

Correspondences

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Editors

Manon Hedenborg White
Aren Roukema **Jimmy Elwing**

Journal for the Study of Esotericism

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Image Creates Human Creates Image

Keith Cantú

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Advances in the study of esotericism continue to be reflected in this issue of *Correspondences*, despite varying degrees of transition around the world and the lack of vibrant (as well as some perhaps not-so-vibrant) in-person conferences that have historically helped define the field and reinforce social relationships among scholars and the public at large. In other words, much of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 does unfortunately remain true a year later.¹ At the same time, in my view scholars in the field have since rapidly adjusted to the format of “virtual” conferences either hosted by Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other communication platforms, and such technology has continued to steadily allow for extended digital engagement in unforeseen ways. As with every advance in technology, however, there are also unexpected downsides to this digitalization of the study of esotericism; expanded participation in social media or blogs in past months can lead to positive or negative backlash or generate unintended public impressions of personal divisions that in earlier days might have been mitigated by “grabbing a drink together” or by means of a ritual of “breaking bread,” that is, by high-context collective rituals of conversation and affirmation that were once much more possible—and perhaps taken for granted—in the before-time prior to the pandemic’s onset.

1. For this journal’s earlier acknowledgment of the pandemic’s effects, see Manon Hedenborg White, “Transformations and Troubled Times,” *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 8, no. 1 (2020): 1-3.

In this issue of *Correspondences* we are invited to consider a range of research articles and book reviews that coincide rather nicely with a complementary impulse to explore one's inner psyche in isolation that many undoubtedly will have felt as external social events have been canceled, scaled down, or rescheduled (often only to be further postponed). The main research articles accordingly arrive and depart from a unique nexus that links disparate yet interconnected ranges of extraordinary experience: dreams, palmistry, and visionary art. The first article, by Samuel Glauber-Zimra, explores the dreams and visions of the Jewish writer and religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942), who as Glauber-Zimra demonstrates was one of the first Jewish figures to provide an explanatory model for his dreams that were informed by modern esoteric and psychological frameworks. The second article, by Alexandra Nagel, quite literally examines the hands of genius in that it offers a fascinating and informative chiromantic history of the prototypical brainiac Albert Einstein. Last but certainly not least, the final article, by Amy Hale, provides a thorough ethnographic analysis of modern ceremonial magic and artistic aesthetics as intertwined in the creative vision of Barry Hale. All three articles point to the human brain's fascinating yet ever-elusive capacity—also possibly present to some limited extent in other complex animal organisms—to imagine and project impressions of reality onto various objects, including the self. Whether the fleeting substance of dreams or the lifelong lines on one's palms, the authors in this issue encourage us to consider the phenomenon of “Man creates art creates man,” as the title of one of my mother's coffee-table books so succinctly put it (the term “man” being used in its historical sense as denoting a non-gendered human being of the male or female sex).² The six review articles in this issue further relate to this impulse to imagine, whether it connects to the imagination induced by mind-altering drugs (Neşe Devenot), the imagination that informs the complicated social history of Theosophical Orientalism (Julie Chajes), the imagination of medieval religion

2. Duane Preble, *Man Creates Art Creates Man* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1973).

(Minji Lee), the imagination of spiritual qualities in one's breath (Magdalena Kraler and Kelly Mullan), the imagination that informed later impressions of ancient religion (Korshi Dosoo), and the imagination that informed esoteric subjectivity in Costa Rica (Mauricio Oviedo Salazar). Various cultures and ethnic groups certainly access and express this impulse to internalize in myriad ways, and both the research and review articles herein point to certain common threads of connectivity that inform these same impulses. The reader is therefore invited to contrast these examples or cases with diverse examples born of one's own individual experience and expertise.

On a more journal-specific level, with this issue we offer bittersweet news. First, we bid a sad but friendly farewell to Manon Hedenborg White, who has served as Editor for the past two years and will no doubt continue to accomplish amazing feats in the fields of esotericism and gender studies. Next, we are delighted to report, however, that Justine Bakker (our former Book Review Editor) will assume her position as Editor. Last but not least, we welcome the energy of two new accomplished scholars as Book Review Editors: Naamleela Free Jones of Rice University and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay of Universiteit van Amsterdam. Their experience and expertise will, beginning with the next issue, certainly assist with addressing the wide range of books that continue to be published on various topics of relevance to Esotericism, both Western and that which lies beyond the range of conventional directionality.

As always, we appreciate your readership, and I am confident that the *Correspondences* team will continue to offer engaging content that not only contributes to scholarly research in the field but also, insofar as is possible or prudent for an academic journal, stimulates the esoteric imagination, however this itself may also be imagined.

“From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams”: Esotericism and Prophecy in the Writings of Hillel Zeitlin*

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Abstract

This article discusses Hebrew and Yiddish writings on prophecy and visionary experience authored by the eastern European Jewish writer and religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942). These texts, written over several decades in the early twentieth century, comprise both theoretical studies of religious and visionary experience as well as detailed records of Zeitlin’s own prophetic experiences, and reflect multiple objectives, such as articulating religious experience, defending the veracity of intuitive foreknowledge, and a turn to clairvoyance in response to social and political crisis. They likewise demonstrate the influence of two American writers, William James and Ralph Waldo Trine, who dealt with religious experience and the development of inner life. Whether directly responding to James or later formulating a system of intuitive clairvoyance inspired by Trine, Zeitlin utilized scientific language and esoteric systems of non-Jewish derivation such as mesmerism, New Thought, and parapsychology, which he integrated with hasidic and kabbalistic concepts. This article likewise analyses his enthusiastic reception of attempts by other Jewish writers to formulate scientific understandings of prophecy derived from parapsychology. Collectively, Zeitlin’s writings point to the place of broader esoteric currents within Jewish intellectual life in early-twentieth-century eastern Europe, a topic not previously subject to scholarly attention.

Keywords: Jewish Thought; Hillel Zeitlin; Parapsychology; Dreams; Prophecy; William James; New Thought

* I am grateful to Jonatan Meir, Boaz Huss, Aren Roukema, and the two anonymous readers for their helpful comments and suggestions to the earlier drafts of this paper.

The Jewish writer and religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) wrote extensively about dreams, visions, and prophetic foreknowledge.¹ Zeitlin’s innovative discussions of these subjects reflect multiple objectives, such as articulating religious experience, defending the legitimacy of intuitive foreknowledge, and turning to clairvoyance as a response to social and political crisis. Taken together, these writings bespeak an extensive engagement with several prevailing intellectual and esoteric approaches to the mind and its powers, from the emergent psychology of religion to New Thought and parapsychology.² This article presents a diachronic study of three works penned by Zeitlin concerning prophecy and religious experience; the texts under consideration point to Zeitlin’s evolution from a theorizer of religious experience to a documenter of his own ensuing visionary experiences as he developed an approach to prophecy and clairvoyance informed by contemporary esoteric literature. Two American thinkers, in particular the philosopher and psychologist of religion William James (1842–1910) and the New Thought writer Ralph Waldo Trine (1866–1958), emerge as key influences in the formulation of his thought. The latter, alongside other esoteric writers, offered Zeitlin the possibility of an empirically grounded notion of prophetic foreknowledge that would give credence to his apocalyptic visions of the impending doom facing the Jews of eastern Europe and validate his visionary practices as a legitimate mode of Jewish religious expression.

I begin with “In the Secret Place of the Soul” [“ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah”] (1913), Zeitlin’s response to James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and the latter’s envisioned science of religions,³ proceeding to the ensuing visionary

1. For biographical information on Zeitlin, see Waldoks, “Hillel Zeitlin”; Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm and the Quiet*; Green, “Hillel Zeitlin: A Biographical Introduction.”

2. My use of the term “esoteric” follows Hanegraaff’s working definition of Western esotericism as “rejected knowledge.” Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 14–17. An important recent criticism of esotericism as a taxonomical category is Hammer, “Mysticism and Esotericism.”

3. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah”; republished with substantial alterations as “ha-Havvayah ha-Datit ve-Giluyeha” in Zeitlin, *Al Gvul Shnei Olamot*, 9–44; translated into English in Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 119–62. On this work, see Waldoks, “Hillel Zeitlin,” 218–42.

and prophetic experiences he recorded in a dream journal, “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer” [“Al Gvul Shnei Olamot: mi-Tokh Sefer Reshimot shel Holem”] (1919),⁴ and followed by the systematic treatment of prophetic intuition found in his essay “On the Hidden and the Concealed” [“Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam”] (1921), which would subsequently be incorporated into a religious manifesto issued in the late 1920s.⁵ Lastly, I discuss Zeitlin’s reception of *Regarding Visions of the Future* [*Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*] (1935) by Shmuel Tsvi Cohen (1882–1933), a philosophical treatise on prophecy informed by parapsychology.⁶ The former viewed this book as the groundwork for a “new science of the religion of Israel” formed out of the encounter between Judaism and the “finest of occultists.”⁷ Collectively, these texts draw together psychology and parapsychology, New Thought and Hasidism, to form an innovative expression of prophecy and visionary experience that drew on the explanatory models found in contemporary esoteric currents in order to substantiate the possibility of prophetic foreknowledge for Jewish readers in early twentieth-century eastern Europe.

Science of the Mind: Contextual Remarks

The advent of the psychology of religion and parapsychology (known in certain contexts as psychical research),⁸ as well as other esoteric and metaphysical systems came to the attention of Jewish readers in eastern Europe in the

4. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot”; republished with alterations in Zeitlin, *Al Gvul Shnei Olamot*, 169–215. The publication history of “Bordering Two Worlds” is treated thoroughly in Meir, “The Book of Visions.”

5. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam”; reprinted in Zeitlin, *Sifran shel Yehidim*, 16–27. These three essays have recently been reissued in their original form in Zeitlin, *In the Secret Place of the Soul*.

6. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*.

7. Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah.”

8. On parapsychology, see, among others, Asprem, “Parapsychology.” The terminological split between psychical research and parapsychology largely fell out along regional lines—the former prevailed in Anglophone contexts and the latter in Germany—until “parapsychology” was universally popularized by the American researcher J. B. Rhine in the 1930s. Jewish readers in eastern Europe were exposed to both terms; for purposes of consistency, I refer throughout to parapsychology, at the risk of anachronism.

closing decades of the nineteenth century.⁹ These had a considerable impact upon the rabbis, Jewish theologians, and other religious writers—among them Hillel Zeitlin—who read the literature of these various currents with great interest.¹⁰ These religious writers, such as Ahron Marcus (1843–1916),¹¹ Fishel Schneersohn (1887–1958),¹² and Menahem Mendel Ekstein (1884–1942)—all, like Zeitlin, Hasidic Jews to varying degrees—produced a largely-neglected body of literature informed, at times only implicitly, by contemporary developments in psychology and esotericism.¹³ Zeitlin, who read and discussed the writings of

9. On esotericism and the occult in this period, see, among others, Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 257–495; Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism.”

10. The hasidic rabbi Joseph Shapotshnick (1882–1937), for instance, regarded modern psychology as bearing “particular proximity to the soul, itself a portion from above of God, may He be blessed and exalted,” Shapotshnik, *Sbas ha-Mashpia*, 245.

11. Marcus’s thick tome on Hasidism, *Der Chassidismus*, is littered with references to mesmerism, spiritualism, and discussions of the unconscious. Marcus, *Der Chassidismus*; Marcus, *Hartmann’s inductive Philosophie im Chassidismus*. On Marcus, see Boulouque, “From *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to *Geisteswissenschaft*.”

12. Schneersohn, a scion of the Habad hasidic dynasty who trained as a physician and psychiatrist, remained, like his friend Zeitlin, “hasidic-adjacent.” His magnum opus *Der veg tsum mentsh* (1927) was published shortly afterwards in German (*Der Weg zum Menschen*) and English (*Studies in Psycho-Expeditions*). A definitive Hebrew edition followed in 1942 (*ha-Derekh El ha-Adam*). In the book, he developed his method of the “psycho-expedition” as a means of treating “Psychical scurvy” and achieving psychological health. In this regard, he turned to both the “scientifically organized confessions of religious individuals” found in James’s *The Varieties*, as well as the hasidic notion of *devekut* [ecstasy], “a most prolific source of an immense healing soul-force,” *Studies in Psycho-Expedition*, 137, 170. A précis of Schneersohn’s system is found in Radosavljevich, *The Educational Significance of Schneersohn’s Psycho-Expedition Method*. See, as well, Freis, “Ecstatic Expeditions.” Schneersohn previously took part in the founding, between 1917 and 1919, of Kadimah, a short-lived “religious-cultural” movement informed by, among others, James’s approach to the psychological study of religion. Schneersohn served as the editor of the movement’s Hebrew journal *Kadimah: An Anthology Devoted to Philosophy and the Science of Religion*, of which only one issue appeared. In his opening article, “Echoes of the Age,” Schneersohn hailed the religious renaissance spearheaded by James, Henri Bergson, Hermann Cohen, and Émile Boutroux, Schneersohn, “Hed ha-Tekufah,” 5. On this organization and its program, see “ha-Tenu’ah ha-Religiyozit-Tarbutit.”

13. Ekstein, a Galician hasidic émigré to Vienna, drew on notions derived from mesmerism and autosuggestion in his introductory guide to Hasidism, Ekstein, *Tenu’ei ha-Nefesh*. On Ekstein, see Reiser, *Imagery Techniques*, 250–317.

the above-listed figures,¹⁴ is exceptional among them for the melding of both theory and experience found in his writings; he not only engaged intellectually with new understandings of the mind and soul, but also incorporated them into discussions of his own dreams and visions.

What was the intellectual background for Zeitlin’s writings on visions and religious experience? Put briefly, a new school of experimental psychology emerged in the 1890s in the United States which sought to examine the psychological phenomena of religious life. These scholars, prominent among them William James and Edwin Starbuck (1866–1947), sought to empirically investigate phenomena such as the process of conversion and religious experience.¹⁵ In the spirit of the age of invention, scientific methods and academic scholarship were to be directed towards the improvement of religious and social life.¹⁶ Prominent among these works was James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which sold over ten-thousand copies within a year of its publication in 1902 and was rapidly translated into other languages.¹⁷ Basing himself on numerous testimonial accounts of religious experiences, including dozens sourced from Starbuck, James “provided . . . the first clear example—albeit perhaps an imperfect one—of the descriptive approach to religious phenomena.”¹⁸ In this,

14. See, for instance, Zeitlin’s review of Schneersohn’s *Der veg tsum mensh*, Zeitlin, “Vegen di letste.” Zeitlin noted, as well, that Ekstein’s work bears “the strong influence of Rudolf Steiner” despite its ostensibly exclusive reliance on hasidic sources, Zeitlin, “Vi azoy men zukht haynt dos inerlikhe likht:”

15. Classic works from this school include James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*. See, as well, Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. For a revision of the latter, see Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 261–307.

16. This sentiment was well-expressed by Starbuck, who pointed to “the vague ideas which had been forming, that religion might be studied in the more careful ways that we call scientific, with profit to both science and religion,” Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, xi. See, as well, the utopian vision expressed in Shapotschnick, *Do You Know Yourself*, 3–4. On Starbuck’s and his colleagues’ efforts to utilize scientific methods for the advancement of religion, see White, “A Measured Faith”; White, *Unsettled Minds*, 134–57. On the interplay between the scholarship of religion and religious practice, see Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 11–13.

17. Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 291.

18. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, 28.

he advocated for the formation of a “Science of Religions” which, “depend[ing] for its original material on facts of personal experience,” would classify and systematize religious phenomena within such categories as “healthy-mindedness,” “saintliness,” and, foremost for James, “mysticism.”¹⁹ As we will see below, Zeitlin expressed great enthusiasm upon reading *The Varieties*, taking up James’s summons to partake in the formation of the science of religions. It must be noted, however, that, like many of his peers, Zeitlin’s understanding of science, more akin to the broader notion conveyed by the German term *Wissenschaft*, did not consist of laboratory investigations and the formulation of hypotheses, but rather an ordered and systematic presentation of a given subject—in this case religious experience—empirically supported by anecdotal evidence.²⁰ Indeed, this image of science favored by Zeitlin was often at odds with the more sterile worldview of scientific naturalism, drawn as the latter was towards agnosticism, as well as other forms of critical scholarship. With that, various turn-of-the-century metaphysical systems utilized scientific language in an attempt to share in the reigning epistemic authority of science.²¹

The origins of parapsychology, meanwhile, are rooted in the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in England in 1882. Psychical researchers sought to apply scientific methods to the study of phenomena previously associated with the occult—such as spiritualism, apparitions, and clairvoyance—now conceptualized as the products of telepathy and other psychic forces.²² The distinction between psychology and parapsychology, today divergent fields, remained quite muddled at the turn of the century as the former

19. James, *Varieties*, 353, table of contents.

20. See Lewis, “How Religion Appeals to the Authority of Science,” 33. Concerning Zeitlin’s use of the word “scientific,” see Meir, “Hillel Zeitlin’s Zohar,” 146.

21. The popular American New Thought movement, itself derived from mesmerism with its quasi-scientific doctrine of animal magnetism, cast its teachings as “laws,” utilizing a legislative metaphor borrowed directly from scientific discourse. See Lewis, “How Religion Appeals to the Authority of Science,” 26–27; Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 12. See also Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 201–330.

22. Asprem, “Parapsychology.”

attempted to tighten its rather loose disciplinary borders. James, for instance, served as president of the Society for Psychical Research from 1894 to 1895 and was a founding member of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1884.²³ In Germany, as well, parapsychological research societies emerged alongside the institutionalization of psychology as a scientific discipline, and many eastern European Jewish writers at the time referred to the activities of parapsychologists in the same tones reserved for other scientific fields.²⁴ Elazar David Finkel, for instance, whose abridged Hebrew adaptation of the parapsychological classic *Phantasms of the Living* appeared in Warsaw in 1904, advertised his work as “founded upon the experiments and investigations of psychologists and philosophers specializing in the study of the psyche,” while his contemporary, R. Mordecai Nissenbaum, informed his religious readers in 1910 of the parapsychological research carried out by the “leading scholars and esteemed professors of France and England.”²⁵

While parapsychology originated in many respects as an attempt to naturalize the supernatural, it was often co-opted by religious thinkers, such as Zeitlin and Cohen, for whom the scientific authority of parapsychology—with its reports of thought-transference, clairvoyance, and hidden forces, all cloaked in a scientific veneer—provided an empirical foundation for contested religious phenomena, foremost among them prophecy.²⁶ With that, Zeitlin’s path to developing his theory of visions and prophecy originated with James’s *Varieties* and the scientific study of religious experience, to which I now turn.

