropriated from spiritualism were used by these scientists to cure spiritualists and other patients of their "hysterics". The fits that their patient would break out in was believed to be brought on by repressed reflections on contemplating mortality. This belief and methodologies laid the basis for what Freud would later adopt into his development of the field of psychoanalysis, and in turn greatly influencing the surrealists.

III. A Surrealist Exploration into the Occult and Science

Throughout his career, Andre Breton strongly objected to the notion of communing with the dead through automatic techniques, but he did believe in the creative outcomes by utilizing these techniques, borrowing from psychoanalysis to access the unconscious. On the contrary, Walter Benjamin believed that surrealism had taken its work "...into the humid backroom of spiritualism" since surrealists were dealing with states of mind between consciousness and unconsciousness, and had adapted the techniques of image and word (both spoken and written) from parapsychical studies; to Benjamin, specifically the texts produced, were more demonstrations than works of literature.3 Despite Benjamin's comments, surrealism continued to work to strip automatism of both its clinical and spiritual frameworks, using it purely as a tool for creative practice. Through automatism, the surrealists opened themselves up to the "ghostly experience" of one's psyche, which evoked the repressed emotions, traumas, etc., of the unconscious mind. In Le Manifeste du Surréalisme, Breton defines 'Pure Psychic Automata' as the means to "express,

either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations (aesthetically speaking, not sociological)."

In writing this, Breton defines automatism purely as a mental state and as the exploration of the creative abilities of the unconscious.

Even though he attempted to remove supernatural connotations from surrealism, Breton himself does not deny the fact that he adopted automatic techniques from parapsychology's exploration of mediumship. In The Automatic Message, Breton credits to mediums the technique of automatic writing during which only an unknown force guided their hand. In surrealism, a hand is guided by a person's unconscious thoughts. Specifically, he admired the artwork of the medium Hélène Smith, who worked extensively with Flournoy in séance experiments, during which she produced a multitude of paintings, drawings, and even new languages. Breton did care for her supposedly supernatural abilities, but he revered her strictly for being a "creative automaton" since both she and Flournoy operated outside the constructs of the bourgeois cultural sphere.

Soon Breton was conducting his own versions of surrealist séances with René Crevel, Robert Desnos, and Man Ray, among others. Rather than calling them séances, the surrealists termed them as 'sleeping-sessions' or 'waking dream séance', where they would begin to explore the unconscious through hypnotic and trance-like states to generate bouts of "unrestrained creativity." Crevel, like Breton, rejected any spiritual connotation to mediumship, however he was the only Surrealist trained by an actual medium to transition into subliminal states. She even expressed to him that he held great clairvoyant gifts. Man Ray documented one of these sessions, or "sleeping fits" as some would call them, with the infamous photo, Waking Dream Séance from 1924 (see figure 3, right)[4] Similar to images of mediums seated at a séance table, Breton's wife Simone sits at the typewriter and is surrounded by the tensed Surrealist participants. As with a real séance, the Surrealist members at the table are completely enthralled by the medium. Not only did Simone act as a medium in that way, but also, she acted as being the "conduit for automatic text" and, in doing so, she assumed the role of the "modest recording instrument."

In comparing the parallels between this photograph and images of séances, W. H. Mumler is often given most of the credit for the images, and although sometimes mentioned, his wife is often overlooked as an equal collaborator in most of his work. While Mumler took all the credit as being the conduit for the spirits, his wife was also known to be present at every studio session. Hannah Mumler was a Spiritualist and medium herself. She originally worked in the photo studio where Mumler made his "discovery. At these photo shoots she often placed her hand on his camera, playing an extremely "vital" role in his process as labeled by some scholars. This key role of her placing her hand on the camera can possibly be compared to the actions taken by mediums during a Victorian séance, and Breton's wife here, as "recording instruments". The medium, which was more often a female and yielded ultimate control for the duration of the séance, would use their hands as a form of communication with the spirits. She would often communicate by either grasping hands with those surrounding them at the table, or by placing their hands on

a planchette to enable automatic writing. So, it was significant that Hannah would place her hand on the camera to use it as an invocation of some sort. During these shoots, photography was used as the medium in placement of the spoken word or writing/drawing used in a traditional séance.

Of all the surrealists, it would be Desnos that Breton acknowledged as bringing these sleep states to the most heightened awareness of the unconscious, thereby epitomizing the language of pure psychic automata and according to Breton, he went so deep into the recesses of his mind that it was potentially deadly.5 He was also the only surrealist to claim to telepathically communicate with another person, Marcel Duchamp's alternate identity Rrose Sélavy. According to Baudin, it is obvious that surrealist automatism was "inherited by mediums," but is a "secondhand connection" adapted from psychiatry. Also, Breton contradicts himself in the text, The Automatic Message, by featuring the spiritual art of Smith: who he had earlier invalidated in his article "The Medium Enter", and in doing so, validating Benjamin's critique.

IV. Realms of The Uncanny

Freud first defines the uncanny when using a Friedrich Schelling quote: "...everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light." As mentioned previously, developing from the context of theories of the nineteenth century psychiatrists and paraphysical researchers, the Freudian uncanny results from repressions of unconscious material that are supposed to remain separate from consciousness. This can be attributed to why the earlier psychiatrists believed that their patients would break into hysterics due to repressed trauma, which were brought closer to their conscious experiences. The surrealists wanted to access these repressions, while Freud believed people needed to improve in repressing these traumas. This "uncanny response" applies attitudes that developed towards "electrical phenomena," which caused "...a sense of disembodiment in electronic technologies." When people are introduced to any technology that they have never experienced before, they try to account for it in abstract ways. Spiritualists tried to cope with death and justify a possible afterlife by communing with deceased individuals based on the same disembodied experience associated with an invention like the telegraph. In a similar way, the surrealists tried to reconceptualize science and the recesses of the mind through creative endeavors; also using the self as a conduit for unconscious forces. Freud explains this interest in the exploration of repressions due to our "conservatism" towards death or anything unknown. Specifically stating that, "the strength of our original emotional reaction to it (death), and the insufficiency of our scientific knowledge about it" is why we considered death and the uncanny to be taboo. In doing so people have the tendency to manifest these uncanny symptoms, whether that be the séance room, spirit photography, a spectacle of hysterics, or the visual and written elements of automatic artworks.

The fear of the uncanny is not only a fear of the repressed thoughts in one's mind, but also a fear of unexpected voices of others. Alex Owen has stated that a female medium, when channeling a spirit, was able to "assume masculine authority" and was also "granted a certain sexullaince" both of which a woman of the Victorian era did not have the dominion to do in a life ruled by strict social etiquette, such during mourning. Furthermore, contemporary artist Mike Kelley explored these themes in a series of works from the 1970s, which were inspired by the excretory nature of ectoplasmic photographs.

Charcot had exploited his female patients as medical spectacles, and similarly, early surrealists further suppressed any voice or venerated expression that women may have gained through spiritualism. Contemporary artist Susan Hiller has found that the early surrealists appropriated femininity when using the techniques of automatic writing, which was a metaphor for the intangible or "unarticulated speech of women." 6 The early surrealists seem to contradict themselves with respect to the automatic processes as practiced in spiritualism and psychiatry, given that women were presumed to have greater accessibility to the unconscious and were thought to be closer to the self. Like

Suffragists, the spiritualists gave a voice to the "radical other", which was a rejection of bourgeois values. By the surrealists imitating/borrowing of the early tactics used by women to produce a radical voice, they contradicted, since they wished to channel a "radically other" creative voice through purely psychic automatism against the bourgeois trends of the academy and conservative political regimes of the time. On the other hand, Charcot used photography as a laboratory tool, in his book Iconographie and he turned the images into what Georges Didi-Huberman refers to as a "Museological procedure (scientific archive)." It is also viewed that this "archival impulse" exhibited by Charcot transpired in surrealist artistic production, with its "ghostly structures" and "barely repressed awareness of death." Meditating on Freud, Jacques Derrida ascribes "archive fever" as a reaction of the death drive, due to one's fear of the unconscious self and a sense of one's own mortality.

