

### Acknowledgment

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THE MESSAGE: KUNST UND OKKULTISMUS [ART AND OCCULTISM] by Claudia Dichter, Hans Günter Golinski, Michael Krajewski, & Susanne Zander. Köln, Germany: Walther König, 2007. Pp. 192. \$48.00 (hardcover). ISBN 9-783865-603425.

This book came to light on the occasion of the 2007 exhibition *The Message* in Köln (Cologne). It exemplifies the current interest in psi phenomena not as evidential (or not) of psi, but as a cultural and experiential phenomenon to be discussed from historical, artistic, and other perspectives (for related chapters on the link between altered states of consciousness, art, music, literature, and other cultural areas, see Cardaña & Winkelmann, 2011, and for a discussion of psi and the arts see the paper by the reviewer, Iriba, and Reijman, in this issue).

*The Message* is a beautifully illustrated book with various essays on the link between ostensible psi phenomena, especially related to mediumship, and the arts. As the editors make clear, not only have a number of visual art objects been produced under the inspiration of other putative entities or psi experiences (the book contains many representative photos, drawings, and paintings of varying artistic quality), but the mediumship séances themselves, whether fraudulent or not, can be analyzed as performances, as Shaker and other religious traditions have been (Bennett, 2005). This is reminiscent of the performance aspect of shamanism, which may involve sleight of hand and other techniques that from a certain viewpoint could be considered deceitful, although they may also bring about desired changes, such as making the patient feel better (Cardaña & Beard, 1996).

A brief foreword by Hans Günter Golinski and Sepp Hiekisch-Picard introduces the exhibit and places it within the larger Art Brut (“raw” or “outsider” art produced by mediums, visionaries, people incarcerated or with mental disorders, and other “nonprofessionals”), a term coined by Jean Dubuffet. The foreword contains an erroneous translation (not the only one in the book) in which the original meaning of a phrase is reversed: “with[out] a divine afflatus no one becomes a great man” (p. 162). The next chapter, by Claudia Dichter, Michael Krajewski, and Susanne Zander, provides a good discussion on “The Medium as Artist” and how mediumship and occultism spurred a number of progressive movements, including

greater equality for women and humane treatment for those considered insane (see also Owen, 1990), as well as artistic movements such as surrealism (Choucha, 1992) and other 20th century art movements (Waldo-Schwartz, 1977). Later in the 20th century occultism in general would get a very bad rap because of its connection with Nazism. The authors of the chapter state that the first mediumistic production of art was by the important French playwright and author of the script for *Tosca*, Victorien Sardou, in 1858, to be followed closely by the spirit drawings and text from none other than Victor Hugo, created during his exile in Guernsey (Anonymous, 1906).

The following chapter, by Barbara Safarova, provides a brief description of the spiritualist productions found in the abcd collection of Art Brut (see [www.abcd-artbrut.net/](http://www.abcd-artbrut.net/)). Peter Gorsen considers "The Entrance of Mediumism into the History of Art." His is the longest of the contemporary articles in the book, analyzing the relationship between psychoanalysis, parapsychological research, and mediumistic art, including how Breton's ideas on automatic productions shifted from purely psychological considerations to the proposal of a sacred realm. Although the author knows the relevant literature, unfortunately the article is neither well written nor organized.

Next is a reprinting of the 1933 essay *Le Message Automatique*, by the foremost intellectual of surrealism, André Breton. His landmark treatise on automatism, which includes references to psychology and parapsychology authors (e.g., Théodore Flournoy, William James, and F. W. H. Myers), was probably the first published survey of automatic art. Completely dismissive of the theory of incarnate influences, he proposed instead that automatism, by liberating the person from inhibitory processes, provide a greater integration and expression of nonrational, spontaneous, subliminal (in the sense of Myers of "nonconscious") impulses. He characterizes "inspired" (as opposed to "calculated") literature into "mechanical," "semimechanical," and "intuitive," depending on the degree of awareness and control by the writer, and in passages reminiscent of both Rimbaud and Carlos Castaneda calls for a *diseducation* of the senses so that we can discover that the subjective properties of the real and the imaginary "are demonstrably interchangeable" (p. 55). He also speaks of an amodal form of perception, which shows his anticipation of theories on the phenomenon of synesthesia and cross-modal perception (Marks, 2000).

The last essay, by Andreas Fischer, discusses the physician and researcher on hypnosis and parapsychology Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, who used photography to study mediums in an, at times, erotically charged context (there were rumors of an affair between Schrenck-Notzing and one of the mediums he hosted at his home). Sexuality, including the moans and emissions observed in some séances, has been related to some ostensible psi phenomena (McBeath, 1985).

The book has many small drawings throughout and, in the middle, color illustrations by well-known (e.g., Sardou, Victor Hugo, the

“thoughtographer” Ted Serios, the psychic “Hélène Smith,” and the at-times-conventional artist Hilma af Klint) and more obscure artists, some with psychological problems, most of them not. There is a wide variety of styles and quality in the art included, such as the symmetric and beautiful obsessions of Agustin Lesage, reminiscent of perhaps the most famous Brut artist, Adolf Wölfli, the art nouveau-like circumvolutions and biological motifs of Helen Butler Wells, and the haunting installations of thousands of pages by Vanda Vieira-Schmidt. As to the entities being channeled, they included extraterrestrials, great artists such as Dürer, and my favorite, “Robert, the armadillo.”

*The Message* is a fascinating contribution to the study of mediumship, automatism, and art, although it has minor flaws, including an irregular translation organization (the English translation is at the very end except for the Breton chapter), some translation errors, and other slips such as including references to images that are nowhere to be found in the book.

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