23. Sommer, “Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology”; Sommer, “Psychical Research in the History and Philosophy of Science”; Knapp, *William James*. James’s writings on psychical research have been collected in James, *Essays in Psychical Research*. The active delineation of boundaries of scientific fields is discussed in Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science”; Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science*, Collins and Pinch, *Frames of Meaning*.

24. See Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernormal.” On the development of German parapsychology, see Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*.

25. Finkel, *ha-Hargashah me-Rahok*; “ha-Hargashah me-Rahok”; Nissenbaum, *Mosdot ha-Emunah*, 31.

26. Compare Aspren, “Parapsychology,” 634.

“In the Secret Place of the Soul”: Hillel Zeitlin and the Science of Religions

Born into a devout family of Habad Hasidim in Korma in what is now Belarus, Zeitlin was swiftly recognized as a prodigy, and as an adolescent he underwent a year of study in the Habad hasidic court in Rechytsa. He later recalled this period as marked by ecstatic religious and visionary experiences:

But a while after I departed from Rechytsa I found myself *consumed by divine fire*. For more than half a year afterwards, when I was about thirteen, I was totally *subsumed within Infinity*. No one knew what was happening to me, since I was by nature a shy loner. Yet even today I recall with secret joy that wondrous time when I was almost able to see the “power of the Maker within the made” and to penetrate beyond the “physical, corporeal nature of things,” constantly seeing the “divine power flowing through them in each moment, without which they are naught.” I found myself in a state of ecstasy that I had not known previously and have never yet attained again. Usually people are in such states for minutes or hours in the course of a day. But I remained in that ecstatic state *all day and night*. *My thought was attached to Divinity with hardly a moment's interruption.*²⁷

This juncture was short-lived, Zeitlin noted, and he soon found his faith undermined by works of modern literature and philosophy. Having shed his religious beliefs, his youthful period of religious experience was relegated to the past as he devoted himself to an autodidactic study of philosophy.²⁸ Established as a prominent writer and journalist, Zeitlin settled in Warsaw in 1907, where he authored a series of essays and monographs on hasidic and kabbalistic subjects, largely in a neo-romantic and existentialist vein.²⁹ Publishing several columns per week over the course of several decades in the widely circulated Yiddish daily *Der moment*, Zeitlin was among the most popular Jewish writers in Poland, his articles read by a mass audience.³⁰

27. Zeitlin, “Kitsur Toldotai” (all emphases in original throughout unless stated otherwise); translated into English in Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 1–6. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, 5. Zeitlin’s account is couched in terminology borrowed from Habad hasidic writings.

28. Zeitlin authored the first Hebrew monographs on Spinoza and Nietzsche. Zeitlin, *Barukh Spinoza*; Zeitlin, “Friedrich Nietzsche.”

29. Zeitlin, “Shekhinah”; Zeitlin, “Yofi shel Ma’alah”; Zeitlin, “ha-Hasidut”; Zeitlin, “ha-Tsima’on”; Zeitlin, *ha-Hasidut le-Shitoteha ve-Zerameha*; Zeitlin, *Rabbi Nahman mi-Breslav*. On these works, see Meir, “Hasidut she-le-Atid Lavo.”

30. In a 1929 survey by the rival Yiddish daily *Unzer ekspress*, Zeitlin was ranked the third most beloved Jew in Poland, “Ot dos zenen di 10 oysdervelte, di 10 belibste yuden in poyln.”

During the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Zeitlin underwent a gradual process of religious renewal, forming an eclectic religious identity as a modern hasidic Jew positioned between the reactive traditionalism of hasidic Orthodoxy and secular Jewish modernity.³¹ He envisioned a prophetic revival already at this time, calling in 1909 for a “new religious current” whose spirit would consist not of:

...“a national ethic,” nor “*Wissenschaft des Judentums*” and meager pedantry, nor economic socialism, nor even what they call art (in the ordinary sense . . .), but rather the spirit of *prophecy*. The prophecy which departed from Israel will return once more. The religious fire which roused Moses, the religious fire which roused Ezra and the Great Assembly—this religious fire will be revealed and seen once more in the life of Israel, even if in a different appearance . . .³²

This prophetic spirit, Zeitlin wrote elsewhere that year, would consist of a “particular world-creation and worldview” which encompassed yet transcended the bounds of emissarial rebuke, universal ethics, and lyrical aesthetic spirit.³³ If his calls for “a new religious current” resembled the advocacy for religious reform put forward by the American psychologists of religion, his complex religious identity as a past participant in religious experience now found at a distance likewise accorded with the biographies of psychologists such as Starbuck, whose short-lived adolescent conversion would later prompt his scholarly investigation of religious phenomena.³⁴ This complex identity would, in part, prompt Zeitlin

31. This process is described as a “religious renewal” in Zeitlin, “Der lebens-veg fun di belibtste yuden in poyln.” Zeitlin’s identity as a “repentant” is a long-standing trope in biographical studies published in the years following his death. See, for instance, Lipkin, “Yeridah le-Tsorekh Aliyah.” This trope has recently been challenged by Bluman, “On the Characterization of Hillel Zeitlin as a Penitent.” On Zeitlin’s self-identification as a hasidic Jew throughout his life, see Zeitlin, *Vos ikh hob yets tsu zogen*, 31. For a critical portrayal of hasidic traditionalism in interwar Poland, see Piekarz, *Ideological Trends*.

32. Hillel Zeitlin, “She’elot,” 15, 25.

33. Zeitlin, “Yugend-Shtimen”; republished with minor alterations in Zeitlin, *Der alefbeyts fun yudentum*, 69–72; translated into Hebrew in Zeitlin, *Alef Bet shel Yabadut*, 54–57. Zeitlin’s remarks were aimed in part at the conception of prophecy put forward by the Zionist ideologue Ahad ha-Am, discussed in Schweid, *Prophets for Their People and Humanity*, 44–65.

34. White, “A Measured Faith,” 433–34.

to issue his response to James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1913 in the literary anthology *Netivot* as "In the Secret Place of the Soul."³⁵ As an individual both near and far from religion, "in whom the flame once burned; the fire has now been extinguished, but 'a whispering coal is still aglow beneath the heap of ashes,'" Zeitlin viewed himself as uniquely qualified to author such a "Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience."³⁶ This work, Zeitlin later recalled, was an expression of "the strengthening and fortification" of his religious renewal in those years.³⁷ "In the Secret Place of the Soul," then, was not a work of detached scholarship, but rather an attempt to articulate his own burgeoning religious experiences. It is here that Zeitlin declared his wish to present a scientific study of prophecy.³⁸

Upon its publication in Russian in 1910, *The Varieties* aroused great interest among Russian Orthodox readers, some of whom took issue with the book's nearly monolithic Protestant orientation.³⁹ Like many Christians, Zeitlin identified with James's call to initiate a science of religions while seeking to issue a corrective to his work, in this case from the standpoint of Jewish, predominantly hasidic, religious experience.⁴⁰ He expressed great esteem for James's work, noting that "only one proper attempt has been made in this field [of the science of religions]. That is James's wondrous book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James is almost

35. Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah." The essay received mixed reviews, see Kabak, "Netivot"; S. Rosenfeld, "be-Safrut u-be-Hayyim"; Brenner, *Ketavim*, 1087. For a more extensive, receptive review, see Friedman, "ba-Mish'olim."

36. Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah," 206; translated adapted from Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 123.

37. Zeitlin, "Der lebens-veg fun di belibteste yuden in poynl."

38. Zeitlin already sought to produce scientific studies of religious topics prior to reading James. See the table of contents of *Safrut* 1, no. 3 (1909-10), in which the words "A scientific work [*sefer mada'i*]" are appended to the title of his article on Hasidism.

39. Etkind, "James and Konovalov."

40. Compare a similar Russian Orthodox critique published in 1911, N. Shemelin's *The Religious-Philosophical Views of W. James in Connection with the Mystical Currents of Contemporary Life* [Russian], discussed in *ibid.*, 172-73.

the only person who has found the scientific key to unlock religion’s gates.”⁴¹ With that, he declared that *The Varieties*, with its Christian focus, had opened only the outer gates of religious experience. The inner gates—leading to the distinct religious experiences of Judaism—were the subject of Zeitlin’s study. Borrowing James’s descriptive methodology, Zeitlin took as his raw material the depictions of encounters with the Divine found in the biblical books of the prophets and early hasidic texts. Adapting the former’s pragmatic mode of evaluation, he delineated various categories of Jewish religious experience (wonder, astonishment, and revelation, respectively), transforming the descriptive content of these passages into a phenomenological map of the landscape of revelation.⁴² James, in short, provided Zeitlin with the analytical lens to develop an innovative hermeneutic for reading Jewish, in particular hasidic, texts as testimonial accounts of religious experience, of “this hidden, deep, yet natural feeling [of] an otherworldly awe, a fear of God that cannot be contained, that they have seen *beyond* the border, that they have *touched* God.”⁴³

“In the Secret Place of the Soul” draws to a close with a discussion of revelation. “People,” Zeitlin observed, “always think that ‘revelation’ is the lot of just a few exemplary individuals among human beings, ‘prophets,’ the most highly elevated of people. This error, shared by almost all superficial believers,

41. *Ibid.*, 208 [126].

42. See Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 206 [122] for an affirmative discussion of James’s pragmatism. Zeitlin’s categories of religious experience are, in all likelihood, the unacknowledged basis for the early chapters of Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *God in Search of Man*, which describes the progressive notions of “The Sublime,” “Wonder,” and “The Sense of Mystery.” See Waldoks, “Hillel Zeitlin,” 230–31, 313n89; Green, “Three Warsaw Mystics,” 33.

43. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 224 [146–47]. It is worth noting, as well, the reform aims of Zeitlin’s work, shared with the American psychologists of religion. See *ibid.*, 207: “They [those qualified to construct the science of religions] gaze at [religion] and study its principles and foundations; they can determine what is essential to its very being and what of falsehood and ugliness has become attached to it.” Compare Starbuck’s 1902 letter to James cited in White, “A Measured Faith,” 433: “A multitude of superstitions and crudities are doomed to fold their tents . . . People will be living in a new era of religious experience before they know it.”

is rooted in a misunderstanding of revelation’s true nature.”⁴⁴ Following a lyrical depiction, interwoven with extensive biblical and rabbinic imagery, of the ineffable experience of revelation accessible to every person, he states:

The various appearances and revelations that happen to *everybody* at certain times are beyond categorization or definition. They can never be placed within borders, about which you say: “These are exactly what they are, and here are the signs by which to know them. These are the authentic revelations; ‘see them and pronounce them holy.’” But to the degree that it is possible to find some sense of order among these things, this is how it seems to me . . .⁴⁵

Zeitlin’s categories of common revelatory experience number, in ascending order: (1) the voice of God within nature; (2) symbols; (3) hints sent by God to particular individuals; (4) dreams and visions of the night; (5) the voice of conscience and thoughts of repentance; (6) desolation of the soul and cosmic longings; (7) the inner voice; (8) a feeling of divine closeness; (9) events in one’s life such as poverty, illness, and human suffering; and (10) ascent of the soul.⁴⁶ These, however, were but initial categories to be continued in a study encompassing “higher forms of revelation,” akin to what James referred to as “exceptional mental states.”⁴⁷ The next chapter of “In the Secret Place of the Soul” would comprise, per Zeitlin’s program, “(1) *voices*, a *maggid* [speaking angel], *bat kol* [divine echo], and others like them; (2) *the holy spirit*, with its various manifestations and properties; and (3) *prophecy* of various types and manifestations,” explicated in a study of “their nature, essence, origins, signs, foundations and special moments—as well as all I have described above, attested to not only by great religious teachers and poets of faith, but by the witness of thousands of people who lived in various times and epochs.”⁴⁸

44. *Ibid.*, 227 [151].

45. *Ibid.*, 230 [155].

46. *Ibid.*, 230–35 [155–61].

47. Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States*.

48. Zeitlin, “ba-Hivyon ha-Neshamah,” 235 [161–62].

This subsequent chapter, a Jamesean study of prophecy and other higher forms of revelation in the Jewish tradition, was ultimately shelved. Presented as the first chapters of a larger book, “In the Secret Place of the Soul” was not completed as originally planned, perhaps owing to the outbreak of the First World War, a disruption which led to a sea change in Zeitlin’s own relation to religious experience and prophecy. While James and the envisioned continuation of “In the Secret Place of the Soul” would come to play a role in the publication of his dream journal, Zeitlin’s subsequent theoretical writings on prophecy and visionary experience would bear the mark of another American thinker, Ralph Waldo Trine. Having initially viewed himself as uniquely qualified to scientifically *study* the manifold variations of religious experience—culminating in prophecy—the trauma of the First World War would transform Zeitlin, in his own telling, into a seer himself. Henceforth, Zeitlin’s writings on visions and prophecy would be directly intertwined with his own experiences.

“A Higher Solution to this World-Riddle”: Visions and Premonitions

The unprecedented violence and loss of life inflicted by the First World War permanently altered the landscape of east European Jewry. Situated between the warring German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian armies, the Polish countryside was ravaged by invading and retreating forces, leading to the widespread destruction of rural Jewish communities and the mass migration of refugees to urban centers.⁴⁹ Warsaw, in particular, was subject to the violent attacks of retreating Russian forces, as well as the ravages of hunger and disease ever-present throughout the subsequent German occupation, and Zeitlin found himself cast into a maelstrom of death and destruction.

Rumors of the brutal acts of violence enacted by Russian troops against defenseless Jewish communities during the spring of 1915 had a profound psychological effect upon Zeitlin. According to his own account, upon receiving

49. See Wodziński, “War and Religion.”

“blood-curdling reports” of expulsions, murders, and other indiscriminate acts of violence, he “roamed during those days as a madman.”⁵⁰ Seeking a “higher solution” to the global conflagration, he “unceasingly studied kabbalistic literature, [his] mind and heart given over completely to esoteric thoughts.”⁵¹ “I entered within myself entirely,” he recalled, “I isolated myself as much I could, I uttered a silent prayer in my heart nearly unceasingly, I reviewed every esoteric work I had previously studied, I sought always, in my constant study of them, a solution to the great riddle before me—the puzzle of entire nations given over to life and death.”⁵² Zeitlin’s feverish study of kabbalistic texts and contemplation of the cataclysm spurred, per his testimony, the return of the visionary consciousness of his youth. He remarked years later:

The picture of my inner life (and that is most of my life) would not be complete or accurate if I did not mention, at least briefly, the growth in my life of faith since the day the war broke out. In it and all that has happened since I see the “messiah’s footsteps,” meant not metaphorically, and not simply referring to our national rebirth, but truly the footsteps of Messiah son of David. In the years 1914 and 1915, I was enveloped in almost the same state of ecstasy in which I had found myself when I first encountered Habad [Hasidism]. I nearly achieved the state of “beholding visions” [*boz'eh b'zyonot*] ... All of my spiritual life in these years is the fruit of that wonderful ecstasy.⁵³

Zeitlin was transformed during the winter of 1914–1915, he claimed, into a clairvoyant visionary with a near singular focus on divining the fate of the long-suffering Jewish people. Subject to lucid dreams and waking premonitions, he dutifully recorded his experiences beginning in the fall of 1915 in a journal he referred to as his “Book of Visions,” noting succinctly within that “from time to time I dream wondrous dreams.”⁵⁴ Zeitlin attributed great importance

50. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 520. For a description of these incidents, see Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse*, 139–40.

51. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 529, 541.

52. Zeitlin, *Demamah ve-Kol*, 18.

53. Zeitlin, “Kitsur Toldatai,” 1–2; translation adapted from Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 5.

54. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 505. Zeitlin discussed the chronology of his journal in a

to documenting and disseminating his experiences; these aims will be discussed below. A short selection from this work, comprising dreams and visions from the early war years up to the summer of 1917 alongside reflections on current events, was published in 1919 in the Hebrew literary journal *ha-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer.”⁵⁵

Zeitlin emerges from the pages of his journal as a writer possessed by a certain prophetic consciousness. Believing himself to be graced with clairvoyant precognition, he turned to his dreams and intuitions to inform him of developments in the war, events in Palestine, and even the end of days.⁵⁶ Notably, many of the dreams allude to Zeitlin’s study of Kabbalah; certain dreams are stimulated by the study of a particular kabbalistic book prior to sleeping, while other times esoteric kabbalistic teachings are revealed to Zeitlin in the dream itself.⁵⁷ The following entry, from April 15, 1917, is representative:

As the last days of Passover commenced, in the afternoon, I sat at the table in my house. I was exhausted and began to drift off. I fell asleep leaning on my hand. I slept and awoke, and I say to the members of my household, “You should know that in recent days the British have captured cities in the Land of Israel.” I do not remember if I saw anything in my dream or had been told, but I knew with great clarity that this was the case. I am inclined to consider it to be a true dream, for it was extremely *clear and certain*.

In this light, I recall now a similar event: I slept one Sabbath afternoon and awoke with the clear awareness that great and awful deeds would soon take place near Pinsk. At that time the Russian front was quite advanced, and the Germans were so distant from Pinsk that it would never occur to anyone that they, the Germans, would reach that city. As for myself, I had not thought of Pinsk at all during those weeks, nor had it even *crossed my mind*. And suddenly—it is Pinsk . . .

1938 letter to Shmuel Yosef Agnon. Hillel Zeitlin to Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Archive of Shmuel Yosef Agnon, 401599 Correspondence, Folder 5:2276, The National Library of Israel.

55. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot.” On *ha-Tekufah*, see Katz, “ke-Avor Tekufah.”

56. *Ibid.*, 508, 523, 541. Zeitlin declared, on the basis of a dream and further kabbalistic speculation, that the final redemption of the Jewish people would transpire by no later than 1970.