V. Conclusion

The uncanny of death induced by scientific peculiarities of new telecommunications technologies led to widespread exploration of ghostly phenomena in religion, science, and art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Freud also described it as part of the human condition to engage in a "constant negotiation with our own mortality," and the spiritualists reflected on this sentiment by communing with apparitions, and the surrealists contemplate through purely psychic creative endeavors. Whether it is spirit photography, hysterical fits, or automatic messages, all shared must be regarded as both "artifacts of the human imagination" and repressions of the unconscious mind. Our preoccupations with the postmodern notions of spectacle and disembodiment sparks our fascination with the dissociative activities in our consciousness, and this ongoing exploration defines the true conception of the recesses of our minds.

Endnotes:

1. It has often been theorized by scholars on photography like Roland Barthes, Andre Bazin, and Christian Metz, that the act of capturing a moment of time is like a metaphorical death, since the image that is produced forever freezes an event that will never occur again. It has already "passed" away due to the nature of time passing. To Barthes, the act of being photographed is like "a micro-version of death". Bazin views photography as "embalming" time, while Metz describes an image to be like the ultimate form of memento mori to the living.

2. The rapping also appeared to be adopted from the tapping of the telegraph, a new and strange means of communication.

3. According to Tom Gunning, Karl Marx had also written on Spiritualism, stating ghosts to be a "lingering" of something "unsettling", but they do not settle in space rather "haunt" it.

4. This photo was a restaging of these sessions.

5. The French author Dumas has compared the relationship between Breton and Desnos to be like the relationship shared between Charcot and his patient, Augestine. Some have called into question the authenticity of Desnos' trances, similarly as those have questioned the performative nature of Charcot's patients. Both relationships can be viewed as an appeasement of a father figure. Not only that, but also both Desnos (by Man Ray) and Augestine (by Regnard), have been greatly photographed by the orders of both Breton and Charcot, an 'archival fever' or somesort.

6. Lucy Lippard has said that in "…Hiller's automatic writing she finds the final reversal of the appropriation of femininity by the first male surrealists: "Automatic writing, in which unfamiliar signs rise to the surface of consciousness, is a metaphor for the unarticulated or unintelligible speech of women."

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Guided By Forces Unknown:
An Interview with Dr. Elmar Gruber on the Collecting of Mediumistic Art

Dr. Elmar Gruber is a psychologist, writer, and a collector of numerous and far-ranging works by mediumistic artists. Dr. Gruber's extensive collection can be viewed online at CoMA (mediumistic.art), the Collection of Mediumistic Art, and on the website's Instagram, @collectionofmediumisticart.

As an artist investigating my own strange experiences and the ways they have influenced my work, I found myself researching areas where occultism, spirituality, and the paranormal intersect with art history. In my journey, the most endlessly fascinating meeting place for art and the unknown was found in works referred to by scholars and collectors as Mediumistic Art. This is a particular subset of art, made outside of traditional institutions, where the artists claim that their work has been created through them by another entity or force. For these artists, like the famous Hilma af Klint, they are not the lone authors of their work. The Mediumistic Artist is not the primary creator but rather the tool, their hands guided by forces unknown to make the work.

Dr. Gruber's website and collection provided and invaluable resources for my own writings and presentations on this subject, and I felt it would be an invaluable experience to speak with him on the many astounding mediumistic artists in his collection. The interview I am presenting here with Dr. Gruber touches on a rich array of material on the topic: the psychology of Mediumistic Art, the unique experience of collecting this form of art, Mediumistic Art's influence on Modernist art movements, its unlikely relationship with UFO phenomenon, numerous talented artists creating Mediumistic Art all over the world, and the fraught nature of the term, Mediumistic Art, itself.

-Alessandro Keegan

Alessandro Keegan (AK):

What inspired you to begin your collection of mediumistic art? Who were some of the first mediumistic artists to grab your attention?

Dr. Elmar Gruber (EG):

In fact, I drew and painted excessively myself in my youth and at one point considered attending art school, but then decided to study psychology because of my intense interest in all things paranormal, transpersonal, inexplicable. In any case, because of my own love for art, I was immediately drawn to mediumistic art when I first heard about it. At that time, I was especially fascinated by the classics, like Victorien Sardou, Hélène Smith, Augustin Lesage, Madge Gill, Heinrich Nüsslein, and Emma Kunz. Hilma af Klint was not yet known, and Georgiana Houghton had not yet been "rediscovered". I began to collect rather accidentally, because several mediumistic artists, whom I met, gave me some of their works. Then, still at a young age, I came across, just as accidentally, a few extraordinarily rare and fascinating works created around 1900 and in the early 20th century, which I was able to acquire.

AK:

Often the term "Outsider Artist" gets argued over. Many see it as controversial and prefer "Self-Taught Artist" or other forms of designation. How do you feel about the term "Mediumistic Art"? Is it adequate to define this field of art?

EG:

This is a question that deserves a long answer. I will try to be brief. The issue of appropriate conceptual delimitations is a tricky one. There is no escaping the necessity of taxonomy, of being able to classify and categorize to facilitate meaningful discourse. But here we are looking for demarcations and labels, so to speak, where the boundaries are so fluid that labels never capture the full extent of what needs to be labeled. In any case, what is crucial is that all mediumistic creators feel at the mercy of an impulse that they cannot escape and which they describe as a force coming from outside. This is the irreducible aspect of the phenomenon. According to this, the creator is above all only an executive medium. Although we must be careful in this regard, because the cases of drawing and painting in trance in a completely unconscious manner under the guidance of an external force are rather rare or tend to manifest only at the beginning of the development of a mediumistic artist. It is much more common, as Maggie Atkinson has convincingly shown, that mediumistic artists tend to produce their works rather in collaboration with disembodied entities. Therefore, the term "mediumistic" is appropriate but should be used with caution.

There is an additional problem posed by the fact that, from an art historical perspective, mediumistic art has been appropriated by Jean Dubuffet and his ideological framework of "Art Brut". As a result, attention has been focused on only one aspect of mediumistic art, i.e., the more raw and naïve type of obsessive or stylistically sketchy works representing rather a form of a quasi-infantile automatism resulting in what André Breton called the "captivating stereotypy". On the other hand, there is also a highly cultivated aspect of mediumistic art, often but not exclusively by professional artists who became mediums and in states of trance-like absorption, radically and unintentionally changed their style as a result. What they produce is a highly idiosyncratic and sublime virtuoso art. The two forms of mediumistic art differ in their aesthetics and their complexity, and are not connected by the same culture, nor by the same inspiration.

AK:

I imagine there are some challenges to collecting the kinds of artists that you are interested in. Sometimes these works are unarchived, lost and forgotten and suffer from conservation issues. What are some of the challenges you have experienced in collecting? How difficult is it to gain access to the art of some of these works, both from the past and the present?

EG:

The main challenge lies primarily in the fact that only a few mediumistic artists perceive themselves as artists at all. If their work is created in the Spiritualistic context in the narrower sense, then they work in a framework that hardly reaches the public. Since they deny authorship of the works, they often do not want to part with them, understand their value and meaning differently than from an aesthetic or artistic point of view. This is also true for the works of contemporary mediumistic artists. That is why many such works remain in closed circles, disappearing, as it were, from the public eye before even getting there. This sometimes happens with the works of mediumistic artists who, at some point, have experienced a high degree of publicity during their lifetime and have even achieved fame. It was a coincidence that the works of Georgiana Houghton, for example, famous for a short period during the late 19th century, did not fall into oblivion forever. On the other hand, from the great number of mesmerizing drawings produced by Therese Vallent, Wilhelmine Assmann and Frieda Gentes, all of whom achieved great international fame around 1900 with numerous publications, exhibitions, and public demonstrations, only one single work by Therese Vallent is known today ¬¬– fortunately enough it is part of my collection.

Therese Vallent, Moon flower Eroses, 1899
Graphite on paper
87 x 60 cm | 34.3 x 23.6 in.

Signed by Vallent's spirit control Ralf.
Titled and dated on the bottom left: "Moon flower Eroses, St. Gotthard, 2 July 1899 in 1 hour and 33 minutes."

With contemporary mediumistic artists, the biggest challenge for a collector is to find an appropriate approach to make them aware of the value their works from a different point of view. This does not mean that I consider mediumistic art mainly under the aspect of art, let alone the art business, but rather to make the mysterious content of the numinous visionary and mediumistic dimensions visible and experienceable in exhibitions especially through the interaction of the works of many mediumistic creators. Through my background I have the great fortune to get to know such artists who often work in seclusion and usually I manage to build a good relationship with them. Many friendships have been formed this way with years of ongoing exchanges.

As I mentioned earlier, that's indeed how my collection started. I did not intend to collect mediumistic art. But the friendships that developed meant that many of the artists eventually gave me their works because they felt that they were in the right place with me and in the environment with works of other mediumistic artists. Now I had, as it were, a mission to set up a collection, in which the works can resonate with each other. I certainly understand this as a commitment, a very rewarding commitment, I would like to add. I didn't look for the collection, the collection found me.

Incidentally, I also feel it is part of this commitment to research the lives, ideas, and worldviews of mediumistic artists who have been completely forgotten and to make them accessible again. I spend a good part of my time researching in libraries, archives, and collections, as there are some extraordinarily exciting creators in my collection who are virtually unknown, such as Gertrude Honzatko Mediz, Nina Karasek or Werner Schön.

Nina Karasek (Joële), Untitled, early 1930s
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
36 x 44.4 cm | 14.2 x 17.5 in.

The name of the heads and figures (from left):
AROSE, ALGUSI, AYMA, ALUM – AVES,
APRAK - ALGUN, ANNOL – DALL, DUJAN
[DUYAN?], DUGIE, DEIPH
Inscribed verso: Sprache (language) Holz
(Wood) Steinkunst (stone art) Musik (music).
These forms may be symbolic renderings of
inspirational spirits or genii of literature, the
art of sculpting wood and stone and music.

AK:

It is my understanding that you have worked as a research psychologist looking into the area of paranormal phenomenon. Has this research provided you with a unique insight into the experiences of mediumistic artists? Has exploring mediumistic art affected your views of the paranormal or, conversely, has the paranormal lead you to see mediumistic art differently? In my own experience, for instance, I connected with the idea of mediumistic art because I had multiple experiences in my past that were unexplainable and then these experiences acquired an entirely new meaning when I learned what mediumistic art was.

EG:

It is interesting that you should ask that. In fact, way back in 1982 I published a paper in a journal discussing the structure of mediumistic art as a paradigm of the structure of the paranormal. Yes, indeed, my involvement with research in parapsychology has shaped my understanding of mediumistic art and vice versa. Many mediumistic artists report various paranormal experiences in their lives. They are often more open overall to the realms of a hidden reality, have special antennae for synchronicities, premonitions, telepathy, clairvoyance. At times they live in their own world of strange correspondences up to the point of creating their own personal mythologies. Knowing the range of paranormal and transpersonal experiences, helps to better understand the mindset of a mediumistic artist. However, the experiences during the artistic processes are very different after all. Most mediumistic artists cannot adequately describe what is happening to them; they do not have the proper arsenal of verbal expression. Their form

of expression is their artistic activity. Interestingly, I have often come across the fact that during their creative process it is obvious to these authors what is happening. Everything lies open before them, as it were, like a revelation. It is woven into the flow of the creative process. They are convinced that all one must do is to observe what emerges in their art. This is reminiscent of peak experiences, of mystical experiences be they drug-induced or not. Everything is there, the unfolding of the ultimate mysteries of the universe, but once they have stepped out of this state of complete absorption, which is characteristic of their artistic activity, no adequate language to communicate the experience remains.

Studying these experiences has taught me that the scientific method is only of very limited use in gaining a deeper understanding of them. This was a major reason why I withdrew from scientific parapsychological research and relied on widening my own approach to these realms experientially mainly through intensive engagement in methods of meditation.

AK:

Would you say that mediumistic art is a global phenomenon? Who are some of the artists in your collection who are from outside of the context of western culture and religion? I ask this question because it sometimes seems that mediumistic art is thought of as being largely tied with Spiritualism, the communication with ghosts, and ideas that seem to come from a specifically western cultural context, but I know there are many artists from diverse backgrounds and belief systems who receive visions, create work, and serve as mediums in some way.

EG:

For a very long time, mediumistic art in the narrower sense was associated with Spiritualism, and thus quasi-forcibly with a religious movement that originated in the West and spread mainly there. But this is wrong. Mediumism is a global phenomenon, known in various forms among all peoples and cultures. Hence, artistic expression based on visionary experiences is a worldwide phenomenon. Entity experiences and other visionary encounters at the basis of such art are cross-cultural and historically widespread. They ought to be understood as part of a broad spectrum of anomalous experiences ranging from shamanism, spirit possession, ecstatic mystical experiences, dreams, hallucinations, out-of-body experiences, and otherworldly journeys.

Nonetheless such types of artistic expressions have received little or no attention as a form of mediumistic art. Perhaps also because especially in indigenous cultures everyday life and the spiritual foundations of the peoples are so closely interwoven that artistic creations characterized by ancestors, spirits, visions, and the like belong quite naturally to the cultural heritage and are not regarded as something extraneous.

AK:

Two artists who you have written about, Victor Emanuel Bickel and Alexandro Nelson García, have connected their mediumistic experiences to UFO related phenomenon. Is this unusual among mediumistic artists, in your experience? Some people might be surprised at the connection between mediumship, which seems very spiritual, and the UFO phenomenon which many see as being very technological.

Victor Emanuel Bickel (Faroxis), Untitled, c. 1970
Color pencil, pastel and ballpoint pen on paper
49.5 x 69 cm | 19.5 x 27.16 in.

EG:

Mediumistic art is never created in a space that is entirely free of cultural influences – as Jean Dubuffet envisioned it as the ideal state for the Art Brut artist. We can discern in most mediumistic artworks a temporal and cultural context that informs the "style" of the works. It is not surprising that as technology advances, the spiritual dimension also seeks new spaces of experience. There is, after all, a line of tradition that cannot be ignored. Spiritualism is largely based on Emmanuel Swedenborg's 18th century extraterrestrial fantasies and his visions of the afterlife. Swedenborg made ideas popular about the nature of the afterlife existence, the dwellings of angels and higher beings. The otherworldly were imagined existing in incarnate and discarnate forms in their abodes on other planets. On visionary journeys Swedenborg explored countless celestial bodies and their inhabitants and taught that spirits of the deceased existed everywhere and spread the teachings of God and Christ throughout the cosmos. From this developed the idea of the spiritual advancement of souls in a gradual process of successive re-embodiments in the form of planetary wanderings.

The somnambulists, who were put into magnetic trance by mesmerists everywhere at the turn of the 19th century, reported about their journeys to the moon, planets and stars and described what they saw as the dwelling places of disembodied entities. During the first third of the 19th century, related ideas about the physical makeup, fauna and flora, and the conditions of existence of the spirits of the deceased on other celestial bodies became entrenched in popular belief through these visionary journeys of "clairvoyant" somnambulists. Their reports popularized a spirit world that was portrayed as a reflection of earthly circumstances.

These ideas directly influenced the earliest mediumistic pictorial works in the context of Spiritualism. They consisted mainly of flowers, plants, organic structures, animals, and entities located on planets or other celestial bod-

ies. In these dwelling places of the souls in the afterlife entities exist, which never incarnated on earth. Therefore, the notion of higher beings or other, higher developed civilizations was informed by the Spiritualist undercurrent since a long time.