57. *Ibid.*, 505, 509, 510, 512.

I knew then with great clarity that the German army would reach Pinsk. And indeed it was so: several months passed and as the German army advanced it captured Pinsk, and the fight over the city was very great.

A great destruction was wrought upon that city and thousands of its residents now wander across the land, hungry, naked, and barefoot. The delicate and spoiled among them now toil in hard labor, and the rich and wealthy have but a loaf of bread. The Lord has exhausted all of His fury upon that city and its residents. Who can know for what and why? The residents of Pinsk are no worse off than the rest of Israel!

But, “who can fathom the spirit of the Lord?” (Isaiah 40:13) “Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Thy judgments are like the great abyss.” (Psalms 36:7) Alas, the awful abyss which swallows up millions upon millions of people! Will this abyss not seal up its mouth? Why, oh Father, Father! Why? Why?

At this moment, as I write these words, I hear a voice calling forth from the depths of my soul: In the first days of the month of Tammuz [July 1917] there will be a change.

I shall wait.⁵⁸

Zeitlin was not alone during the war years in professing clairvoyant foreknowledge. Throughout Europe, thousands of self-declared prophets predicted the outcome of impending battles, the fate of particular soldiers, as well as when the war would finally draw to an end.⁵⁹ Zeitlin himself was aware of these professed prophets and took their forecasts seriously. When one such seer, a young Jewish man, prophesied in Warsaw in late 1917 that the war would end the following spring, Zeitlin was reported to have invited him to his house, while, in a series of entries, he ruminated on the possibility of the war ending by March 17, 1917, as proclaimed by “a seeress in Paris.”⁶⁰ He likewise related his own visions to popular occult modes of clairvoyance. In one entry, he dis-

58. *Ibid.*, 523.

59. See Davies, *A Supernatural War*, 16-53.

60. Toleroz, “Natur un vunder”; Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 510, 513: “The day has passed, the 17th of March, the day when the seeress in Paris prophesied with great confidence that the world war would end, and even I had such a feeling—and we have not been saved. Nevertheless, one cannot say that this vision was completely false, for although peace itself has not come, the events *enabling* peace have occurred.”

avowed any familiarity with the “‘astral’ visions spoken about by non-Jewish occultists,” yet noted that he himself had experienced such an “astral vision,” in which, employing kabbalistic terminology, he relates that he was accosted by a red cat formed of fire which emerged “not from the side of holiness.”⁶¹

The majority of Zeitlin’s dreams and premonitions were concerned with forecasting the fate of the Jewish people and the international order, and this seems to have been the chief aim of his divinatory practices. Yet his clairvoyance extended to more immediate matters, as well. In an undated entry from the spring of 1917, he related that he suffered from a nightmare in which a gang of thieves attempted to anesthetize him with chloroform; his wife, too, dreamed that night of an attempted robbery. He noted, with astonishment, that “these dreams held a sort of warning and second sight, for that very day two men in the guise of poor beggars attempted to harm my wife and steal all of my possessions while I was not home.”⁶²

Zeitlin was ambivalent about the prophetic nature of his dreams. On February 7, 1917, he equivocated:

I do not yet know if these dreams are of any substance or worth. “Dreams speak falsely . . .” (Zech. 10:2), and “Dreams bear no importance for good or ill.” Although it says, “I will speak with him in a dream,” (Num. 12:6) such words were not uttered about people like me . . . On the other hand, the heart believes in accordance with its wishes, in the subject of its desire, its longings. And who does not yearn now for peace, for a respite, for an end to the suffering, the likes of which have never been seen from the day God created the earth and man upon it?⁶³

With that, a week earlier he recorded a description of a nocturnal ascent to heaven, propelled, in his dream, by the repeated recitation of Ezekiel 1:1, “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened, and I saw

61. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 523-24.

62. *Ibid.*, 537-38.

63. *Ibid.*, 508.

visions of God . . .”⁶⁴ It appears, then, that Zeitlin sought to emulate the prophetic vision revealed to Ezekiel, appropriating the biblical account of the latter’s initial theophany as a mantra so that he might attain a similar revelatory experience.

As mentioned above, an excerpt from Zeitlin’s diary appeared in the Hebrew literary journal *ba-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer.” What initially led Zeitlin to seek to publicize his visions? One of his colleagues later alleged that he was inspired by the wave of prophecy that swept across Europe,⁶⁵ yet from an undated letter to the Hebrew writer and editor Fishel Lachower, it emerges that Zeitlin’s decision to record and publicize his dreams and experiences was at first closely bound to the planned completion of “In the Secret Place of the Soul:

I would be very grateful if you could sway [the publishers David] Frishman and [Avraham Yosef] Stybel to publish my visions. Following reflection, I have decided to present them as a second part to “In the Secret Place of the Soul.” I will complete the first section with numerous testimonials and demonstrations from the experiences of others, while the second section (the Book of Visions), will consist of my own experiences.⁶⁶

If he had initially intended to delineate the “nature, essence, origins, signs, foundations and special moments” of appearances of otherworldly voices, the holy spirit, and prophecy, “attested to . . . by the witness of thousands of people who lived in various times and epochs,” he now wished to supplement the study with his own first-hand experience.⁶⁷ While Zeitlin had at first been inspired by James to gather testimonial accounts of religious experiences, he had since parted ways from the latter in turning to his own experiences.⁶⁸ Yet the dream journal did not ultimately appear within the framework of such a study.

64. *Ibid.*, 507.

65. Toleroz, “Natur un vunder.”

66. Hillel Zeitlin to Fishel Lachower, Archive of Fishel Lachower (16), Genazim Archive, Document 11038/12 (cited in Meir, “The Book of Visions,” 151).

67. *Ibid.*, “ba-Hivyon ha-Neshamah,” 235 [161–62].

68. Christopher White argues that James, who personally struggled to gain access to the inner emotions actuated in religious experience, found “vicarious satisfaction” in the testimonies of others, White, “A Measured Faith,” 443–44.

As noted above, “Bordering Two Worlds” chronicles Zeitlin’s experiences up to 1917 yet did not appear in press until 1919. A review of Zeitlin’s other publications from the intervening years reveals his growing interest in Trine, one of the leading writers of the New Thought movement, which enjoyed enormous popularity across America and Europe at the turn of the century and well into the interwar period. New Thought, with its radical doctrine of “mind over matter,” granted supremacy to mental states, which were viewed as the true determiners of reality.⁶⁹ While Zeitlin was already familiar with Trine’s work in 1913—an anecdote from *In Tune with the Infinite* appears in “The Secret Place of the Soul” as an exemplification of “the inner voice”⁷⁰—he began in 1918 to publish a Yiddish translation of Trine’s book. This incomplete translation of two chapters from *In Tune with the Infinite* appeared in *Hilel tseytlen’s bletlekh*, a short-lived Yiddish periodical edited by Zeitlin devoted to “contemporary and eternal questions.”⁷¹ Tellingly, one of passages he translated describes the malleability of the mind upon waking, the very hour in which Zeitlin noted in his journal that he experienced many of his dreams.⁷² *Hilel Tseytlen’s bletlekh* ceased publication after only two issues, and the Yiddish translation of *In Tune with the Infinite* was shelved.⁷³

69. Hanegraaff, “New Thought Movement”; Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*. On Trine, see *ibid.*, 164–69; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 394–97. See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 260, for a list of the many New Thought clubs active in Germany between 1890 and 1936.

70. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 233 [159]. Zeitlin praises Trine here as “Emerson’s senior and wondrous disciple.” *In Tune with the Infinite* is cited by James in *The Varieties* and it is possible that Zeitlin learned of Trine through reading *The Varieties*. See James, *Varieties*, 83, 94, 305.

71. Trine, “Der nayer onhoyb”; Trine, “Di harmonye mit dem unendlikhen.” The sections translated by Zeitlin originally appear in Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 131–34, 11–15. From a comparison of editions it is apparent that Zeitlin read the Russian translation of *In Tune with the Infinite* (Saint Petersburg, 1907). I am grateful to Jonatan Meir for bringing the second issue of *Hilel tseytlen’s bletlekh* to my attention.

72. Trine, “Der nayer onhoyb,” 6. Zeitlin exercised creative license in his translation of the passage, appending a sentence of his own which reads: “We can [upon waking in the morning] infuse our mind with a lucidity full of song and inner thought, endowing it with a direction which is desirable for us.”

73. Zeitlin continued to cite *In Tune with the Infinite* as late as 1934. Zeitlin, “le-Herzl ve-ad Herzl . . .”

When “Bordering Two Worlds” ultimately appeared in *ha-Tekufah* in 1919, it was preceded, then, not by the originally planned Jamesean study of prophecy and visionary experience, but rather by Zeitlin’s translation of Trine’s programmatic work with its call to gain “perfect inner vision” by tapping into the “inexhaustible reservoir” of the “Infinite Spirit of Life.”⁷⁴ The published dream journal, with its bold claims of clairvoyance and lyrical depictions of lucid dreams, strayed far from the standard fare of Hebrew letters and was ill-received.⁷⁵ Zeitlin’s work was panned by critics—one reviewer deemed it a “wondrous blend . . . of true religiosity and manic hallucinations,” while another denounced its “bizarre prayers, strange tone, dreams of nonsense, and sickliness.”⁷⁶ In response, he issued a rejoinder presenting his theory of clairvoyance and precognitive dreams. This rebuttal, issued in defense of his dreams and premonitions, demonstrates Zeitlin’s reliance on Trine and other esoteric writers in order to present dreams and visions as a legitimate source of prophetic foreknowledge.

“On the Hidden and the Concealed”

Zeitlin’s response appeared two years later in a brief article titled “On the Hidden and the Concealed.” The essay, Zeitlin’s most thorough treatment of precognitive dreams and clairvoyance, consists of two sections, “Hidden Senses” and “Dreams.” Zeitlin disclosed his aim in publishing the piece in a footnote appended to the beginning of the article:

I present here two chapters from my book *On Esotericism [Al ha-Mistorin]* both on account of their theoretical value in their own regard, and inasmuch as they serve as a proper response to those who criticize my book of visions, the beginning of which was printed in the fourth issue of *ha-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds.”⁷⁷

74. Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 14–15, 39.

75. On the reception of “Bordering Two Worlds,” see Meir, “The Book of Visions,” 153–54.

76. Koplowitz, “Sifrei ha-Tekufah”; Kimhi, “Reshimot Bikoret.”

77. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 472. This footnote is omitted in all subsequent printings.

“On the Hidden and the Concealed,” then, formed the beginning of a larger study on higher forms of revelation, possibly a revision of the shelved continuation of “In the Secret Place of the Soul.” Now titled *On Esotericism*, it was published with the express aim of legitimating Zeitlin’s experiences and encouraging others to develop visionary faculties, as well. In the essay he formulated a theory of clairvoyance revolving around the reductive category of intuition as a conceptual alternative to the worldview of scientific materialism—which Zeitlin regarded with mocking derision—in order to impress upon his colleagues the validity of higher sources of knowledge. To that end, he mustered support from traditional religious texts, appealed to presumed widely-held personal experience, and drew widely on contemporary non-Jewish esoteric literature.

“On the Hidden and the Concealed” opens with an argument for the existence of an inner array of senses analogous to the five recognized faculties of sense perception. Having delineated the external sensual cognates of cognition—organized around the kabbalistic schema of perception consisting of the rungs of *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and *Da’at* [wisdom, understanding, and knowledge] as sourced in biblical and later kabbalistic texts—Zeitlin asserted that “the innermost psychic states, as well, correspond precisely to the external senses.”⁷⁸ With this correspondence established, he asserted that:

Every inner revelation, every inward gaze, every submergence into the depths of the self, every glimpse beyond the screen of consciousness, every sudden spiritual emergence, all that we call “intuition”—this is in fact a hidden sense corresponding precisely to the external faculty of vision.⁷⁹

Zeitlin borrowed this notion of intuition directly from Trine, who in *In Tune with the Infinite* posited that all of reality is but a manifestation of the “Spirit of

78. This assertion is substantiated by a lengthy excerpt from the German Romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 473, citing Friedrich von Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen*, 176–77; translated into English in Schlegel, *The Philosophy of Life*, 451–52.

79. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 473.

Infinite Life and Power,” whose essence is shared by all of humanity.⁸⁰ Coming to a realization of our oneness with the divine inflow of this “Infinite Life,” Trine argued, “make[s] it possible for the higher powers to play, to work, to manifest through us.”⁸¹ The individual who succeeds in doing so receives “the inner guiding we call intuition.”⁸² Zeitlin translated into Hebrew a lengthy passage from Trine, whom he referred to as “one of the greats of American philosophy”:

Intuition is to the spiritual nature and understanding practically what sense perception is to the sensuous nature and understanding. It is an inner spiritual sense through which man is opened to the direct revelation and knowledge of God . . . It is, we repeat, a spiritual sense opening inwardly, as the physical senses open outwardly; and because it has the capacity to perceive, grasp, and know the truth at first hand, independent of all external sources of information, we call it intuition. All inspired teaching and spiritual revelations are based upon the recognition of this spiritual faculty of the soul, and its power to receive and appropriate them . . . Conscious unity of man in spirit and purpose with the Father, born out of his supreme desire and trust, opens his soul through this inner sense to immediate inspiration and enlightenment from the Divine Omniscience, and the co-operative energy of the Divine Omnipotence, under which he becomes a seer and a master.⁸³

Appropriating Trine’s definition of intuition, Zeitlin brought it to bear on visionary experience to the effect that:

Intuition is generally revealed . . . as an inner *feeling*, as an inner truth which has no need for sight, as a *thought* or a *representation*. However, there are those, and these are very few, to whom intuition is exposed as an *image* or *vision*. That which others merely think or feel these ones *see* as though with their actual external eyes. That which comes to others as an abstraction or a hazy feeling, comes to these ones *as something fully formed or coming into being in fine detail*.⁸⁴

Intuitive vision, Zeitlin noted, constitutes a hidden sense which allows one to “behold the ultimate, inner, hidden truth, as well as deeds distant in both

80. Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 11

81. *Ibid.*, 16–17.

82. *Ibid.*, 39.

83. *Ibid.*, 39–40; cited in Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 474.

84. *Ibid.*

place and time, *in living images*, sometimes in allegory, and sometimes—in *the true essence of apperception*.”⁸⁵ The entire passage makes extensive use of rabbinic and kabbalistic expressions, essentially translating New Thought doctrine into a language of Jewish visionary experience.

Intuitive revelation, Zeitlin informed his readers, is manifest in gradations ranging from dream-states to prophecy (“the true vision of the God-seer”). This lowest rung, the predictive dream, is the subject of the second part of the essay, apparently intended to be followed by further chapters on prophecy. In his argument, he appealed to personal experience (“Has it never occurred to you in all of your days to behold a certain fortunate or injurious matter in a dream, to put it out of your mind, and then be cast into a state of wonderment when days or years later the subject of the dream comes true in all of its details?”) as well as the litany of prophetic dreams which litter the historical record. Zeitlin was aware that biblical narratives of precognitive clairvoyance were no longer persuasive for “the modern intellectual”; he availed himself of testimonial accounts of presumably greater credence, namely, those reported in modern esoteric literature. In this vein, he drew on an assortment of esoteric writers, most notably Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) and Carl du Prel (1839–1899), both of whom documented instances of oneiric prophecy within their respective mesmerist and early parapsychological milieus.⁸⁶ He rendered into Hebrew accounts related in their works, namely Kerner’s *Seherin von Prevorst*,

85. Ibid., 475. Trine was not the only authority on intuition cited by Zeitlin. See Zeitlin, “Kadmut ha-Mistorin be-Yisrael,” 302–03, for a discussion of Henri Bergson’s notion of intuition in the context of kabbalistic epistemology. Zeitlin elsewhere regarded Bergson as drawing closest among contemporary Jewish intellectuals to the true path of faith, Zeitlin, “Der seyfer un der soyfer.”

86. The German physician Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) achieved fame during the Romantic period for his mesmerist experiments conducted upon the somnambulist Friederike Hauffe (1801–1829), the eponymous Seeress of Prevorst. On Kerner, see Hanegraaff, “A Woman Alone”; Hanegraaff, “Kerner, Justinus Andreas Christian.” On Carl du Prel, see Kaiser, “Zwischen Philosophie und Spiritismus”; Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*, 33–82; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 29–55; Sommer, “From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism”; Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernormal,” 19–23.

Blätter aus Prevorst, and *Magikon*, and du Prel’s *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*, with the intent of convincing skeptical Jewish readers of the reality of precognitive dreams.⁸⁷ The reports cited from Kerner, for instance, range from that of a businessman who resolved an accounting discrepancy thanks to a nighttime vision to a prominent doctor whose most effective methods of treatment were received in his dreams. From du Prel, Zeitlin quoted the case of the polymath occultist Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), who, du Prel related, was endowed with literacy overnight by a young lad in his dream.⁸⁸ These cases were placed alongside comparable accounts found in works of Jewish literature such as Menasseh ben Israel’s *Nishmat Hayyim* and several descriptions of clairvoyant dreams recorded by the Italian bible scholar Samuel David Luzzato (1800–1865).⁸⁹

If Zeitlin evinced regard for esoteric writers such as Kerner and du Prel, another contemporary theorizer of dreams, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), was the subject of fierce criticism. Turning to Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* [*Die Traumdeutung*], Zeitlin sought to identify the shortcomings of the former’s work. Freud, he wrote, sought to produce a “physiological-psychological solution to all dreams,” one in which dreams originated not from a higher, external source, but rather within the unconscious of the dreamer.⁹⁰ “When superficial science does not blind our critical inner eye,” Zeitlin charged, three cracks in Freud’s theory emerge: (1) Freudian analysis does not account for many critical details; (2) Freud’s interpretations are oftentimes unconvincing and have little relation to the dream itself; (3) Freud selectively singled out material supportive

87. Kerner, *Seberin von Prevorst*; Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst*; Kerner, *Blätter aus Prevorst*; Kerner, *Magikon*; du Prel, *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*. For a discussion of the latter work, see Andriopoulos, “Psychic Television.”

88. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 478, citing du Prel, *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*, 2:263–64.

89. Ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayyim*. Luzzato’s correspondence with his fellow Italian maskil Samuel Hayyim Loli appears in *Otsar Nehmad*.

90. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 478–79. Zeitlin read the fourth edition of *Die Traumdeutung*, which, it is worth noting, included discussion of the “brilliant mystic du Prel.” Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 48n2, cited in Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 179.

of his theory, while leaving out dreams that refute or challenge his mode of interpretation, and this despite the fact that the latter dreams are recorded in the same collections from which Freud sourced the material on which he based his analysis.⁹¹ Having done away with *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Zeitlin concluded:

We see, then, that despite the unquestionable immensity of the unconscious, it nevertheless does not suffice to account for all the various dreams which so interest us. We therefore need to accept as an axiom that dreams do not always originate in the conscious and the unconscious, but, at times, *in that which transcends or lies outside of the conscious* . . .⁹²

If we recall the polemical context in which “On the Hidden and the Concealed” appeared, it emerges that Zeitlin was presenting the theoretical underpinnings of his *own* dreams. He located his account of his prophetic visions within the literary canon of Western esotericism, alongside Kerner’s studies of somnambulism and du Prel’s investigation of the transcendental subject.⁹³ Both of these thinkers, who treaded the line between religious supernaturalism and the natural sciences, served Zeitlin in his efforts to formulate a theory of prophecy palatable to the modern Jewish reader. Much like Kerner, he sought, in his investigation of dreams, to undermine dogmatic rationalism and provide an empirical basis for higher forms of knowledge, while pointing to the existence of precognitive dreams as indicative of a transcendental psychology, à la du Prel.⁹⁴ Zeitlin, then, like a long line of early-twentieth-century thinkers, appealed to the alternative scientific doctrines oftentimes associated with esotericism—in his case, parapsychology, Trine’s system of intuition, and their mesmeric antecedents—in an attempt to develop a natural theology that might counter a disenchanting materialism and countenance prophetic foreknowledge.⁹⁵

91. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 479.

92. *Ibid.*

93. That he likewise maintained that such an association would placate his critics speaks to the epistemic authority Zeitlin believed these esoteric writers enjoyed among his educated Jewish readership.

94. See Hanegraaff, “Kerner,” 660; Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*, 35.

95. See, among others, Turner, *Between Science and Religion*; Asprey, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 225–232; Asprey, “Parapsychology,” 634. Other esoteric systems of thought make appearances throughout Zeitlin’s vast oeuvre, as well. Earlier in the 1920s, Zeitlin had favorably compared

On Esotericism, like many of Zeitlin’s literary projects, was never completed, leaving “On the Hidden and the Concealed” as a fragmentary testimony to a larger system of thought. It likewise received little attention in the press, critical or otherwise. Yet its two chapters and their appeals to the significance of dreams and visions would play a role in Zeitlin’s responses to the political and social crises confronting the Jews of eastern Europe in the interwar period. Zeitlin occupied himself during the 1920s and ‘30s with quixotic attempts to form elite religious fraternities organized around various social and spiritual aims.⁹⁶ Zeitlin’s efforts in this regard were chiefly literary and he articulated his aims and strategies in a number of booklets and articles. The two chapters of “On the Hidden and the Concealed” were incorporated into one of these programmatic texts, *The Book of the Elite: Profound Secret, Clear Thinking, and Guidance and Deed for the Lone Souls Longing for World Salvation in these Years of the “Messiah’s Footsteps”* [*Sifran shel Yehidim: Omek Raz, Zakh Mahshavah ve-Kisharon Hanbagah u-Ma’aseh le-Nishamot Bodedot ha-Metzapot le-Yishu’at Olamim be-Shanim Eilab shel “Ikvatah de-Meshiba”*] (1928).⁹⁷ Zeitlin sought in this book to “train” a cadre of spiritual elites from among the Jewish people to serve as “world-redeemers” by first redeeming their own internality; this inner transformation would subsequently enable them rectify the ills of the world.⁹⁸ In this new messianic context, Zeitlin’s theory of dreams and visions served a distinct social and political role in response to the crises enveloping the Jewish people and the world. Few, however, heeded

theosophical and kabbalistic doctrines concerning the structure of the soul, appealing to the concept of the astral body held by the “occultists and theosophists. See *ibid.*, “Maft’e’ah le-Sefer ha-Zohar,” 290, 293–97. See, as well, Zeitlin, “Vegen an’originelen pruv” for a discussion of Kerner, the astral body, and various occult healing methods. Zeitlin likewise took an interest in the spiritual writings of the German artist and mystic Bô Yin Râ (Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken) (1876–1943), particularly the latter’s *Das Buch vom lebendigen Gott* (1919). See Zeitlin’s Dec. 7, 1922 letter to the Hebrew publisher Simon Rawidowicz, then residing in Berlin, beseeching the latter to send him several of Bô Yin Râ’s books, “Hakdamat Sefer ha-Zohar,” 39.

96. On these groups, see Green and Mayse, “The Great Call of the Hour.”

97. Zeitlin, *Sifran shel Yehidim*, 16–27.

98. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

Zeitlin’s call in his lifetime, and each of his fraternities were disbanded shortly after their founding.⁹⁹

The turn to prophecy in response to crisis is evident from another work published that same year bearing the curious title: *A Word to the Nations: A Vision Concerning Nations and Wars, the Principles of the Noahide Laws and Prayer-Songs for World Peace and the Return of the Divine Presence to Her Place* [*Davar la-Amim: Haẓon al Goyim ve-al Mamlakbot, Ikarei Torat Bnei-Noah ve-Shirot-Tefilot al Shalom ha-Olam ve-al Shivat ha-Shekhinah le-Mekomah*]. Here Zeitlin published prophetic calls for world-wide repentance in the wake of the destruction of the First World War. In his introduction he disavowed any delusions of prophetic grandeur, yet somewhat disingenuously asserted that “were the prophets to rise today from their graves . . . the *outer revealed, understood* content of their message, I believe, would be the same as my *A Word to the Nations*.”¹⁰⁰ He likewise delivered public lectures in which he called for a return to the prophets and published several reviews of contemporary scholarly and religious works on prophecy.¹⁰¹ He was particularly taken by one book, *The Vision of Life* [*Haẓon ha-Hayyim*], a self-declared “modern commentary on Daniel” which elucidated the biblical book in order to predict upcoming conflagrations such as the Second World War, forecast by the author to transpire in the years 1937–1938.¹⁰²

99. For a firsthand account written by a young member of one of these short-lived fraternities, namely, the “Association of Saviors,” see Collection of Polish Jewish Autobiographies: Record Group 4, Autobiography #3752, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. This autobiography is discussed in Waldman, “A Hasid Turns Modern.” Several self-styled neo-Hasidic groups active in the post-war period were directly inspired by Zeitlin’s vision, such as Havurat Shalom (Fellowship of Peace) founded in Somerville, Massachusetts in the United States in 1968 and Irgun Shalhevet-Yah (Organization of the Divine Flame), active in the Israel in the 1950s. Green and Mayse, “The Great Call of the Hour”; Bergman, “Reshafim.”

100. Hillel Zeitlin, *Davar la-Amim*, 2. See Tor, “Bein Ge’ulah le-Teshuvah,” 55, for an insightful analysis of this disavowal.

101. Zeitlin, “Naye ‘nevies’ fun yerushalayim”; Zeitlin, “Vi azoy kumt men tsu rayner sotsialer gerechtigkeit.” See, as well, the lecture announcement preserved in Magazyn Druków Ulotnych (DŹS IK 2f), Biblioteka Narodowa, The National Library of Poland,

102. Shevili, *Haẓon ha-Hayyim al Sefer Daniel*, 70–78. Zeitlin’s review appears in Zeitlin, “Vi azoy konen di nevies fun daniyel.”

Zeitlin's prophetic dream states proceeded unabated throughout these years, all diligently recorded in his journal. Towards the late 1930s, he corresponded with a number of leading members of the Hebrew literary intelligentsia in an effort to publish the continuation of his "Book of Visions."¹⁰³ In a 1938 letter to the Hebrew writer and future Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon, Zeitlin described his journal as "a book of great interest to the Kabbalist, scholar, psychologist, poet, and any reader in search of God and in search of justice." Zeitlin cast himself here as "a modern man who likewise maintains constant intercourse with *distant, higher worlds* . . . and alongside that knows to *analyze and critique* every transcendental phenomenon and lives at once in the most secular of worlds, taking part in every universal and Jewish social movement."¹⁰⁴ Much to his chagrin, the Hebrew literary community responded to his proposals with disinterest. Having published his earlier writings on religious experience and clairvoyance in leading Hebrew literary periodicals, he now found himself pushed out, his visions and dreams regarded as the ravings of a madman. His journal, written over more than two decades, was lost in the destruction of the Holocaust, leaving the small selection published in "Bordering Two Worlds" as the sole record of his prophetic experiences. While Zeitlin never developed a systematic approach to prophecy beyond "On the Hidden and the Concealed," he located the nucleus of a more complete system in a contemporary work of biblical scholarship published in the final years of his life. An examination of this work, Shmuel Tsvi Cohen's *Regarding Visions of the Future*, demonstrates the possibilities esoteric currents, in this case parapsychology, offered to interwar Jewish religious intellectuals in search of a prophetic paradigm. Zeitlin's appraisal of the book, meanwhile, speaks to the prominence he granted to esoteric systems in promoting a novel theory of prophecy for his day.

103. This correspondence is collected in Meir, "The Book of Visions," 156–70.

104. Correspondence of Hillel Zeitlin to Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1938).

Regarding Visions of the Future: “A New Science of the Religion of Israel”

On August 23, 1935, Zeitlin published a book review in the Warsaw Hebrew weekly *ba-Derekh* under the headline, “Regarding an Attempt to Create a New Religious Philosophy” [“Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah”].¹⁰⁵ The publication reviewed, Cohen’s *Regarding Visions of the Future*, appeared posthumously earlier that summer in Jerusalem, brought to press by friends of the deceased.¹⁰⁶ Cohen, a child prodigy born into a rabbinic family in Latvia, spent several years studying at the University of Bern prior to immigrating to Palestine in 1913, where he worked as a teacher up until shortly before his death in 1933. A peripheral member of the circle surrounding R. Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), Cohen independently pursued biblical scholarship alongside Kabbalah and philosophy.¹⁰⁷ He took a keen interest in German parapsychology, which he wielded as a weapon in his polemical struggle against the claims of biblical criticism; the latter all but nullified the possibility of prophetic precognition, writing off biblical prophetic accounts as works of literary fiction authored after the fact. *Regarding Visions of the Future*, written with great intellectual sophistication and accompanied by extensive footnotes, sought to demonstrate the scientific underpinnings of prophecy as a real phenomenon and thus restore legitimacy to the biblical prophetic writings. Cohen put forward his central question in the book’s opening lines:

105. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah.” Reprinted with substantial omissions as “Al ha-Hazon le-Atid.”

106. These were the scholars Benjamin Menashe Levin, Jacob Nahum Epstein, and Moses Seidel. These three became acquainted with Cohen during their years studying at the University of Bern, where they formed the Tachkemoni student association.

107. Biographical information on Cohen may be found in Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, v–xvi. I am grateful to Cohen’s son, Menachem Cohen, for graciously providing further information regarding his father’s activities and relationships. An *ilan* scroll, an arboreal kabbalistic diagram, previously in Cohen’s possession is preserved in Ms. Heb. 4°200.2, The National Library of Israel. A broadside announcing Cohen’s death has likewise been preserved in the Haifa City Archives Collection, The National Library of Israel. On Kook, see, among others, Mirsky, *Rav Kook*. For a reassessment of Kook’s circle, see Meir, “Lights and Vessels.”

Is there foreknowledge? May the future be predicted in advance by means of a spiritual sense? Is the belief in true dreams (dreams which prove accurate), premonitions, spiritual expectation, and visionaries in possession of the power to uncover the future a mere figment of the imagination, or does it have a basis in reality?¹⁰⁸

This question, Cohen posited, had suffered a “strange fate”—precognition, having been acknowledged by all the ancient and medieval authorities, was firmly rejected by the ideologues of the European enlightenment, embraced once more by the German romantics (Cohen pointed favorably to the writings of Franz Anton Mesmer and Kerner), only to be once more rebuffed by the mid-nineteenth-century proponents of scientific materialism.¹⁰⁹ By the late nineteenth century, he asserted, the dialectic pendulum had swung once more, as parapsychologists and various psychical research societies co-opted the materialists’ staunch empiricism in order to investigate the “dark corners of the soul with the sophisticated tools of modern science,” substantiating the veracity of precognitive visions.¹¹⁰

Cohen presented his parapsychological model of prophecy as a continuation of classic Jewish approaches to the subject. To that end, his account is prefaced with a brief survey of the various understandings of prophecy found in the writings of medieval Jewish philosophers and kabbalistic texts, alongside an exposition on the chief philosophical quandary brought up by prophecy, namely, the threat to free will raised by the possibility of prophetic foreknowledge.¹¹¹ With that, his approach to prophecy was strongly informed by two contemporary studies, Max Kemmerich’s *Prophezeiungen: Alter Aberglaube oder neue Wahrheit? [Prophecies: Old Superstition or New Truth?]* and Emil Mattiesen’s *Der Jenseitige Mensch: Eine Einführung in die Metapsychologie der mystischen Erfahrung [The Otherworldly Man: An*

108. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 1.

109. *Ibid.*, 1–5. On the rise of scientific materialism as a dominant worldview in the nineteenth century, see Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, 8–37; Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, Aspren, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 50–89.

110. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 6. Cohen’s account of the history of parapsychology is taken from Oesterreich, *Grundbegriffe der Parapsychologie*.

111. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 11–28.

Introduction to the Metapsychology of Mystical Experience].¹¹² Kemmerich, a popular writer on occult subjects, collected in his work numerous accounts of fulfilled prophecies culled from the historical and literary record; these provided Cohen with the historical evidence he cited in support of prophecy. Mattiesen’s tome, spanning over 800 pages, was an ambitious attempt to integrate paranormal phenomena, chief among them instances of telepathy and clairvoyance, into the study of religious experience; Cohen rooted his understanding of the nature of biblical—and contemporary—prophecy in the former’s metapsychology, a competing paradigm of parapsychology more prevalent in French circles.¹¹³

In Cohen’s assessment, prophetic visions are renderings of precognitive messages stemming from the subconscious. The subconscious, he asserted, does not owe its omniscience to its link with the unconscious, as argued by Eduard von Hartmann, nor to a connection established with the transcendental sphere, as posited by du Prel in his discussions of the transcendental subject, but rather to a telepathic reception of the thoughts of God, thus instantiating the biblical designation of the prophet as the one who (literally) “knows the mind of the Most High” (Numbers 24:16).¹¹⁴ Cohen’s theory of prophecy bears great resemblance to that of Maimonides as explicated in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, with the latter’s Aristotelean metaphysics exchanged for Mattiesen’s metapsychology. He admits as much, conceding that “the spiritual overflow which an individual might receive from the Active Intellect according to medieval philosophy is essentially the same thing we are representing with telepathy.”¹¹⁵ His project, then, was in a certain sense a continuation of the medieval philosophical tradition, translated into contemporary scientific terminology, yet it differed in a key respect. The

112. Kemmerich, *Prophezeiungen*, Mattiesen, *Der Jenseitige Mensch*.

113. I am grateful to Eberhard Bauer for sharing with me unpublished material on Mattiesen and his work. On the distinctions between the French *Métapsychique* and German *Parapsychologie*, see Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 334–49.

114. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 35–47. Hartmann presented his system in Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten*; Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*.

115. *Ibid.*, 45n1. On Maimonides’s notion of prophecy, see Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 148–315.

neo-Aristotelian worldview embraced by many medieval Jewish philosophers, among them Maimonides, enjoyed intellectual supremacy in its day, while the scientific paradigm put forward by parapsychology—one that granted credence to the paranormal—struggled against the prevailing scientific agnosticism of the early twentieth century.¹¹⁶ With that, *Regarding Visions of the Future* was not the only Jewish study of prophecy to address parapsychology. Jacob Kaplan’s *Psychology of Prophecy* (1908) and *The Mind of the Prophet* (1919) cite studies published by the Society for Psychical Research, while one receives an impression of the pervasiveness of parapsychology in scholarly studies of prophecy from Abraham Joshua Heschel’s declaration, in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation on prophecy, that he did *not* consult any parapsychological literature.¹¹⁷

Turning to Zeitlin’s review of *Regarding Visions of the Future*, one is struck by how greatly Cohen’s scholarship excited him. The very title of the book, he wrote, “attracted me considerably, for the problem of prophecy—in particular visions of the distant days of the future down to the exact time and location in which such and such events will transpire—has enticed and enchanted me from the days of my youth.”¹¹⁸ While Cohen had harnessed biblical scholarship to parapsychology for a particular polemical purpose within his field of interest, namely, to legitimate the prophetic accounts related in the Bible, Zeitlin perceived the book as heralding something far greater. *Regarding Visions of the Future*, he declared in his review, was no less than the “*construction of a . . . new science of the religion of Israel.*” Furthermore, Cohen had unequivocally located his project within the parameters of biblical scholarship; in a 1921 letter to his brother, he avowed that he “has a few other things to say concerning biblical scholarship, and they are, in my opinion, of great importance,” and the

116. See Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 289–316.

117. Kaplan, *Psychology of Prophecy*, 122; Kaplan, *The Mind of the Prophet*, 15; Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 4. In a fascinating connection, Heschel’s doctoral advisor was Max Dessoir, one of the founders of German parapsychology. Kaplan and Dressner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, 103.

118. Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.”

biographical note appended to the work stated that he had recently “resigned from his [teaching] position and dedicated himself entirely to the study of the Bible.” Zeitlin, however, rejected this account, asserting instead that “it was not the study of the Bible for its own sake which brought [Cohen] to his investigations and conclusions regarding prophecy, but rather *the clear desire to create a new Guide of the Perplexed in accordance with the new philosophy and sciences.*”¹¹⁹

Zeitlin, it appears, projected upon Cohen his own unrealized ambitions to articulate a theory of Jewish religious experience revolving around the phenomenon of prophecy, going so far as to identify Cohen as a kindred spirit whose “*approach to the solving the problem of visions of the future is very close to my approach.*”¹²⁰ Zeitlin drew attention in his review to Cohen’s use of James—this despite the fact that Cohen only mentions James twice in passing throughout his book.¹²¹ Zeitlin’s characterization of James here speaks volumes to his shift in orientation since he first wrote about *The Varieties* two decades earlier. James, whom Zeitlin had earlier applauded as “almost the only person who has found the scientific key to unlock religion’s gates” was now listed alongside du Prel as “the finest of occultists.”¹²²

In Zeitlin’s eyes, *Regarding Visions of the Future*, with its application of parapsychological findings to age-old philosophical and metaphysical questions, amounted to a revolution in Jewish thought akin to Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*, and he went on to conjecture that “the book, *Regarding Visions of the Future*, is only a part of the great work he thought, so it appears, to produce; a work which would encompass the laws of the Torah, and the depths

119. Cohen, *Al ba-Hazon le-Atid*, ix, xi; Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.”

120. Ibid. See, as well, a 1962 letter written by R. Hayyim Zevulun Harlap in which Harlap relates that Zeitlin turned to his father, R. Yaakov Moshe Harlap (who later married Cohen’s widow, Devorah), for information about Cohen, “for, in [Zeitlin’s] words, the two of them were of one mind.” Archive of Hillel Zeitlin (237), Document 1150-A, Genazim Archive. I am grateful to Jonatan Meir for directing my attention to this source.

121. James is discussed by Cohen in *Al ba-Hazon le-Atid*, 34n, 43.

122. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 208 [126]; Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.”

of the essence, breadth, greatness, and flourishing of the religion of Israel.” While Cohen gave no indication of such intentions, another accolade offered by Zeitlin lay closer to the mark. Cohen, he surmised, “read and carefully studied my book ‘In the Secret Place of the Soul,’ published in the literary anthology *Netivot*, as well as other articles of mine such as “On the Hidden and the Concealed.”¹²³ Zeitlin was not a systematic thinker and his thought underwent many changes over the years as his interests shifted. With that, if one views the rhetoric in his review of *Regarding Visions of the Future* alongside his earlier writings on prophecy and religious experience, one catches a glimpse of an envisioned synthesis of Judaism with esoteric currents such as parapsychology and New Thought.

Concluding Remarks

The texts presented in this article reflect Hillel Zeitlin’s decades-long concern with dreams and prophecy. His writings, both theoretical and disclosing his own experiences, bespeak the importance he granted to visions and clairvoyance, whether as a form of religious expression or in response to political and social crisis. These texts, I argue, reflect a significant attempt on the part of an early-twentieth-century Jewish thinker to articulate and explain visionary and prophetic experience through engagement with contemporary esoteric and psychological frameworks. For all of his exceptionality—and he was exceptional in many ways—Zeitlin was not an outlier. The early-twentieth century was host to an array of theories of the mind and its powers which caught the eyes of Jewish writers in eastern Europe. As this examination of Zeitlin’s writing has aimed to demonstrate, esoteric paradigms and systems of thought—parapsychology and New Thought in the case of Zeitlin—played an important role as explanatory models within Jewish religious thought in the early decades of the twentieth century (Cohen’s study, feted by Zeitlin as heralding the future of religious

123. Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.” Cohen’s familiarity with “On the Hidden and the Concealed” may be deduced on the basis of an erroneous citation of Samuel David Luzzato’s dream correspondence identical to a corresponding erroneous citation in Zeitlin’s work. *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 4.

philosophy, is a fine example). Other rabbis and Jewish theologians engaged in their writings with mesmerism, spiritualism, theosophy, autosuggestion, and religious readings of hypnosis, among other ideas ranging from the occult to early popular psychology. This fruitful period, largely erased from collective memory by the subsequent horrors of the Holocaust, produced numerous original yet largely forgotten thinkers, such as Zeitlin, worthy of further scholarly attention.

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The Hands of Albert Einstein: Einstein's Involvement with Hand Readers and a Dutch Psychic*

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Abstract

When the handprints of Albert Einstein sold in 2013 at Sotheby's for £55,000, no one queried how Einstein might have come to allow the chiromancer Marianne Raschig to read his hands. It is symptomatic of a wider lack of interest in the art of reading hands, which remains underresearched territory. This essay fills such a gap in connection with Einstein, arguing that the art of reading hands (chiromancy, chirology) was popular in the Weimar Republic, and that in addition to Raschig at least three others analysed Einstein's hands. Pictures of his hands also appeared in magazines, and they were once sculpted. Obviously, being a famous man, Einstein was "exploited" by people, also by hand readers. Furthermore, this essay argues that Einstein had an interest in the occult. He was stunned, for instance, after he had witnessed a séance organised by the salonnière Edith Andreae-Rathenau for the Dutch medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme. Shortly thereafter, Einstein withdrew from research into the occult, but did so half-heartedly.

Keywords: Albert Einstein; hand reading (chiromancy); occultism; parapsychology

* The research conducted for this paper is a spin-off of my PhD-research on the German hand reader Julius Spier (Nagel, "De psychochiroloog Julius Spier"). After the publication, in Dutch, of my findings of Einstein's encounter with two hand readers and a Dutch psychic (Nagel, "Bracht het medium"), I discovered more material and considered the article worthy of an amended, enhanced version in English: this paper.

I am grateful to Barbara Wolff and Orith Burla, who gave me access to documents preserved in the Albert Einstein Archives (AEA), Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I'm also grateful to Wim Kramer, Wilfried Kugel, the anonymous peer-reviewers, John Hickie, Aren Roukema and Tommy Cowan. They too contributed in their own unique ways to the accomplishment of this text.

The question: What may have caused Albert Einstein to get his hands read?

Between 1922 and 1935 Marianne Raschig compiled a unique collection of handprints. When Sotheby's sold in 2013 the remainder of this collection in six lots, lot no. 348 was the most outstanding one. It consisted of a single print each of Albert Einstein's left and right hand (figure 1). Einstein signed and dated these April 9, 1930. Instead of the estimated £10,000 to £15,000, lot no. 348 sold for £55,000.¹ Naturally, the auction reached headline news.² Yet nothing was said about Raschig's extraordinary collection other than that she had obtained in Berlin almost three thousand handprints from many famous men and women of her time, and was the author of *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (1931, Hand and Personality). This book contains a selection of Raschig's impressive handprint collection, including Einstein's, but does not have any reference to a cultic milieu, nor to possible motives for Einstein, or others, to have their hands analysed. Consequently, questions come up: Who was Marianne Raschig? And what about Einstein's possible motive to get his handprints made?

The parapsychologist Wilfried Kugel has argued that Einstein did not regard the occult with fundamental scepticism, but had rather a reserved attitude that was intimately connected to his enormous popularity — an opinion unknown to

1. Information about the auction held on June 5, 2013, in London can be found on Sotheby's website, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.348.html/2013/music-continental-books-manuscripts> (this link and all others referred to in this paper have been accessed on September 23, 2020). The Raschig collection went up for auction L13402 in lot nos. 316 (the handprints of c. 150 artists and sculptors, estimated £8,000–10,000, sold for £11,875), 325 (the handprints of c. 2,200 actors, film directors, politicians, and other members of the public, estimated £15,000–20,000, sold for £16,250), 334 (the handprints of c. 120 writers, journalists, and publishers, estimated £6,000–8,000, sold for £10,000), 348 (the handprints of Albert Einstein), 368 (the handprints of c. 90 scientists, and medical people, estimated £8,000–10,000, sold for £12,500), 458 (handprints of c. 180 musicians, estimated £10,000–15,000, sold for £13,750). The Berlin antiquarian Peter Severin had bought the collection in 1985 of Marianne Raschig's heirs for 200,000 DM ("Schatz für Chiromantiker," 131). A different print of Einstein's left hand made and dated on the same day sold by Sotheby's for £10,625 on December 4, 2018, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/music-sale-l18406/lot.126.html>.

2. Robson, "Hands up."



Figure 1. Einstein's handprints made by Marianne Raschig and sold by Sotheby's (<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.348.html/2013/music-continental-books-manuscripts>).

the larger public, who may have read online articles about Einstein's attendance at a séance in California and his meeting with the psychic Gene Dennis,³ but nevertheless the groundbreaking physicist is widely believed to have dismissed the paranormal. In his study about Einstein's involvement with the paranormal, Kugel made no reference to Raschig's handprints of Einstein. Was it because Einstein never seems to have said anything about it? Or because hand reading does not automatically link to the paranormal?

The answers to these questions are presented in the following pages. It will be shown that reading hands was practised by many in the Weimar Republic, and that in addition to Raschig two other hand readers from Berlin published something about Einstein's hands: Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier. Both link to the salonière Edith Andrae née Rathenau. Kugel mentioned Andrae-

3. Desai, "Did Albert Einstein Believe"; Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 59, 71; Pendle, "Einstein's Close Encounter"; The New Republic Staff, "Albert Einstein Endorsed."

Rathenau as the person facilitating Einstein's meeting with a Dutch psychic, the *Paragnostin* (psychic) named Mrs. Akkeringa, an otherwise obscure and forgotten figure in Einstein's life.⁴ It will become clear that Einstein was deeply disturbed by Akkeringa's séance. It will also become clear that Einstein decided to stay away from occultists shortly after meeting Mrs. Akkeringa, but within a month allowed Marianne Raschig to make his handprints, and allowed Margaret Mamlok, a fourth hand reader, to make them in 1938, New York. With these names the contours of a social milieu appear that sheds light on Einstein's willingness to get his hands studied.

The answer part 1: Hand reading was fashionable in the Weimar Republic

Before presenting the data of Einstein's encounters with these four hand readers, it is important to sketch the background of this practice.

Chiromancy, or palmistry, is the art of fortune telling and interpreting character traits and health issues from the lines and configurations of the palms of a person's hands. It is considered, therefore, a divinatory, or mantic practice. The term chiromancy is often used to dissociate the knowledge of the hand from the soothsaying aspect. However, in daily practice the distinction between chiromancy and chiromancy — *chiro*, or *cheiro*, means hand in Greek — is not clear-cut. Moreover, chiromancy used to be related to medical practices, in which hand readers and physicians were able to determine particular health issues based upon features observed on someone's hands (skin, nails, deformities).

4. Kugel counted six psychics that Einstein had met: Wolf Messing (in 1913) (Kugel was uncertain whether this encounter had taken place or not), a "thought reading lady" (1920), Otto Reimann (1930), a "metagraphologist" (c. 1930), Roman Ostojka (1931), and Mrs. Akkeringa (between 1914 and 1933) (Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 117). Einstein's encounter with Wolf Messing never took place (Nagel, "The Enigmatic Mentalist," 318), and as is shown in this paper, the "metagraphologist" was Einstein's reference to Mrs. Akkeringa. Currently, Kugel has written an enhanced version of his 1994 article, in which he discusses also, among more, Einstein's involvement with the psychic Gene Dennis (1907-1948) (cf. note 99).

Throughout time chiromancy has meandered between the domains of the occult and medical science. Yet despite its long history and notwithstanding a series of interesting articles and books describing segments of the art, chiromancy has escaped the modern scholar's eye: a scholarly monograph on the subject still needs to be written. Furthermore, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Peter Staudenmaier and Corinna Treitel mention palmistry as part of Germany's widespread interest in occult matters during the first decades of the twentieth century, but offer hardly any reference to hand readers or their works.⁵ The following is a first effort to fill this gap.⁶

The forerunner of the hand reading hype that unfolded between WWI and WWII in the Weimar Republic, is the occultist Gustav W. Gessmann (1860–1924) from Austria. After hand reading had been the subject of several articles in the occult magazine *Sphinx*,⁷ Gessmann devoted five books to the study of hands. Published in Berlin, *Katechismus der Hand-Lese-Kunst* (1889, Catechism of the Art of Reading Hands) and *Katechismus der Handflächenkunde* (1898, Catechism of Palmistry) have a mere general character. The other three, published a few years earlier, are considered “physiognomical” studies. They cover the significances of the hands of children to aid in education and career choices, and the significances of hands of women and men to determine the fe/male character. Around 1920 Gessmann's five titles were re-issued, whereby *Katechismus der Hand-Lese-Kunst* reached its sixth, enhanced edition.⁸

1920 is the year that the interest in hand reading in the Weimar Republic suddenly increased. Several publications came out; some were new, some were reprints.⁹ One of the new ones was the thirty-page treatise *Handlesekunst und*

5. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots*, 165–67; Staudenmaier, “Esoteric Alternatives,” 28; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 59, 69, 101, 206–7, 228, 320 note 57; cf. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 16 note 16.

6. A second effort is forthcoming: Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochiromancy.”

7. For the references see Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 184–85.

8. Gessmann, *Die Frauenhand*; Gessmann, *Katechismus der Handlesekunst*; Gessmann, *Katechismus der Handflächenkunde*; Gessmann, *Die Kinderhand*; Gessmann, *Die Männerhand*.

9. New were: [Gerling], *Was uns die Hand verrät*; Greiser, *Chiromantie*; Lucke, *Die Handlesekunst*;

Wissenschaft ([1920], *The Art of Hand Reading and Science*) by the renowned parapsychologist Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929). Towards the end of his explanation of the principles of hand reading, von Schrenck-Notzing shared that in 1904 a well-known French chiromancer had prophesied to him that he would write an important book on occultism which, to his surprise, had become true ten years later.¹⁰ The incentive for von Schrenck-Notzing to write about hand reading may have been a conference in Paris on psychic studies, where special attention was given to chiromancy due to the fact that Henri Durville (1887–1963), publisher of *Psychic Magazine*, had recently obtained the archive of Paris’ other famous chiromancer, Madame de Thèbes (Annette Savary, 1844–1916).¹¹

Subsequently a range of handbooks entered the German speaking market.¹² So did articles in popular magazines; they informed the general public that hands reveal many things.¹³ Several scholars conducted palmistry related research;¹⁴ performers of the occult enacted hand reading on stage;¹⁵ two movies featured

Schrenck-Notzing, *Handlesekunst und Wissenschaft*; Schubert, *Der Linien der Hand*; St. Hill, *Die Handlesekunst*. Reprints were: Ertl, *Vollständiger Lehrkurs der Charakterbeurteilung*, Freimark, *Wie deute ich mein Schicksal*, Gessmann, *Die Männerhand*, Lustig, *Die Handlesekunst*, Ottinger, *Originalsystem der Handlesekunst*.

10. Schrenck-Notzing, *Handlesekunst und Wissenschaft*, 32; cf. Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 117.

11. Hentges, “Begründung einer Lichtbildersammlung,” 190.

12. Among more: Adels and Kurt, *Das ABC der Handkunde*; Beck Rzikowsky (ed.), *Cbeiro, die Handlesekunst*; Ciocki, *Schicksalsgeheimnisse*; Desbarrolles, *Die Hand und ihre Geheimnisse*; Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*; Kreusch, *Das System der Chirologie*; Lomer, *Die Sprache der Hand*; Nestler, *Lehrbuch der Chiromantie*; Peters, *Hand und Charakter*; Planas-Ketty, *Die Hand-Abhandlung*; Reissinger, *Die Hand*; Wefers, *Die Chiromantie und Paul Stoß*; Wolff, *Wissenschaftliche Handlese-Kunst*.

13. See among more: Finck, “Rätsel der Hand”; Gretor, “Wo lasse ich bloß”; Günther-Geffers, “Hellsehen durch die Hand”; Hanussen, “Sie können Handlesen”; Naval, “Die Hand spricht”; Reimann, “Das Schaltsystem er menschlichen Hand”; Wimmers, “Musikerhände”; Zielesch, “Sagen Ihre Handlinien die Wahrheit?”

14. See among more: Bettman, “Über die Vierfingerfurche”; Friedeman, “Handbau und Psychose”; Herig, *Menschenhand und Kulturwerden*; Kühnel, “Die Konstitutionsform der Hand”; Pöch, “Über Handlinien”; Révész, *Die soziobiologische Funktion*; Würth, “Die Entstehung der Beugefurchen.”

15. See among more: Kugel, *Hanussen*, 80; Benkhar, *Ein Blick hinter die Kulissen*, 36–37. Wilhelm Gubisch (1890–1972) exposed “psycho-chiromantie” on stage but equally amazed his audience (“Onzichtbare machten,” 833).

a hand reader,¹⁶ a third sketched the history and explained the basic principles of hand reading,¹⁷ and a fourth compared the lives of a few people and the lines of faith in their hands.¹⁸ Besides, other than having their hands read (and getting handprints made), people got them photographed. The writer Rolf Voigt (1897–1964) and the chiromancer Madame Sylvia filled a book with such pictures, as did, on a smaller scale, the biologist and writer Alfred Koelsch (1879–1948).¹⁹

There are no records as to how many persons worked in Berlin as hand readers. Only a few seem to have advertised in newspapers and magazines. The Berlin 1931 and 1936 telephone directories for tradesmen, businesses and professionals of all kinds did not carry a register entitled Chiromancers or Chirologists. Neither was a register of Psychologists, but there was one for Graphologists. Nevertheless, by 1933 hand readers seem to have popped up;²⁰ the art was becoming fashionable in the Weimar Republic. It was an outcrop of the modern German occult revival on the verge of becoming a psychological science, comparable to, for instance, graphology. Depending on the person practicing it, hand reading was an occult, soothsaying practice, a psychological technique to aid a person in getting a clearer understanding of his or her own character and talents, or something in between. Some hand readers claimed clairvoyant abilities, whereas others did not. Still others were plain frauds. Sincere hand readers presented their art as a genuine science and set out to alter the traditional negative connotations attached to its practice.²¹

16. These movies are *Im Banne der Suggestion (Der Chiromant)* (1920) directed by Siegfried Philippi, and *Abenteuer im Südexpress* (1934) directed by Erich Waschneck.

17. The movie *Wer bist Du?* (1922), directed by Adolf Trotz, featured the hand reader and writer Margret Naval (Margarete Nauheim, c. 1892–after January 1951) from Vienna.

18. The film produced by “Professor Kutty” [sic Ketty or Ket-ty] (Jean-François Planas, 1865–died after 1929) and Martin Berger was shown in Berlin in 1921 (“Kurze Notizen”).