In addition, there are interesting parallels between psychedelic entity experiences with entity experiences in other contexts, such as religious and spiritual visions, shamanism, mediumism, and so on. These include encounters with entities familiar from folklore and mythology, such as gnomes, dwarves, elves, but also of encounters with unidentified flying objects. How to classify these entity experiences, what underlies them, is still largely unexplored. Nevertheless, the parallels among them are often remarkable. I find the varieties of these experiences as they express themselves in mediumistic artworks quite fascinating.

AK:

Some historical mediumistic artists, such as Emma Kunz or Hilma af Klint, are very well known today, but the many mediumistic artists today who are alive are lesser known. What are some of your favorite living mediumistic artists who are producing fascinating work today?

EG:

As everywhere in the field of art, there are great qualitative differences in mediumistic artists. Artists who have created an independent, intriguing, and comprehensive oeuvre are rare among the mediumistic creators, such as Augustin Lesage, Madge Gill, Hilma af Klint, Georgiana Houghton, Emma Kunz, Wilhelmine Assmann, Margarethe Held, or Heinrich Nüsslein. The 20th century saw the activity of some great mediumistic artists whose works remain to be appreciated or even discovered, like Gertrude Honzatko-Mediz and Nina Karasek mentioned before. Among contemporary mediumistic artists I am intrigued by the works of Noviadi Angkasapura from Indonesia, who creates his mesmerizing drawings under the influence of a supernatural entity.

Noviadi Angkasapura, Untitled, 2015
Ink and graphite on paper
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in.

Marie-Jeanne Gil, a psychic from France, began to draw following a vision of the prophet Elijah. Her intense structures of cosmic eruptions and faces of masters are filled with sprawling rays of light and exuberant colors. Un-

fortunately, she prefers to live in seclusion and not exhibit, let alone sell, her works, which completely cover the walls of her apartment like wallpaper. The works of the Finnish mediumistic artist K. Tschährä are also quite captivating. I follow her since she spontaneously started last year to draw "under influence" and actively exchange with her about her reflections as the process develops. Also peculiar is the work of Patricia Salen, which exerts a fascination all its own and, incidentally, Patricia is one of the few who knows how to introspectively reflect her creative process with profound yet demanding intellectual clarity.

There are quite a few others that probably work somewhere in the hard to define border area between the mediumistic and other forms of inspiration and which I find very exciting, but who at times reveal little about their spiritual backgrounds.

AK:

Are there any major exhibitions or projects that your collection will be involved with soon? Are there any announcements or upcoming publications to look forward to?

EG:

For a collector, it is a stroke of luck that mediumistic art is currently so highly valued and becoming reassessed in an art historical context. That is why there are always requests for loans. I can be selective in order to offer works from my collection an appropriate framework to be shown. In fact, at the moment there are two projects under evaluation that are truly significant, but since nothing has been finalized yet, unfortunately I cannot give more details about them. What I can only reveal in a hint is that I have made another significant discovery of a group of historical mediumistic works of utmost importance. Since one of the projects is being planned with these, I must keep all the details to myself at the moment. Isn't it nice that there always is a veil of uncertainty and mystery spread over this kind of art!

The Camera, The Womb, The Grieving Mother
An excerpt from Séance, a book published by Fulger Press, 2019

Text and photography by Shannon Taggert

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here… the photograph of the missing being… will touch me like the delayed rays of a star.

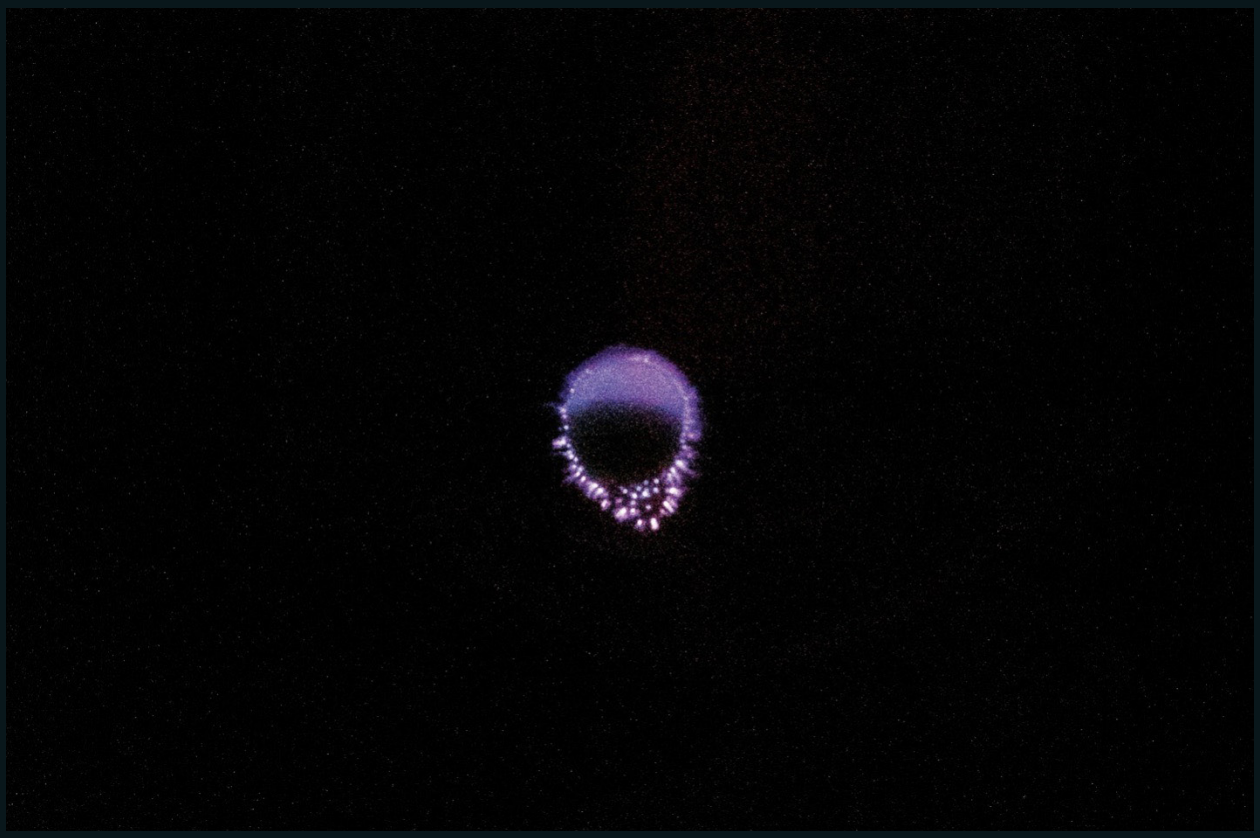
—Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (1980)

Medium Syvia Howarth's bedroom, transformed into a camera obscura séance room, with doll. England, 2013.

For this photo, I was part of a group invited by the medium Sylvia Howarth to experience a camera obscura séance space she had constructed in her bedroom. Standing inside, we were asked to carefully watch the outdoor scene projected onto the walls through a tiny hole cut into the window shade. Before closing her eyes and going into a trance, Sylvia told us that the moving pictures in her camera obscura séances enabled time travel. She reports seeing sequences from the future related to advances in transportation, technology and artificial intelligence.
Like Sylvia, members of the influential Scole Experiment also attempted to merge dimensions of time and space through cameras. A team of Scole's spirit communicators referred to as the 'photographic department,' allegedly delivered extensive photographic phenomena during Scole séances over the years. One report described a levitating camera that snapped photos by itself in the dark, capturing exposures of eleven 'photographs of photographs.' Another incident involved an image of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that materialized in a sealed pack of Polaroid film.
At Scole, rolls of unexposed 35mm Kodachrome film were kept in the séance room. When processed, the film strips

transformed into long scrolls containing glyphs, images and writing. Among the etched spirit transmissions were poems from Wordsworth, diagrams from Thomas Edison, and the signature of French photography pioneer Louis Daguerre, along with the phrase, 'Can you see behind the moon?' These films formed inside a tamper-proof security box under four-step protocols designed and implemented by visiting scientists from the Society for Psychical Research. The photographic artifacts produced at Scole are part of a legacy deemed by some Spiritualists to be 'The most important scientific evidence of life after death ever created.'

Over the years, I've encountered an array of photographic séance phenomena. These artifacts made me consider the analogies found at the intersection of life, death, Spiritualism and photography. Photography and Spiritualism both offer an interaction with what was once present, but is now gone. Each uses the term 'medium' to describe their role as an intermediary instrument for communication. Trance states often develop under a red light, like the latent images brought forth in the fluid of chemical darkrooms. Ectoplasm is described as moist and fragrant, like human emissions, and light-sensitive, like photographic materials. Wombs, cameras and séance rooms are all devices that generate and transmit presence from inside a dark chamber.

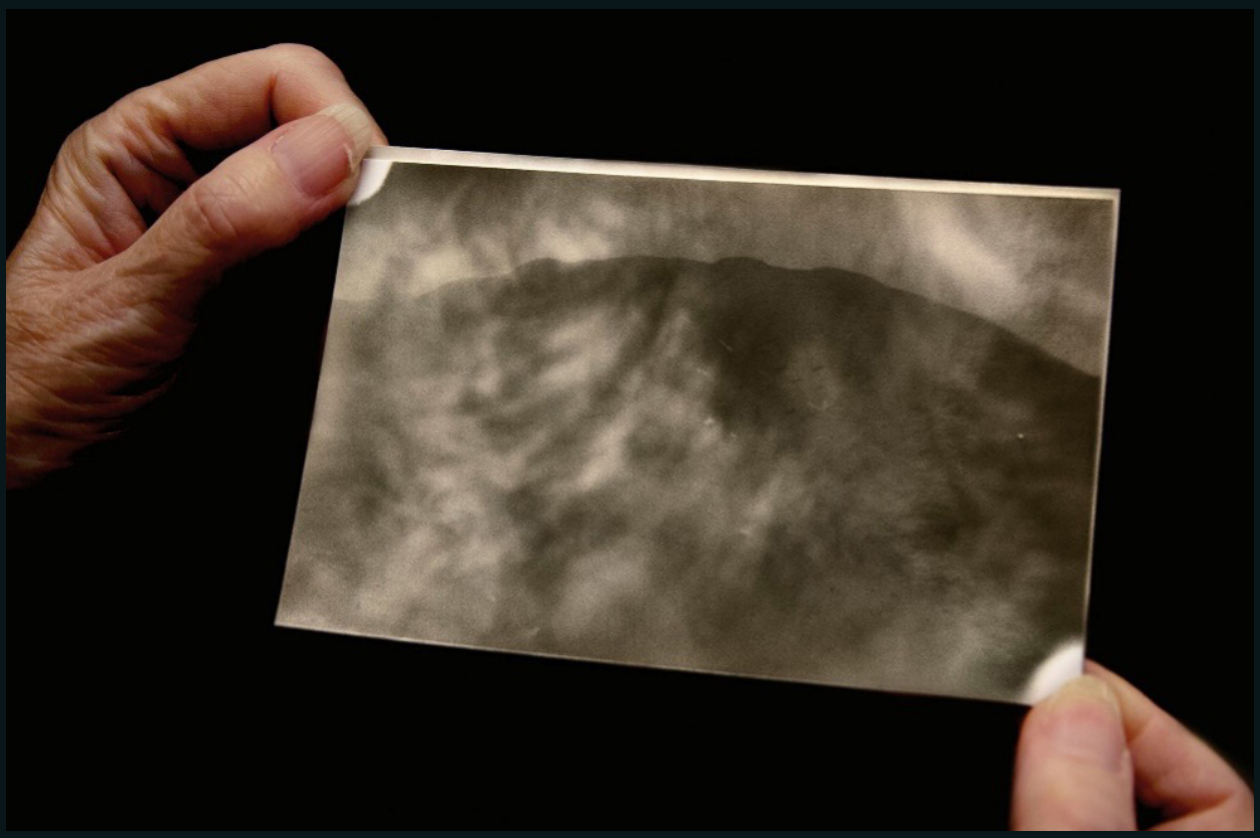


Kirlian corona on my mother's fingertip, three years before her death.
Assembly Hall, Lily Dale, NY, 2014.

My mother died on Mother's Day, May 14, 2017. Editing this book, I remembered that I once photographed her Kirlian aura during an experiment at Lily Dale. It struck me that this was a way to include my mother's presence in Séance. When I finally located her Kirlian imprint in my archive and processed the file, I began to dig for her presence in the shadows of her fingertip photograph. Inside the black borders, I opened up the darkness as much as possible with my software. I gasped when I finally brought forth my mother's faint outline and found the edge of her shoulder, part of her hair, her collarbone and her other fingers. In this moment, I was reminded of the brute power that photography has, all by itself.

Kirlian photography is defined as a camera-less technique that applies a high-voltage, high-frequency electrical current across a grounded object. The process produces an electrical discharge that can then be recorded through direct contact with photographic film, plates or paper. It was made popular in the 1970s by the book Psychic Discoveries Beyond the Iron Curtain (1970). Initially presented as a new invention, Kirlian photography actually originated in the late-nineteenth century. Known then as electrography, effluviography, or by a variety of other names, the technique was used in attempts to diagnose disease, make thoughts and feelings visible, and to prove the existence of the human soul.

The Kirlian process was believed to be a way to explore the mysterious relationship between electricity and the human body. Galvanism—a process that seems to stir dead tissue to life through electric shocks—fueled speculation regarding Kirlian experiments. The curiosity surrounding electricity's power, and its relationship to the 'life force,' led some nineteenth-century mediums to seek contact with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, the scientist famous for his study of electricity.



Skotograph, spirit photography class.
Arthur Findlay College, England, 2018.

In 1907, the French medical doctor Hippolyte Baraduc photographed white wafts floating above his wife Nadine's body at the time of her death, and interpreted the image as a document of her soul in flight. Critics challenged Baraduc's conclusion and argued that tiny holes in his camera bellows had likely fogged the picture plane. This debate over a material or metaphysical explanation attracted controversy. The argument amplified the fact that interpretation plays a primary role in photographic communication.

In the late nineteenth century, Baraduc and other intellectuals, including the Swedish playwright August Strindberg and Romanian philologist Bogdan Hasdeu, were among those who suspected that photographs could document the invisible. Some of the inquisitive and wide-ranging experimentation that ensued sought to record prayers, dreams, feelings, auras and disease, as well as interactions with spirits. These mainly camera-less efforts put photographic plates in contact with such alleged sources of power as the grotto at Lourdes, the forehead of an angry

person, a mummified hand after it had been mesmerized, electric sparks on the skin of a prostitute, nature at night, and activated séance rooms. The patterns that appeared after processing were cryptic, and the photographs could be read in different ways.

The term 'skotograph'—from the Greek for 'dark writing'—has been used in Spiritualist settings since the late nineteenth century to describe camera-less experiments, such as those mentioned above. Over the course of this project, I have participated in a number of skotography experiments with Spiritualists.