19. Voigt, *Hände*; Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, ill. 1–50; Koelsch, *Hände*, ill. 1–64; cf. Dith, “Hände sprechen Bände”; Kissling-Valentin, “Ja, die Hände können sprechen”; Reuter, “Die Psychologie der menschlichen Hand.”

20. See note 37.

21. Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 194–220.

One of the hand readers standing out in this varied field was Ernst Issberner-Haldane (1886–1966), who is referred to by Goodrick-Clarke.²² Issberner-Haldane authored *Wissenschaftliche Handlesekunst: Chirosophie* (Scientific Hand Reading: Chirosophy) that under another title appeared first in 1921 and remained in print, in amended editions, well into the twenty-first century. Issberner-Haldane travelled the country to give lectures and teach hand reading, but as far as is known he never commented on Einstein’s hands. Yet several others did.

The answer part 2: As a famous public figure, Einstein was of interest to many

Madame Sylvia included photos of Einstein’s hands in her “Book of a Hundred Hands”

Actively promoting herself in Berlin, where she settled in 1927 and opened a practice, countess Beck Rzikowsky (better known as Madame Sylvia) was born Bianca Sylvia von Lazarini (1882–1949), a baroness in Vienna, who had married in 1905 Friedrich J.N.L., count von Beck Rzikowsky (1872–1942). From a young age she was aware of her clairvoyant abilities and premonitions – gifts she believed to have inherited from some of her ancestors who dealt with alchemy, and recorded prophecies.²³ The countess claimed to have been able to master her talent through the study of palmistry and graphology. She logged, more or less chronologically, a series of her premonitions and forecasts, and narrated the memories specifically relating to palmistry in *Das Buch der hundert Hände* (1931, *The Book of a Hundred Hands*).²⁴ Apparently Madame Sylvia was a

22. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots*, 165–67; cf. Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 220–31.

23. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 41: “die sich mit Alchemie befaßt oder Prophezeiungen aufgezeichnet haben.” It is unknown whom of her ancestors Madame Sylvia referred to.

24. The only reference to palmistry in *Okkulte Erlebnisse* concerns the soirée held before her wedding, when the young baroness read the hands of many military officers, and claimed to have seen WWI coming: “Als am Vorabend unserer Hochzeit im Herbst 1905 die Gäste in unserer Villa in Abbazia versammelt waren, mußte ich bei der Soirée ungezählte Hände Revue passieren lassen, weil jeder als gute Vorbedeutung empfand, sich von einer Braut wahrsagen zu lassen. Bei den vielen aktiven und Reserveoffizieren fiel mir der Umstand auf, daß ich in deren Handlinien einen bevorstehenden Krieg besonders stark markiert fand. Ja es ging sogar so weit, daß ich als Resumé mit Sicherheit sagen konnte, daß in etwa zehn Jahren der große Weltkrieg kommen werde. Damals wurde das unter Scherzen hingenommen, aber doch vielfach besprochen” (Beck Rzikowsky, *Okkulte Erlebnisse*, 29–30; recited in Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 43–44).

clairvoyant hand reader: looking onto the palm of a hand triggered the release of colourless images, like a movie, in her mind’s eye.²⁵

One anecdote recounts her premonition while looking at the hands of Edith Andreae-Rathenau, the wife of the banker Fritz Andreae, and sister of the industrialist, writer, and brutally murdered politician Walther Rathenau.²⁶ By becoming a leading lady in Berlin, Frau Andreae had stepped into her mother-in-law’s footsteps: she held a salon that was frequented by many intellectual, creative men and women from her time.²⁷ In June 1927, Madame Sylvia had been a guest at Villa Andreae. When a large party had gathered in the salon in Berlin-Grunewald and Andreae-Rathenau had stretched out her hands – meanwhile asking what Madame Sylvia saw ahead for the summer – the prophetess anticipated a fire would destroy the family’s country house in Feldafing am Starnberger Sea. It was to happen two months later.²⁸

As a token of friendship Madame Sylvia dedicated *Das Buch der hundert Hände* to Edith Andreae-Rathenau. Perhaps the chiromancing countess did so while she had been permitted access to the library of the Rathenaus in preparation of

25. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 42.

26. Franz Friedrich (Fritz) Andreae (1873–1950) was a descendant of the author of the *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz* (1616), Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654). His mother was Berlin’s most distinguished salonière before the outbreak of WWI, Bertha, baroness von Arnswaldt-Andreae-Holland (1850–1919). Walther Rathenau (1867–1922) and Edith Andreae-Rathenau (1883–1951) were two of the three children of the Jewish industrialist Emil M. Rathenau (1838–1915) and Mathilde S. Rathenau-Nachmann (1845–1926).

27. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 55; Wilhelmy, *Der Berliner Salon*, 585–86. Edith Andreae-Rathenau was a member of the Theosophical Society (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 100). Among her many friends and acquaintances list Leo Baeck (1873–1956), Gerhart J.R. Hauptmann (1862–1946), Annie Besant (1847–1933), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), Melchior Lechter (1865–1937), Max Liebermann (1847–1935), Katharina H. (Katia) Mann-Pringsheim (1883–1980), Eleonora G.M.J. von Mendelssohn (1900–1951), Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Karl Vollmöller (1878–1948), and Karl Wolfskehl (1869–1948).

28. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, 50–51; “De schatgraverij,” 646. According to Madame Sylvia two-thirds of the country house in Feldafing burnt down in August 1927. Designed by the architect Fritz A. Breuhaus, the house was constructed in 1925–1926 and reconstructed in 1927–1928 (homepage Fritz August Breuhaus De Groot, <http://www.fritz-august-breuhaus.com/breuhaus-works-2.html>).

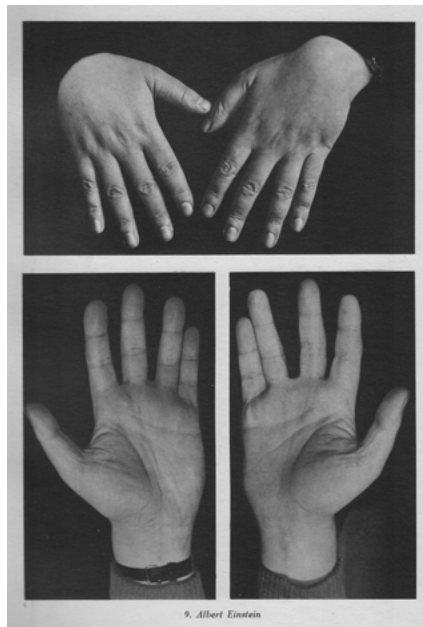


Figure 2. The photos of Einstein's hands in Madame Sylvia's *Das Buch der hundert Hände*.

her book. After all, the book offers a relatively extensive overview of important authors on the art of hand reading and the Rathenaus' library – Walther Rathenau's collection supplemented with parts of the library of the “Geheimen Kommerzienrats Emil Rathenau und seiner Gattin” (the parents of Walther and Edith Rathenau) – included a substantial amount of works on chiromancy.²⁹

Doing justice to the title, the book also incorporates a series of very nice photos of the hands of fifty well-known people. Among these pairs of hands are those of Edith Andrae-Rathenau, the “chirosophist” Ernst Issberner-Haldane, the graphologist Rafael Schermann, and Albert Einstein.³⁰ In fact there are three photos of Einstein's hands: one of his outer hands, and one each of his right and left palm (figure 2).³¹

29. “Die Bibliothek Walther Rathenaus,” *Berliner Tageblatt* on October 5, 1928.

30. Madame Sylvia, *Das Buch*, ill. 3, 9, 22, 41. The photos of Issberner-Haldane and Schermann are identical to those in Voigt, *Hände*, ill. 44 and 45.

31. The two photos of Einstein's inner hands made by Jaro von Tucholka (1874–1976) sold

Also noteworthy is that Madame Sylvia decorated the waiting room for her clients with a large portrait of the Nobel laureate. Einstein had dedicated it to “Der Seherin der ungläubige Thomas” (The seeress of the doubting Thomas), and signed it “Albert Einstein 1930.”³² When a journalist interviewing the “grande dame” in Berlin queried if Professor Einstein had consulted her, she stated that she had seen Einstein’s hands indeed, and to have revealed to him many things. It is unclear where they met. It could have been at a social gathering at the Andreaes — Einstein had been on very good terms with Walther Rathenau, and certainly was acquainted with Edith Andreae-Rathenau.³³ But for the same token Einstein had paid Madame Sylvia a visit in her consultation office close to her living quarters at the Kaiserplatz in Berlin.

Julius Spier incorporated a print of Einstein’s left hand in an article

Another hand reader whom Einstein met in person is Julius Philipp Spier (1887–1942). Spier is nowadays remembered as the charismatic, hand reading psychotherapist of the Jewish diarist Etty Hillesum (1914–1943), and a pupil of Carl G. Jung.³⁴

Having studied numerous hands for over two decades while making a career at a metal trading company in Frankfurt am Main, Spier decided around 1926 to enrol in a *Lebranalyse* (psychology course) in Zurich. There he met Jung, who advised him, after having seen Spier at work with patients of the Bürglhölzli clinic, to set up a practice as a hand reader in Berlin. Jung also recommended that Spier contact Edith Andreae-Rathenau since she might be able to introduce him to the Berlin society. Frau Andreae duly obliged.

at Christie’s online sale May 2–9, 2018, for £13,750 (<https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/einstein-family-letters-portraits/einsteins-hands-48/55729>).

32. “Bij de Berlijnsche Profetessee,” 603. A picture of Einstein’s portrait in Madame Sylvia’s waiting room is available in the database Het Geheugen, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ur-n:gvn:SFA03:SFA005001629>.

33. Hodgkiss, “Einstein’s Friend”; cf. AEA 32-834. Edith Andreae-Rathenau had given Einstein two books. Especially the one with a collection of aphorisms taken from Walther Rathenau’s works, Einstein liked, and he cited three “timeless” sayings of which it is unclear whether they are part of the book, or that Einstein had spotted them himself among Rathenau’s writings.

34. Nagel, “Jung, Julius Spier,” 71–72.

Following the lecture Spier delivered in Villa Andrae in the fall of 1929, *Tempo Berlin* ran the news that a new chirologist had emerged, a so-called “Schermann der Handlesekunst” (the Schermann of the hand readers).³⁵ The reference to the clairvoyant graphologist Rafael Schermann is apt. Schermann amazed his audiences by revealing specific details of someone simply by looking at that person’s handwriting.³⁶ Such details covered events that happened in the past, as well as events that were to unfold — and, as history presumably proved, Schermann’s revelations often turned out precisely as he had predicted. According to the journalist’s judgment, Spier’s accuracy equalled this graphologist’s.

Contrary to Schermann, Madame Sylvia and others, Spier was rather vague about his own clairvoyant gift. Moreover, he strongly avoided the business of predicting the future. Over the years Spier had observed — just as other palmists had done — that lines and marks in the hands could change, even within a relatively short period of six weeks. This implied that events foreseen needed to be foreseen differently once the lining pattern and marks in the palms had changed. This notion, combined with a deep interest in psychology, led Spier to alter his view on hand reading. Once settled in Berlin, he stated time and again that he did not practice *chiromancy* (the mantic art of fortune telling through hand palms), but *chirology* (the science of hands).³⁷ Or, even more to the point,

35. Manfred Georg, “Ein Schermann der Handlesekunst,” *Tempo Berlin / Züricher Zeitung* [1929]. Ursula von Mangoldt-Reiboldt-Andrae (1904–1987), an established hand reader herself, recollected Spier’s lecture in her parents’ home (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 146).

36. In addition to the hagiographic literature about Rafael Schermann (1879–1945), there is a report of a series of experiments conducted by the researcher of occult phenomena Oskar Fischer (1876–1942), who concluded that Schermann had an extraordinary talent (Nagel, “Rafael Schermann,” 9).

37. See for instance Spier, “Warum ich nicht wahrsage,” 55: “Es ist großen Kreisen des Publikums nicht bekannt, daß ein Unterschied besteht zwischen *C h i r o m a n t i e* und *C h i r o l o g i e*. In einer Zeit, in der einerseits die ernsthafte Handdeutung anfängt, in wissenschaftlichen Kreisen an Boden zu gewinnen und beachtet zu werden, andererseits anscheinend auf Grund dieser Tatsache die Wahrsager, die Chiromanten wie die Pilze aus dem Boden schießen (siehe Friedrichstraße, Wittenbergplatz in Berlin!), erscheint es notwendig, auf diesen Grundunterschied hinzuweisen.” N.B. From a historical point of view Spier’s interpretation of chiromancy versus chirology is arbitrary (Nagel, “De psychochiroloog Julius Spier,” 191–93; Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochirology”).

he did not exert what he considered the old art of chiromancy, but excelled in a new science that he called *psycho-chirology*, meaning that he combined (Jungian) psychological insights with particular features of the hand. Instead of predicting someone's (near) future, Spier tried to help a person in becoming aware of his or her psychological hindrances built up in the past, and highlighted his or her inherent potential. By doing so, Spier wilfully diverted palmistry from its dominant occult setting of divining the future into a dynamic tool for personal growth, as illustrated by his motto "Werde der du bist" (Become who you are) that he had taken from the Greek poet Pindar.³⁸

When or how Spier encountered Albert Einstein, and exercised his new developed art of reading hands on him, is unknown. Equally unknown therefore is what he observed about Einstein other than a very brief description. Nevertheless, the fact that Spier incorporated a print of Einstein's left palm – the print differs from the ones made by Marianne Raschig – in an article published October 1931 by the popular magazine *Der Querschnitt*, indicates that Einstein had his hands analysed by Spier somewhere between the autumn of 1929 and the autumn of 1931.³⁹

Marianne Raschig took up prints of Einstein's palms in her book "Hand and Personality"

Marianne Raschig, whose handprint collection was sold at Sotheby's, described Einstein's hands slightly more elaborately than Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier.⁴⁰ Most likely Raschig had rung Einstein's doorbell on April 9, 1930, asking whether Einstein would be willing to let her make prints of his hands. For persuasion, she might have shown him some of the thousands of handprints

38. Spier, *The Hands of Children*, 1. At the time, the aphorism was widely used, also by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and C.G. Jung (Babich, "Nietzsche's Imperative"; van den Brandt and Nissen, *Veel mooie woorden*, 19, 107).

39. Spier, "Hände sprechen," 688. This page can be found through <https://www.arthistoricum.net/werkansicht/dlf/73283/56/>.

40. Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 134–35. Marianne Raschig was born in Spandau on June 5, 1874 (Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*, 39). Derived from a news item in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* on January 18, 1904, is that Marianne Raschig née Körner was the daughter of the manufacturer Hermann Körner and his wife Anna Kuneck, and was widowed by 1904. She passed away in or after 1938.

she had already collected from a variety of people. This, namely, is precisely the procedure that Fedor von Zobeltitz sketched after Raschig had paid him an unexpected visit in the winter of 1925–1926.

According to Zobeltitz, Raschig handed him her introduction card and then asked if he was willing to print the inner surfaces of his hands “durch eine einfache Manipulation mit einer schwarzen Masse” (through a simple manipulation with a black mass) for a planned, large chiological book.⁴¹ Inclined to smile and say no, Zobeltitz agreed to go along with the procedure as soon as the woman had shown him a stately book containing numerous handprints of princes, diplomats, scholars, writers, artists, industrialists, and other very famous people. His interest in Frau Raschig had been piqued. The elderly, reputable looking, capable lady had good sense, and explained to him how she had come to studying hands:

[F]irst of all, and this can be explained, by astrology, which bases its core on the idea that the human being and his organs are influenced by the position of planets and stars. The hand, then, is divided into seven planetary regions and planetary mounts delimited by the hand lines. From their expression, size and form, and their mutual relations, the destiny, life, character, etc., are read. I admit that this gypsy science made little impression on me, but her [Raschig’s] narrative, the extraordinary literacy, and her, with all its “fantasticness,” undeniable intelligence, captivated me. She had also dealt extensively with graphology, vouched for her reliability, and further with the explorations of the transcendental world, to which she even had convened an international meeting [in 1914], which was to be followed by the founding of an institute for occult research. All this sounded strange and adventurous, but at the same time convincing, and what particularly struck me was her great knowledge, not only of these dubious areas, but also in the field of art.⁴²

41. Fedor von Zobeltitz, “Aus dem Tagebuch,” *Hamburger Nachrichten* on July 9, 1926. The bibliophile, writer and journalist Fedor K.M.H.A. von Zobeltitz (1857–1934) initiated in 1897 the *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde* and co-founded in 1899 the Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen.

42. Ibid: “Ich gestehe, daß diese Zigeunerwissenschaft wenig Eindruck auf mich machte, um so mehr fesselte mich die Erzählende, ihre außergewöhnliche Belesenheit und ihre bei aller Phantastik unleugbare Intelligenz. Auch mit der Graphologie hatte sie sich eingehend beschäftigt und schwor auf ihre Zuverlässigkeit, und weiter mit der Erforschung der übersinnlichen Welt, zu der sie sogar eine internationale Sitzung einberufen hatte, der die Begründung eines Instituts

Zobeltitz also shared that Raschig dealt in ceramics, and could deliver genuine Michelangelos. For quite some time he did not hear from or of her, until the news reached him that she was accused of swindling in the ceramic business. Raschig pleaded not guilty to the charges; claiming instead to have acted in good faith for which Zobeltitz gave her the benefit of the doubt. Given Frau Raschig's utopian nature, he reasoned, she had completely mastered a mixture of imagination and a clever sense of reality, and may indeed have been innocent of the charges against her. The court, however, did not agree. Raschig was sentenced to one year and three months *Zuchthaus* (disciplinary house) because of attempted fraud and perjury towards the state.⁴³ Presumably she accepted the verdict with the utmost composure.