In skotography sessions, a room is transformed into a chemical darkroom for a photographic séance. Participants begin by sitting in a circle, under red light and next to trays of photographic chemicals. The instructing mediums hand out pieces of unprocessed photo paper, with numbers written on the back. After inviting spirit guides and loved ones to make imprints in the emulsion, the papers are sent over to the leading medium and flashed quickly with a light. As everyone sits in meditation, the images are processed and laid onto a table to dry. After each one has been chemically fixed, a white light is turned on and everyone retrieves their numbered photo. A discussion follows concerning the messages found inside the patterns produced. In one session I attended, a fellow student received a pattern that looked like an X-ray of a female breast. The woman excitedly waved the image around and explained that it was a message saying she would be healed of the breast cancer she was battling. Arthur Findlay College tutor Kim Moore-Cullen, an expert on Spiritualist skotography, told me that a portrait of Sir William Crookes showed up twice on one of her skotographs: 'It was a reversible image. One way up it looked like him—beard, clothes, etc.—and the other way up, the same, just wearing a hat!' Kim says such playful results are common, and she advises students to watch their skotographs for changes over time: 'Usually Spirit will take an image and play with it by altering it in some way, to show the intelligence of those producing the image.'

Skotography session in the library with teacher Angie Morris.
Arthur Findlay College, England, 2012.

In 2012, I reconnected with Sharon Harvey, after she became a demonstrating physical medium. Since then, I've documented many of her séances.

In this sitting, friends of mine were chosen to sit up front because they were considered to be 'good batteries' for spirits to draw energy from. Sharon sat in a cabinet with a portrait of her hero, Gordon Higginson, by her side. Her séance music mix played for the duration, with lullabies such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,' Judy Garland's 'Somewhere over the Rainbow,' and songs from Disney movies. During the séance, people shouted out that they were seeing transfigurations of other faces form over Sharon's own face. Among the spirits that were reported were an elderly Chinese man, various deceased relatives, spirit guides and a Samurai warrior.

When the séance ended, my friends reported a cold blast that passed by and flipped up their hair. 'It felt like a mini tornado, like someone had come out of the cabinet and then left out the door.' A woman recording video felt it too. She pointed and said to them: 'Whatever that was just passed right between you two.' I took this photo as the séance broke up, and the group saw it as a confirmation of what was felt. They tell me I captured that psychic breeze with my camera.

Medium Sharon Harvey ends a séance.
Arthur Findlay College, England, 2012.

Form Following Spirit:
An Investigation of Recent and Near-Recent Metaphysical Art

Michael Carter

My aim in this essay is to investigate and reflect on the current state of metaphysically influenced visual art. I want to better consider when the label "spiritual" or "metaphysical" is applied to visual art how to better analyze this work. I believe there is a helpful duality that can be applied to work in this field; there is work that most people would identify as spiritual, but also work that more informed theorists or artists would apply this label to that might not be immediately identified as "spiritual" by a less trained eye.

Generally, I see two major categories of spiritual art: symbolic/diagrammatic and that which is produced by "energetic" processes or practices.

Michael Carter, Untitled, 2021
Gold leaf, acrylic, and spray paint on panel 32 x 21 in

The first category, art of the symbolic/diagrammatic variety, is popularly identified as spiritual art. Naturally, the use of representational imagery as symbols is ancient and not confined to metaphysical content. At the same time, it is specifically the use of representational and abstract symbols that seems to denote religious and spiritual art; anecdotally, this characteristic appears to hold cross-culturally and historically. Presumably, the imagery of petroglyphs, pictographs, and other examples of the oldest known visual images are also symbolic, pointing towards the possibility of the extreme ancientness of symbolism in the human genus. As the spectrum of symbolism is well researched, analyzed, and theorized, I will focus on contemporary examples of this typology, starting with popular imagery.

As of July 2021, searching the collection of stock image company Shutterstock returns 2.4 million images tagged with the keyword "spiritual," strongly favoring imagery with overt, "new age" content. "Metaphysical" returns almost 31 thousand results, "occult" over 123 thousand, even the more obscure "yantra" returns almost 12 thousand images. The bulk of this visual imagery features symbolic and diagrammatic elements: hands in prayer, women sitting in padmasana, seemingly countless versions of the energetic bodies and the seven chakras, magic circles, sacred geometry such as the Flower of Life, Metatron's Cube, variations of the sri yantra, and the Kabalistic Tree of Life. Within this same image source, "occult" returns imagery favoring elements popularized through 19th-century, Western Occultism: Golden Dawn-esque magic circles, Ouija boards and planchettes, Tarot cards, pentagrams, sigils, tools of witchcraft, etc. The deployment of "sacred geometry" in this image source deserves further inspection. I would argue that whatever esoteric concepts are claimed to be encoded in this diagrammatic and symbolic imagery are more found in the *act of construction* by the practitioner and less in the final, visual form. I understand that the tantric yantras and other, similar diagrams are intended to also be meditational foci (in theory, the content emerges to the meditator through contemplation), but these also are symbols for elaborate, culturally specific interpretations that have been accumulated over the centuries of their development and use. This imagery is itself a symbol for its own content: a vernacular signifier for the evolving, visual language of contemporary spirituality. The imagery does not so much communicate the specifics of the spiritual experience, as it does circulate a vernacular, visual language of the spiritual throughout the culture. I strongly suspect that most individuals who come across the sri yantra scrolling through their social media feeds do not decode the symbol as the union of Siva and Sakti any more than they could enumerate the Sefirot in a Kabbasltic diagram encountered in the same context. Without the received instructions of initiation, these diagrammatic forms are inert. In the Baudrillardian view, they are simulacra. Though a more cynical lens, it is branding, from a marketing perspective.

The use of naturalistic imagery for symbolic meaning is, of course, an ever-present feature of visual art, popular and fine. Whether one conceives of this symbolism as occult, metaphysical, surrealist, psychological, philosophical, political, etc. is largely a function of individual approach and orientation; its operation and features are well illuminated through semiotics and related, intellectual tools. More interesting to me is the use of geometric, diagrammatic imagery within the realm of academically trained, "fine art"; that is to say, it is largely absent. Anecdotally, I can only recall a few examples: the early, diagrammatic works of Hilma af Klint (the Altarpieces, etc.), the more recent works of Paul Laffoley, and the contemporary, syncretic diagrams of Jesse Bransford. Certainly, there are others, but this imagery exists in a tiny minority. What is most intriguing in this territory is the apparent tendency of trained artists to elaborate, innovate, or modify established diagrammatic forms. For instance, af Klint's Group X, No. 1, Altarpiece (1915) appears to be a mostly typical depiction of the Theosophical doctrine of the "seven rays" (a cosmological doctrine of differentiating vehicles of emanation) yet, elaborated onto the outer red and violet rays and central green ray are paired and singular ellipses which, taken together, form the "00 0 00" figure which the artist specifically notes in her journals as "three concepts... taken as the starting point." This is a seemingly personal intervention into an established form that circulated in her milieu. Elaboration and transformation are very notable in my other two examples as well. Whether this tendency emerges from a Modernist notion of artist as innovator, insights into these diagrams arising from the artist's deep investigation, or some other cause, I can only speculate at this time.

The second category is seemingly more elusive at first but ultimately encompasses a vastly larger range of artworks produced in the Modern, post-Modern, and contemporary. These works use the surface of the media, sculptural volume, or installation space as a bounded site to capture the materialization of otherwise invisible or incorporeal forces and systems.