Once set free, the hand-reading woman continued where she had left off. She resumed collecting handprints, held consultation hours for "Schicksalforschungen aller Art Handaufnahmen, Horoskope, graphologische, chirologische Auskünfte, Traumanalyse, usw. usw." (fate allotments of diverse hand pictures, horoscope, graphological, chirological information, dream analysis, etc. etc.), and finished her book project.⁴⁴ By the time *Hand und Persönlichkeit* came out – most likely late November or early December 1930 but antedated 1931 – Raschig had seen over the course of thirty years approximately 200,000 hands and obtained approximately 80,000 prints of hands.⁴⁵ A brochure entitled *Schicksal und Charakter* (Destiny and Character), now lost, preceded the

für okkultistische Forschungen folgen sollte. Das alles klang seltsam und abenteuerlich, aber doch durch aus überzeugend, und das, was mich bei dieser Frau besonders frappierte, war ihre große Kenntnis auf nicht nur diesen zweifelhaften Gebieten, sondern auch auf dem Felde der Kunst."

43. "Geheimnisvolle Gemäldeverkäufe," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, June 23 (1926). Marianne Raschig's companions, the salesmen Ernst Benedikt and Max Schultz, were sentenced to prison for respectively one year and one year and three months. See also "Das beschwindelte Reichsausgleichsamt," *Berliner Volkszeitung* on June 23, 1926.

44. From an editorial note in *Der Querschnitt* 8, no. 2 (1928): 126.

45. Raschig, "Nun wissen Sie es," 86; Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 5; "Wunderzeichen der Hand," *Berliner Börsenzeitung* on December 6, 1930; Engelhardt, *Das Wissen von der Hand*, 39.

book,⁴⁶ and a chapter of *Hand und Persönlichkeit* was published in the illustrated magazine *Uhu* to raise publicity.⁴⁷

Although in the media Raschig is referred to as a writer,⁴⁸ nothing has been found other than *Hand und Persönlichkeit*, (reference to) three articles,⁴⁹ the above mentioned brochure, the reference to a book or brochure entitled *Geheimnisse der offenen Hand* (Secrets of the Open Hand), and the publication of three handprints of her vast collection.⁵⁰ The painter and occasional writer Rudolf Grossmann once paid her a visit for an article about soothsayers, and considered her a wise woman.⁵¹ He wrote:

Really, whoever sees her in her medieval roundness with the reddened face, the sharp but not piercing, relentlessly fixing eyes behind the large round glasses, gets reminded of all sorts of oddities. Certainly, not the witch of children’s fairy tales, or the fearful centuries of the past. She is reminiscent, though, of those mysterious women, who at any time in some form as “wise women” steered the steps of council and future-healing to themselves. But she is by no means a giver of oracles. Her “seeing,” her sensitivity seems scientifically directed and determined, [she] only says what she can account for, knows the how and why of her interpretation, has seriousness and method. She is nevertheless a wise woman! She is and remains fully on the solid ground of reality.⁵²

46. Raschig, *Hand und Persönlichkeit* (vol. 1), 13.

47. Raschig, “Nun wissen Sie es.”

48. “Das beschwindelte Reichsausgleichsamt,” *Berliner Volkszeitung* on June 23, 1926.

49. Raschig, “Nun wissen Sie es”; Raschig, “Die Handlesekunst”; Raschig, “Schmelings Hand.”

50. See the illustrations “Die Hand von Werner Krauß,” *Der Querschnitt* 6, no. 1 (1926), and “Die Hände der Zwillingbrüder Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau † und Graf Ernst Rantzau,” in With, “Ein Leben,” 53.

51. Grossmann, “Wahrsager,” 411. Grossmann’s drawing of Marianne Raschig in the same article can be viewed here: <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id355966999-19280600/55>. A picture of her reading hands is available in the Getty Images databank, see <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto's/german-nationals-the-palmist-marianne-raschig-at-her-nieuwsfotos/542927203>.

52. Grossmann, “Wahrsager,” 412: “Wirklich, wer sie so sieht in ihrer mittelalterlichen Rundlichkeit mit dem geröteten Antlitz, den scharf aber nicht stechend, doch unerbittlich sich festsaugenden Aeuglein hinter den großen runden Gläsern, der wird an allerlei Sonderbares erinnert. Gewiß nicht an die Hexe der Kindermärchen oder vergangener Angstjahrhunderte. Wohl aber an jene geheimnisvollen Frauenwesen, die zu allen Zeiten in irgendeiner Form als ‘weise Frauen’ die Schritte Rat- und Zukunfttheischender auf sich lenkten. Aber sie ist dabei keineswegs eine Orakelspenderin. Ihr ‘Sehen,’ ihre Einfühlungskraft scheint wissenschaftlich geleitet und bestimmt, sagt nur, was sie verantworten kann, kennt das Wie und Warum ihrer

Just as captivating as this vivid description of Grossman is the severe criticism of Ernst Issberner-Haldane concerning Marianne Raschig's decision to put a selection of copies of prints up for sale in bookshops in Berlin. Issberner-Haldane named Raschig an "Auchchiromantin, die bereits in den älteren Jahrgängen steckt" (an "also chiromancer" already in her older years), not belonging to the new league of "scientific" hand readers that he considered himself part of.⁵³ According to Issberner-Haldane it was very tactless of Frau Raschig to expose the handprints of various persons openly in the bookshops' windows, because those who could read hands would be able to see all kinds of very private issues like love affairs, difficult times, or delicate illnesses! He had invited Raschig for a leisurely walk on a Sunday afternoon to explain the problem. But when they met, she had treated Issberner-Haldane, to his dismay, as a student instead of an equal in the field.

Miscellaneous

In 1922 the Jewish German impressionist Max Liebermann painted Einstein's portrait. Late February or early March that same year Liebermann had his hands read by the "characterologist" Max von Kreusch: the *Berliner Tageblatt* published von Kreusch's article about it.⁵⁴ Perhaps Liebermann introduced Einstein to the art of reading hands? Fact has it that at least five years before Einstein allowed Raschig to make his handprints, he and Liebermann agreed to have pictures taken of their hands. The photos of the palm of their right hands are namely included in a series of four published on a page entitled "Das Genie im Handspiegel" ("The Genius in the Hand Mirror") in *Uhu's* issue of April 1925.⁵⁵

Deutung, hat Ernst und Methode. Trotzdem ist sie eine weise Frau! Sie ist es und bleibt doch ganz auf dem festen Boden der Realität." Rudolf W.W. Grossmann (1882–1941) had visited Raschig also in 1922 ("Rudolf Grossmann," 141).

53. Issberner-Haldane, "[Frau Raschig]," 5.

54. Max von Kreusch, "Neue Technik der Handlesekunst: Analyse der Hand Max Liebermanns," *Berliner Tageblatt* on March 7, 1922.

55. See *Uhu* 1, no. 7 (1925), 80; see <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id358216435-19240700/101>. The other two geniuses whose right palm were photographed are the writer Gerhart Hauptmann

Three other photos of Einstein’s hands, one dated 1925 and two dated 1927, are kept in the Ullstein Bild archive.⁵⁶ The same illustrated periodical, *Ubu*, published in August 1930 a photo of Einstein seated on a stool with the caption, “The shy hand posture of a really great one.”⁵⁷ The image functions as an example pertaining to the question of how people ought to keep their hands. Prior to this, Ellen Kissling-Valentin (b. 1876) devoted a brief section to Einstein’s hands in an article in *Scherl’s Magazin* published April 1930, which was illustrated with a photo taken by Atelier Callo, Berlin.⁵⁸

Probably based on the photo of Einstein’s palm in *Ubu*, or *Das Buch der hundert Hände*, and/or the handprints in *Hand und Persönlichkeit*, the English hand reader Noel Jaquin (1893–1974) made a sketch of Einstein’s right hand and offered his interpretation of it.⁵⁹ The Russian born, American émigré, journalist and palmist Josef Ranald (1902–1956) did the same.⁶⁰ J. Stuart Lucy, also a journalist and palmist, clearly used one of Raschig’s handprints of Einstein and offered a rather detailed analysis in an Australian newspaper.⁶¹ Furthermore, presumably Einstein sent a note to the American hand reader Nellie Simmons Meier (1864–1944), after her book *The Lions’ Paws* (1937), a book about the hands of 137 famous American people, had come out.⁶² And he agreed in April 1939 to have his hands sketched by the Lithuanian born, American sculptress Ray

(just like Liebermann befriended by Edith Andreae-Rathenau, see note 26), and the painter Lovis Corinth (1858–1925).

56. See in the database of Ullstein Bild, <http://www.ullsteinbild.de>, pictures nos. 541536683 (dated 1925, taken by studio Zander & Labisch), 0108357 and 00293994 (both dated 1927). A fourth picture, no. 1451433 (dated 1927), is identical to no. 0108357.

57. Gretor, “Wo lasse ich bloß,” 72; see <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id358216435-19291100/70>. N.B. An article on physiognomy incorporated a photo of Einstein’s face with the caption “Alle Merkmale des Genies” (Mellinger, “Vom Spiegel der Seele,” 59).

58. Kissling-Valentin, “Ja, die Hände können sprechen,” 539.

59. Jaquin, *The Hand of Man*, 260, ill. 63.

60. Ranald, *Masters of Destiny*, 67; Ranald, “Hands of Fortune,” *The Telegraph’s Brisbane* on August 19, 1939.

61. J. Stuart Lucy, “Einstein, Scientist And Romantic,” *The Labor Daily* on May 28, 1938.

62. Knobloch, “Indiana’s Palm Reader”; cf. “Speaking of pictures,” 7.



Figure 3. Ray Shaw's sculpture of Einstein's hands in *The Australian Women's Weekly* on September 6, 1947 (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/46945148>).

Shaw (1910–d. after 1978), whereupon she crafted a ceramic object of Einstein's hands (figure 3).⁶³

The fact that Jaquin, Ranald and Lucy included Einstein in their works shows that even though they had not seen Einstein's hands personally, he was, as a famous man, of interest to them as hand readers, just like he was to Raschig-Körner, Madame Sylvia and Julius Spier. The fact that magazines featured photos of Einstein's hands, and those of other well-known men and women, shows that they were part of a society interested in the scientification of hand reading. It also indicates that Einstein was willing to go along with those who photographed his hand(s), just as he was willing to go along with those who read them.

63. Philippa Day, "Ray Shaw's Portraits Are Studies of Famous Fingers," *The Australian Women's Weekly* on September 6, 1947; "Notes on People," *The New York Times* on March 7, 1979; cf. "Hands Only!" The sculpture was in March 1979 part of the Einstein centennial celebration of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The answer part 3: Einstein dipped into the occult

The medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme stunned Einstein

This part is particularly interesting because Einstein stated in several letters to different people that he refrained from clairvoyants, graphologists and the like, even after he had been involved with two such people in February and March of 1930. The first of these two Einstein met on February 10, 1930 when he was a witness to tests carried out with Otto Reimann (b. 1903). This “metagraphologist” from Prague worked in a similar manner as Rafael Schermann: Reimann claimed to clairvoyantly read handwriting. Out of curiosity, Einstein invited the man to his house five days later to experiment some more with him.⁶⁴ Afterwards, Reimann talked about his encounter with the famous physicist: “Expert on Writing Amazes Einstein” appeared in the *New York Times* edition of February 23, 1930.⁶⁵

A month later Edith Andrae-Rathenau invited Einstein to the séance that she had organised for the Dutch medium Coba Akkeringa-Kromme (1868–1942) (figure 4).⁶⁶ Previously, Andrae-Rathenau had seen this elderly woman demonstrate her “psychometric gift” at a meeting organised by the physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. Akkeringa-Kromme’s journeys to Berlin and Potsdam (December 1929),

64. Fischer, “Der metagraphologe,” 189; Schmidt, “Experimente,” 604, 607, 609–10; Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 61–62; AEA 46-660: “Es war zweifellos unvorsichtig von mir, dass ich mich durch die Neugierde habe hinreissen lassen, mir zwei sogenannte ‘Hellseher’ genauer anzusehen.”

65. Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 61.

66. Born in Gouda on October 2, 1868, and married in 1905 to the physician, midwife, and childless elderly widower, Everd A. Akkeringa (1838–1912), Coba Akkeringa-Kromme joined the spiritualist association Harmonia at a young age. During the winter of 1918–1919 she became the first Dutch psychometrist to show her paranormal talent publicly on stage. From then on Mrs. Akkeringa-Kromme, Mrs. C. Akkeringa, the widow Dr. E. A. Akkeringa, or, for intimates, “auntie Coba” offered many private and public séances, also in the Dutch East Indies, until her passing in The Hague on March 22, 1942. She became Holland’s best-known medium. Prof. Jan Valckenier Suringar (1864–1932), one of the first researchers in the Netherlands studying parapsychology, set up several experiments to test her unusual abilities and considered her a talented, reliable medium (Jansen and Kramer, “A Forgotten Chapter,” 98–99; Kuiken, “Kromme, Naatje”). N.B. Mrs. Akkeringa’s birthname was Naatje Kromme. At some point she chose Coba as her first name, and no one called her Naatje anymore (personal communication with Wim Kramer, November 25, 2015).



Figure 4. Coba Akkeringa-Kromme in Antwerp, December 10, 1937 (Harmonia 1390.599, Utrechts Archief, Utrecht).

Wiesbaden (Spring 1929, January/February 1930), and Frankfurt am Main (January/February 1930) had captured the attention of Hirschfeld, so he had queried if she could demonstrate her extraordinary gift for a group of scientists, sceptics and journalists alike. Andreae-Rathenau herself was impressed by the performance, but felt the hostility towards the medium from the scientists. Therefore, she welcomed Akkeringa-Kromme to her home, meanwhile inviting about fifty others along to witness the occult powers of the woman from The Hague.⁶⁷

Among the visiting crowd was Andreae-Rathenau's daughter, Ursula von Mangoldt. More than thirty years later von Mangoldt recalled the séance and described what had taken place in the music room of her parents' house:

Frau Akkeringa holds a picture, a letter, a bag, a lighter in her hand. She has no idea who the owners of these items are when they are put on a tray in front of her. The statements she makes in a very fast, almost driven manner, about the owners, are correct in every detail.

67. In addition to Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the Indologist, anthroposophist and writer Hans Hasso von Veltheim (1885–1956), the painter Emil Orlik (1870–1932), and the theatre and film director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) witnessed Akkeringa-Kromme's performance in Villa Andreae (Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 136; [Leonard Rademaker], "Mevr. Akkeringa en . . . Prof. Einstein," *Het Vaderland* on March 27, 1930).

When she takes an object from Einstein in her hand, her first conclusion is: “You are very famous, but so modest that you do not know how great you are” (. . .). When he was queried about what he just heard, “Pour le mérite,” he just smiled. Frau Akkeringa continues: “He is grateful for everything that comes to him, and takes it as a force that is given to him, not as something that came from him.” Another question: “You were paralyzed.” – “No.” But later he admitted that for months he had been lying in bed, unable to move.⁶⁸

According to von Mangoldt none of the guests were able to explain the workings behind the psychometric experiments. Apparently baffled, Einstein had invited the ladies Akkeringa-Kromme and Andreae-Rathenau to his home. After their private meeting, he confided in von Mangoldt’s mother that he had encountered a world that he could not fit into his scientific worldview, but that this same world would no longer leave him in peace.⁶⁹

Back in the Netherlands Akkeringa-Kromme shared her Berlin experience with the editor of *Het Vaderland*. Immediately this newspaper ran the widow’s story on the front page. Mrs. Akkeringa had picked up someone’s bracelet-watch at a séance organised in Villa Andreae, the bulletin reported.⁷⁰ Subsequently she had given such a correct diagnosis of the owner of the object that he barely parted from her side for the remainder of the evening. Akkeringa-Kromme did not know the owner of the watch, the paper continued. She was highly surprised

68. Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 136: “Frau Akkeringa hält ein Bild, einen Brief, eine Tasche, ein Feuerzeug in der Hand. Sie hat keine Ahnung, von wem diese Gegenstände stammen, die auf einem Tablett vor sie hingelegt werden. Die Aussagen, die sie in einer sehr schnellen, fast getriebenen Art über deren Besitzer macht, stimmen in allen Einzelheiten. [/] Als sie einen Gegenstand von Einstein in die Hand nimmt, ist ihre erste Feststellung: ‘Sie sind sehr berühmt, aber so bescheiden, daß Sie gar nicht wissen, wie groß Sie sind.’ (. . .) Als man ihn nach dem gerade erhaltenen ‘Pour le mérite’ fragte, lächelte er nur. Frau Akkeringa spricht weiter: ‘Sie sind dankbar für alles, was Ihnen einfällt, und nehmen es hin als eine Kraft, die Ihnen gegeben wird, gar nicht als etwas, das von Ihnen stammt.’ Weitere Frage: ‘Sie waren gelähmt.’ – ‘Nein.’ Aber er gab später zu, daß er monatelang im Bett gelegen hatte, unfähig, sich zu rühren.” Early in 1917 Einstein had fallen into a prolonged illness, which lasted on and off until 1920. During that period his cousin Elsa Einstein (1876–1936), whom he married in 1919, took great care of him (Isaacson, *Einstein*, 233). Perhaps the illness Akkeringa-Kromme picked up on, confirmed by Einstein, refers to (a particular phase within) this timespan.

69. Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle*, 137.

70. [Leonard Rademaker], “Mevr. Akkeringa en . . . prof. Einstein,” *Het Vaderland* on March 27, 1930.

once her host entrusted to her that no one less than Albert Einstein had handed it in as an object for psychometrical scrutiny. What is more, two days after the séance Einstein and his wife had received the medium and her host, and a few other scientists. Upon arrival, Elsa Einstein confided to the ladies that her husband had been upset and unable to think about anything other than the meeting in Villa Andraea. During the visit in Einstein's own house, Einstein had posed endless questions and set up experiments. At the end of the day he had given the medium a picture of himself. "Frau Akkeringa als Zeichen der Dankbarkeit für des Wunder das Sie am 14 III 30 vor meinem erstaunten Sinn entfaltete" he had scribbled on it (Frau Akkeringa as a token of gratitude for the miracle that you at 14 III 1930 unfolded before my astonished mind).⁷¹

Once the story came out in *Het Vaderland*, a reader approached the paper's author/editor Leonard A. Rademaker and told him that "Frau A. in Berlin Fiasco gemacht hat" (had failed), and that Einstein had faked his admiration; he even said that "the portrait gift was only customary for servant maids and so on!"⁷² Wanting to know the truth, Rademaker then wrote a letter to Einstein politely asking if the most learned professor would be so kind to tell his version of the event.