Michael Carter, Untitled, 2021
Gold leaf, acrylic, and spray paint on panel 32 x 21 in

Starting in the nineteenth century and moving forward, numerous examples of this category can be identified in the works of visual artist both well-known and obscure. Outside of academic art, this methodology is seen early in the practice of automatic drawing and painting of the Spiritualists, currently most famously in the mediumship of Georgiana Houghton. Interestingly, emic Spiritualist discourse opens insights into the dynamic of this category and its deeply intertwined existence with spiritual practices: "Revered Ken Lee Tet suggests that Georgiana Houghton's paintings are best seen within the context of a Spiritualist service, and that they are 'manifestations first, and art second.' (Georgiana Houghton, A Gift from Spirit, 2021) Additionally, scholar of Australian Spiritualism, Diana Carroll, notes, "The main focus of Spiritualism is to provide proof of survival through evidentiary mediumship." (Talking to the Dead: An ethnographic study of Spiritualism in Australia, 2013, emphasis mine). There is a certain resonance with photographic processes that I suspect is not coincidental, there being a close chronological relationship between the emergence of this category in the late 19th-c and the development of photographic technology during the same era. The lens focuses—it captures—light rays reflecting on objects within its view and then permanently fixes their luminous qualities to a prepared surface through a chemical process. Thus, out of an infinite possibility of images, a single image is made though a seemingly magical, quasi-alchemical process. Houghton's own trajectory reinforces this: after finding no public success with an exhibition of her automatic paintings, she migrates to the more popular spirit photography and confines her creative output to documenting spirit manifestations from that point forward. There's a telling example of this approach as well in a foundational text of Western abstraction: Thought-forms (1905). Preceding the now more-famous taxonomy of mental and astral forms and colors, the fourth chapter ("The Form and Its Effect") contains an extended argument for the visualization of "occult" forces through the use of Chladni sound plates and a harmonograph: "It seems to us a most marvelous thing that some of the drawings, made apparently at random by the use of this machine, should exactly correspond to higher types of thought-forms created in meditation." (Besant & Leadbeater, Thought-Forms) My own work with the pendulum emerges from my first encounter with this highly influential text.

This category expands dramatically with the realization that the larger category of process art, and its more academic sibling, systems art, as defined by existing art-historical scholarship, can be noted to repeatedly intersect with metaphysical theories or are built on such foundations. The insight that systems/process-based works are intended to operate within the same "evidentiary" framework—the revealing of process and systems—emerges as a key characteristic of this category.

A few notable historic examples include Yves Klein's "Cosmogonies" and "Fire Paintings" where the artist captures traces of wind, rain, and fire on the canvas, seemingly emerging from insights derived from his practices of Daoist-influenced judo and studies of the Theosophically influenced doctrines of the Rosicrucian Fellowship. Joseph Beuys' many "social sculptures," e.g., the Documenta VI (1977) installation Honeypump at the Workplace, are permeated by the artists self-admitted studies of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical concepts of social systems, especially "social threefolding," and materialize these same systems. Also interesting for this category is the millennia-old, Chinese practice of gongshi ("Scholar's Rock" or more correctly "Spirit Stone"): stones shaped by natural, erosional forces selected for their peculiarly twisted shapes and appreciated as evidence of the vital, transformative force of qi. My pendulum ritual performances fit within this category as well. Here, the macro and micro scale effects of gravity are made visible by the spiraling swing of a pendulum fixed directly above a plane of canvas. The influence of gravity is traced directly onto the surface by a thin stream of paint pouring out from the tip of the pendulum vessel; the result is appearing something like a spiral galaxy. This analogy proves doubly resonate as both forms—the spiral painting and the spiral galaxy—are the result of the same immaterial force operating identically yet on vastly different scales.

A compelling articulation of this relationship can be observed in the writing of art theorist Jack Burnham (1931 - 2019). Burnham's trajectory is intriguing: starting as a sculptor of kinetic and light art, he is credited with naming "systems aesthetics" (Artforum, September 1968), and he was also well known for his later studies of the Kabbalah (his Kabbalistic studies eventually eclipsing his interests in art writing). Initially invested in a materialist and Marxist-influenced comprehension of systems (Burnham early on theorizes systems art through an analysis of Hans Haacke's "weather boxes" and the later (in)famous Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971), Burhnam seemingly enters a metaphysical understanding first through an investigation of alchemy (assumably via Jung) as reflected in Duchamp's ready mades. This expands by introducing systems of alchemical elemental essences into semiotic methodologies such as the Klein group chart ("For all works of art sharing the structure of AIR or FIRE there is an analogical equivalency between the signifiers for the Plane of Content and the Plane of Expression, and also signified on both planes. On the other hand, nonobjective works of art are expressed through the structure of WATER, where a metalanguage or Denotative Plane is substituted for a missing Plane of Content." "The True Readymade?" Arts and Artists, February 1972) and then, through searching for ever more fundamental systems, quickly into the esoteric, sefirotic cosmology of the Kabbalah.

Continuing with Burnham, there is a revealing aside in a brief discussion of the reception of kinetic art during the 1960s:

> "In this respect, it may be significant that in the past few years kinetic art or any art powered by mechanics and electricity has not won the approval of critics. The consensus regarding such tendencies is that they are 'bad art.' Recently, the Los Angeles County Museum's 'Art and Technology' exhibition gained considerable attention in the press. Generally, the moving works of art, those by Oldenburg, Whitman, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Mefferd, Dupuy, Rauschenberg, and others, were criticized severely, while nonmoving sculpture by Serra and Smith came off rather well. Even more interesting was the general approval of the work of one relatively lesser-known artist. Subsequently Haacke has produced many works operated by power sources and others concerned with the dynamics of natural processes, e.g., ice freezing and melting, people voting, baby chicks hatching and growing, etc. <u>In nearly every instance, Haacke's most successful work has depended on natural, nonmechanical sources of energy."</u>
> (Emphasis mine, "The True Readymade?", Arts and Artists, February 1972)

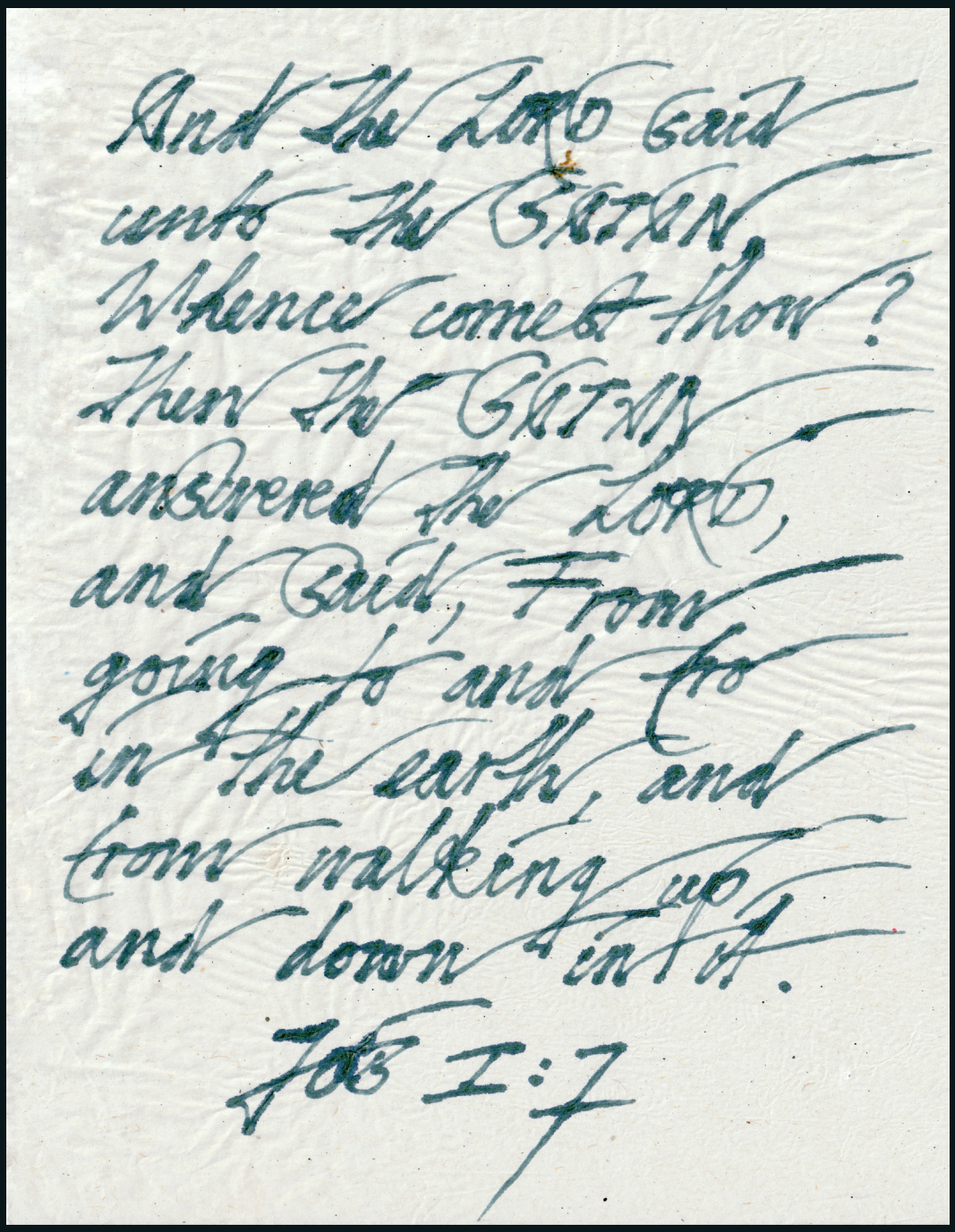
An "energy" that powers changes of state in matter, organized human activity, or the life cycle of animals is an abstract energy and one that the wide range of "energetic practitioners" would recognize. More narrowly confined to the body, Hatha Yoga, Tai Chi, Reiki, spiritual healing, dowsing, and a wide range of cross-cultural, regionally specific, and historic forms of manipulating abstract forces are all related fields of human activity. When it is observed that Burnham's theorization of systems encompasses ritual, this category expands dramatically and points towards the cross-cultural and historic use of systems within the landscape of human social and cultural practices. Thus, we might link early American and Aboriginal Australian sandpainting, Vajrayana Buddhist sand mandalas, Zen Buddhist-influenced tea ceremonies, Masonic lodge rituals, the Catholic Christian High Mass, and countless other examples of the operation and manipulation of this understanding of abstract energy.

The why of this arises by connecting the assertion of the reality of metaphysical views to the manifested, the physical. Understood with the weight of its historical definition, a metaphysic is the statement of theorization of an inviolable law—as surely as gravitation, thermodynamics, evolution, or relativity—whose correlation is evidentiary, but the causation is so far unknown or unconfirmable. Thus "metaphysical" is the signifier for causes that lie outside of the possibilities of the Foucauldian episteme of a civilizational moment.

In conclusion, if it isn't clear from my analysis of these two categories of spiritual/metaphysical art, I am suspicious of the contemporary viability of the first category and bullish on the possibilities of the second. Combined with the observation of the general absence of the first among academically trained artists and that such artists utilize the symbolic and diagrammatic primarily through elaboration and transformation of historic forms, further strengthens my conclusions of the present limits of the first category in the contemporary and the rising strength of the second. I don't intend this analysis to be qualitative though. In fact, I suspect the ultimate source and content of the two categories is identical. Perhaps it is that, in this epoch of deep materialism, the artistic possibilities of the symbolic and diagrammatic are currently largely exhausted—the category is filled—while the second, with its resonance to the scientific materialist dianoia of our era, churns with the potential of systems, energies, and heretofore unknown forces on the edge of revelation. As technologies, one wanes while the other waxes. Summarizing the condition of this duality, I am reminded of a passage from a Rudolph Steiner lecture of May 20, 1923 (known today as Lecture VIII of "The Arts and Their Mission"):

"We must have the will to penetrate into this material world spiritually; nor despise the gifts of scientific materialism and naturalistic art; must — though not by developing dry symbolism or allegory — find our way back to the spiritual. Symbolism and allegory are inartistic. The starting point for a new life of art can come only by direct stimulation from the source whence spring all anthroposophical ideas. We must become artists, not symbolists or allegorists, by rising, through spiritual knowledge, more and more into the spiritual world."

David Tibet



And the LORD said
unto the SATAN,
Whence comest thou?
Then the SATAN
answered the LORD,
and said, From
going to and fro
in the earth, and
from walking up
and down in it.
Job I:7

IRELAND
NORTHERN
IRELAND
IRISH
SEA
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
IRELAND

ויאמר
השטן
ויצא מ
יהוה
משוט
ומהתה
יהוה אל
מאין תבא
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ATLANTIC OCEAN
NORTH SEA
SWEDEN
BLACK SEA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

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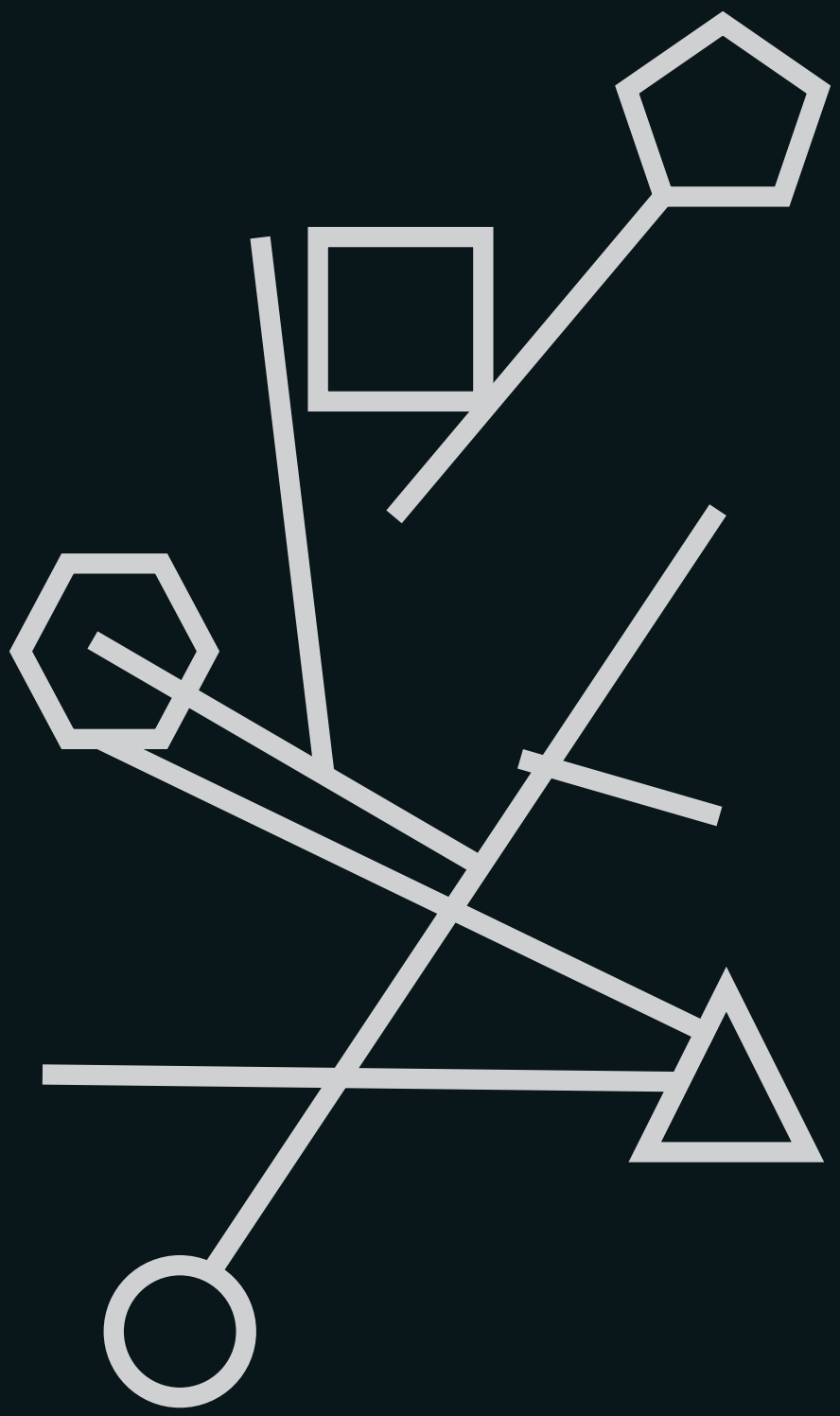
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