By return mail Einstein responded as requested. "Frau Akkaringa" [sic] had desired the picture, Einstein stated.⁷³ In other words, he had given her a photograph of himself, though not on his own but her initiative. Einstein also explained that the number of experiments had been too few, and too carefully drafted, so that it was impossible to derive any conclusions from them. "Anyway, based upon my bad experiences, I will absolutely avoid contact with such people

71. Ibid.

72. Letter from Leonard A. Rademaker (1872-1956) to Einstein, March 28, 1930 (AEA no. 48-58): "Nun ist diesen morgen ein Herr zu uns gekommen, und hat erzähl dass Frau A. in Berlin Fiasco gemacht hat und Sie Ihre Bewunderung nur getäuscht haben. Ja, er sagte selbst dass das Porträtgeschenk nur üblich war für Dienstmägde u.s.w.!" Cf. AEA nos. 48-59, 46-660, 39-282, 47-662, 48-416, 48-417, 48-418, 50-189, 50-189.1.

73. AEA no. 48-59. According to Nederburgh, "Een schitterend succes," 111, Elsa Einstein had asked if Akkeringa-Kromme would appreciate to get Einstein's picture. Upon Akkeringa-Kromme's positive reaction, Einstein would, on his own initiative, have penned the dedication on it.

in the future so as to not feed the superstition,” he ended the brief reply.⁷⁴ On the same day Einstein briefed Dr. Albert Hellwig, a lawyer in Potsdam, about the recent developments. It had been very careless of him to engage with two so-called clairvoyants, he confessed, one being Mrs. Akkeringa, the other Otto Reimann, while they had used his name to seek publicity for themselves.⁷⁵

Six months later the director of the Institute für Metapsychikalische Forschung and editor of the *Zeitschrift für metapsychische Forschung*, Christoph Schröder, asked Einstein if he was interested in participating in research with “Psychitiven” (mediums), thereby referring to Reimann and Akkeringa.⁷⁶ Einstein declined the invitation, stating that he had to do penance for having become involved twice with “metapsychic” performers: afterwards the mediums would have used his name for personal publicity purposes.⁷⁷

The whereabouts of Otto Reimann are unknown after he disappeared from the scene of the scientists testing him, but such is not the case for Akkeringa-Kromme. Although this Dutch medium turned to the press, and the news of her encounter with Einstein travelled to the Dutch East Indies, it is unlikely she did so solely for personal fame.⁷⁸ Akkeringa-Kromme was a strong propagandist for spiritualism. It must have been at least partly for the cause of bringing “comfort, encouragement and security” to people about “the incorruptibility and the nullity of death” that

74. AEA no. 48-59: “Jedenfalls werde ich es in Zukunft auf Grund meiner schlechten Erfahrungen unbedingt vermeiden, dem Aberglauben durch Berührung mit derartigen Leuten Vorschub zu leisten.”

75. AEA no. 46-660.

76. AEA no. 48-416. See also Hermann, “Albert Einstein über Parapsychologie,” 279.

77. AEA no. 48-417. Cf. the reply of Christoph Schröder (1871-1952), AEA no. 48-418: “Ich habe die Fachliteratur ziemlich vollständig u. laufend in Händen u. verfolge auch die bezüglichen Äusserungen in der Tagespresse durch ein Abonnement auf einschlägige Ausschnitte. Mir ist aber nicht bekannt geworden, dass Herr Otto Reimann oder Frau Dr. Akkeringa Ihren Namen für Reklamezwecke missbraucht hätten.”

78. Rademaker’s article in *Het Vaderland* was published, in amended versions, in *De Indische Courant* on May 5, 1930; *De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden* on May 5, 1930; *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* on May 7, 1930, and *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* on May 22, 1930. See also the letter from Johan Valckenier Suringar to Coba Akkeringa-Kromme dated May 24, 1930, and from J. Wesselman (in Surabaya) to her dated June 16, 1930 (Harmonia 1390.559, Utrechts Archief, Utrecht).

she and those with her were pleased with the Einstein story, and so spread it around.⁷⁹ Besides, as soon as Einstein's message of regret came through, Akkeringa-Kromme did not allow people to publish the picture she had been given by him.⁸⁰

In comparison to Einstein's whimsical reactions in connection with the elderly lady from The Hague, it is remarkable that over time she remained consistent in her tale. A year later (after a séance held in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands), a reporter asked Akkeringa-Kromme what had taken place in Berlin, and he drafted her response into the following:

It was like this: I was asked to a party by the sister of [Walther] Rathenau in the great world of Berlin, and demonstrated just as I demonstrated to you [here in Zeeland]. Finally, they handed me an object; I said: its owner is a great scholar, who penetrates the nature of things more deeply than any other has done, yet at the same time he is naive and simple as a child.

Then the hostess asked: "And, do you now know, who that is? Einstein."

I didn't know him, didn't know that he was present. But the professor didn't leave me alone for the rest of the evening. I had to sit next to him at the table; he hardly ate, and did nothing else except ask me questions. After dinner, I had to sit in a windowsill with him, where people gathered around us.

Later, I had to come to his house. About a dozen interested people were also present. "No - I only do it for you, that was the agreement," I said.

"Fortunately, that you say so," Mrs. [Einstein] said: "Einstein is too nice, he didn't want to send them home." But now he had to send them away. Thereupon Einstein experimented with me all day. "He hadn't thought of anything else," his wife explained.⁸¹

79. Ned. Vereniging van Spiritisten, *Eenijfeest*, 12: "Zij [Akkeringa-Kromme], die jarenlang alles, wat in haar vermogen lag, gedaan heeft, om (...) anderen troost, bemoediging en zekerheid te geven, de alles-ervullende zekerheid van 's levens onvergankelijkheid en de nietigheid van den dood." Cf. Kuiken, "Kromme, Naatje."

80. Nederburgh, "Een schitterend succes," 111.

81. Zwerver [ps. of H.W. Tesch], "Uit een onbekend land: Ergens in Zeeland," *Algemeen Handelsblad* on March 3, 1931: "Dat was zoo: ik was op een partij bij een zuster van Rathenau in de groote wereld van Berlijn gevraagd, en ik demonstreerde precies als bij u. Ten slotte gaf men mij een voorwerp; ik zeide: de bezitter is een groot geleerde, die dieper dan iemand anders

In other words, at the end of February 1931 the then 61-year old Coba Akkeringa-Kromme repeated to the journalist Zwerver more or less the same as she had done the year before to the journalist/editor Rademaker. Both versions are in line with the memories recorded by Ursula von Mangoldt. Most likely, the grey-haired widow had impressed Albert Einstein genuinely, presumably just as Otto Reimann had done. After all, he invited both of them to his home. The experiments conducted with either one failed Einstein's scientific standards. Yet his argument to dismiss the matter was that Reimann and Akkeringa-Kromme had taken advantage of his name for their own publicity. This contrast between Einstein's public statements and private actions might be explained by concerns surrounding the exploitation of his popularity, which Wilfried Kugel has illustrated.⁸² Maybe Einstein was tired of seeing his name appear in newspapers whenever he had spoken to someone somewhere, especially if that person seemed to "upgrade" him/herself through him (Einstein).

Despite the firmly phrased resolution in the letters to Rademaker and Hellwig, Einstein allowed the prophesizing palmist Marianne Raschig to read his hands less than two weeks later. Moreover, he offered to endorse the author Upton B. Sinclair on his own initiative in a letter dated April 12, 1930, by recommending Sinclair's *Mental Radio* (1930) – a book about experiments with his wife who was gifted with psychic abilities – to his own publisher, provided that Sinclair would not use his name.⁸³ Even though Sinclair had not hinted

in het wezen der dingen is doorgedrongen, en tegelijk is hij kinderlijk eenvoudig. [/] Toen vroeg de gastvrouw: 'En weet u nu, wie dat is? Einstein.' [/] Ik kende hem niet, wist niet, dat hij tegenwoordig was. Maar professor Einstein heeft me verder niet losgelaten. Ik moest aan tafel naast hem zitten; hij at bijna niet, deed niets dan mij vragen stellen. Na het diner, bij de koffie, moest ik ook met hem in een vensterbank zitten, waar een kringetje mensen zich om ons schaarde. [/] Later moest ik nog bij hem thuis komen. Maar er zaten wel een tiental belangstellenden bij. [/] 'Nee - ik doe 't alleen voor u, zòò was het afgesproken,' zei ik. [/] 'Gelukkig, dat u 't zegt,' zei mevrouw: 'Einstein is te goed, die wou ze niet weg sturen.' Maar nu moesten ze weg. [/] Einstein heeft toen nog een heelen dag met mij geëxperimenteerd. [/] 'Hij had dagen lang aan niets anders gedacht,' vertelde zijn vrouw."

82. Kugel, "Ohne Scheuklappen," 59, 62-63 (i.e. AEA no. 39-282), 71.

83. AEA no. 39-282. Upton Beall Sinclair (1878-1968) was at the time married to Mary Craig

at the idea, this offer was followed a month later by another offer: Einstein proposed to write a foreword to the book's German translation.

At the end of 1930 Albert and Elsa Einstein travelled to the United States, where they befriended Sinclair and in February 1931 attended a séance that was ruined by “hostile forces” of “doubting witnesses.”⁸⁴

Margaret Mamlok prepared a report of her analysis of Einstein's hands

Then seven years later, early March 1938, in New York, the fourth occasion presented itself in which Einstein had his hands analysed. This time the hand reader was Margaret Mamlok-Stern, a student of Carl G. Jung and Julius Spier (and two other hand readers), and wife of a leading German dental scientist, Hans-Jacques Mamlok.⁸⁵ The couple had fled from Berlin, where their house had been an international meeting place for academics, ambassadors, artists, musicians, and industrialists — presumably similar to Villa Andrae. This social network must have helped Margaret Mamlok to build a name for herself as a professional hand reader.⁸⁶ Very honoured with the opportunity to study Einstein's hands, she sent Einstein a rather long, typed report of the analysis.⁸⁷

Present during the meeting in Einstein's house was also the *Life* photographer Fritz Goro (1901–1986). The pictures he took were intended for a book entitled “Outstanding Men and Women of Our Time” that Margaret Mamlok worked on, but it never came to fruition.

From the correspondence between Mrs. Mamlok and Albert Einstein, and Fritz Goro and Einstein, it surfaces that Goro, inspired by photographing Einstein's hands, presented some of these pictures to the editors of *Life*. “LIFE

Kimbrough (1882–1961). The medium involved was Roman Ostoja (1887–1974).

84. Kugel, “Ohne Scheuklappen,” 64–65; Pendle, “Einstein's close encounter.”

85. Bragdon, “The Buried Wisdom,” 20; Day, *Seeing into the Future*, 100. Margarethe (Margaret) Mamlok-Stern (1879–1953) and Hans-Jacques Mamlok (1875–1940) arrived from Berlin in New York in April 1937 (“Coincidence of Names: Mrs. Mamlok Dies at 74,” *New York Herald Tribune* on December 10, 1953).

86. Day, *Seeing into the Future*, 98.

87. AEA no. 53-920.

interessiert sich nun ausserordentlich fuer diese Bilder” (*Life* is extremely interested in these pictures), Goro informed Einstein afterwards, and he asked permission to publish them.⁸⁸ Out of a principle decided upon long ago, Einstein replied, he could not allow others to use his name for personal publicity; he only could allow permission to such publications provided that his name was unattached to the other person’s name.⁸⁹ Within two weeks one of Goro’s photos of Einstein’s hands was selected for *Life*’s article about the appearance of Einstein’s latest work (written in cooperation with Leopold Infeld), *The Evolution of Physics* (1938).⁹⁰

However, when Margaret Mamlok heard about Einstein’s reply to Goro, she was confounded. Upon receipt of the report of the hand analysis, Einstein had given her his honest commentaries. It was difficult for him to determine which statements were correct or not, all the more so because some were rather general in nature, or could have been derived from the news already known to the public at large. Einstein’s comments were generally critical, but certainly not dismissive.⁹¹ Thereupon Margaret Mamlok had offered to elaborate on the analysis – which she had prepared upon Einstein’s request – but to do so, she would need another opportunity to study Einstein’s hands.⁹² After this exchange of letters, Einstein’s message to Goro came as a shock to her: “After the friendly reception in your home, and your sympathetic attitude to the problems of chirolgy, I lack the words to tell you how hard you have hit me with the oppressive nature against me and my work,” she confessed to him.⁹³

88. AEA no. 53-925.

89. AEA no. 53-926.

90. “Einstein Simplifies Relativity,” 49. The link to Fritz Goro’s picture of Einstein’s hands in this article is <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/x-einstein-albert/7gHiVGFd3Ads9Q>.

91. AEA no. 53-921.

92. AEA no. 53-924: “Am Schluss unseres Zusammenseins überraschten Sie mich durch den Wunsch nach einer Analyse, was mich – das darf ich bei dieser Gelegenheit sagen – ausserordentlich erfreute. Es würde deshalb für mich ungeheuer viel bedeuten, wenn Sie mir noch einmal eine halbe Stunde gewähren würden, damit ich die Voraussetzungen für eine Analyse in exakter Form schaffen kann.”

93. AEA no. 53-927: “Nach der freundlichen Aufnahme in Ihrem Hause und Ihrer verständnisvollen Einstellung zu den Problemen der Chirolgie fehlen mir die Worte, um Ihnen zu sagen, w i

On the very same day Einstein explained in response that she would consider his attitude completely natural, if she looked at the matter from his point of view. Under no circumstance would he allow someone to use his name for the other's personal gain. On the other hand, Einstein reasoned it to be fully okay if she used the handprints and pictures obtained from him in her book, if it would be clear that he carried no responsibility for it. The letter ended with a note that Margaret Mamlok ought to acknowledge Einstein's effort to help her with her work, but should not take it as a base for a new attack: "Die Tatsache, dass ich Ihnen Zeit geschenkt und nach Möglichkeit zur Begünstigung Ihrer Arbeit beizutragen zu fördern gesucht habe, sollte von Ihnen anerkannt und nicht als Stützpunkt für einen neuen Angriff verwendet werden."⁹⁴ With another thank-you note from Mrs. Mamlok the correspondence between them came to an end.⁹⁵

Although, as said, the manuscript "Outstanding Men and Women of Our Time" was never published, Fritz Goro's picture of Margaret Mamlok reading Einstein's right palm, a schematic drawing of this palm, and an excerpt of the analysis were included in an article printed October 1943 (figure 5).⁹⁶ Several months later Einstein declined the invitation to aid in raising money for the "Fourth War Loan" by having his name mentioned in an advertisement for Margaret Mamlok's contribution to this fund raising event.⁹⁷ During specific hours at the warehouse Bonwit Teller, Mrs. Mamlok would read the hands for free of those who purchased a \$500 War Bond. Upon Einstein's withdrawal, the advertisements announced her as the "[i]nternationally-famed hand analyst and widow of the noted anti-Nazi Professor Hans J. Mamlok" – hence, without reference to Einstein or any other popular person.⁹⁸

e schwer Sie mich – mit der herabsetzenden Art gegen mich und meine Arbeit – getroffen haben."

94. AEA no. 53-928, translated: "The fact that I have given you time and looked for [a] possibility to contribute to promote your work, ought to be recognized by you and should not be used as a base for a new attack."

95. AEA no. 53-929.

96. Bragdon, "The Buried Wisdom," 20.

97. AEA no. 55-652.

98. Advertisements for the event have been traced in the *New York Herald Tribune* on February



Figure 5. Picture of Margaret Mamlok reading Einstein’s right palm taken by Fritz Goro, March 1938 in *The Southern Israelite* 18, no. 39 (1943): 20.

Reflection: Einstein was affected by the *Zeitgeist* and his popularity

It is remarkable that Einstein’s involvement with hand readers has been largely ignored in discussion of his interest in the paranormal or occult. Until my initial research on Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Margaret Mamlok, Einstein’s encounters with these figures had gone unremarked.⁹⁹

Perhaps the loss of knowledge about these hand readers and their practices is the result of the wider lack of interest in hand reading. It has been largely ignored in the field of esotericism, and has not attracted much study in the history of science or ideas either. This is despite the fact that in the Weimar Republic there were those who had their own proof that it “worked.” Diverse hand readers presented their profession as a genuine empirical science, even

11, 1944, and the *New York Times* on February 11, June 13 and 19, November 14, 1944, and on May 14, 1945. Cf. Nagel, “Jung, Julius Spier,” 74–75.

99. Wilfried Kugel became aware of Einstein’s meetings with Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Margaret Mamlok after he had taken notice of my research on them (Nagel, “Bracht het medium”). Supplemented by the draft of this article, it aided him in writing a new, expanded version of “Ohne Scheuklappen,” forthcoming as “Albert Einstein und die Psi-Phänomene” (personal communication with Wilfried Kugel, April 17 and August 26, 2020).

while others took advantage of the hype and deceived people. Some considered a sixth sense to be part of the art of reading hands (e.g. Issberner-Haldane, Madame Sylvia, von Schrenck-Notzing), whereas others dismissed or ignored the complex issue of the paranormal (e.g. von Kreusch, Spier).¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, during the Interbellum hand reading was in the process of transforming from a fortune telling practice into a psychologised format to aid those in need,¹⁰¹ and there were several scientists who according to academic measures did research on specific hand features like lines in the palm in connection with particular illnesses.¹⁰² With that, the hand reading discourse in Berlin has to be considered an aspect of the intricate conglomerate of science, the occult and the paranormal that is discussed, for instance, by Corinna Treitel and Egil Asprem.¹⁰³

From the material unearthed, it is obvious that Einstein was exposed to this multifaceted discourse, and in a rather private, low-key manner attended séances and experimental sessions with Otto Reimann and Mrs. Akkeringa. Together with a few others, he tried to fathom what they witnessed. Possibly Einstein was also invited by Frau Andreae when she had Julius Spier come to speak about his newly developed hand reading method called psychochirology. The fact that Einstein, at least between 1925 and 1939, let his hands be photographed, read, and drawn and sculpted (by Ray Shaw), and presumably wrote the hand reader Nellie S. Meier a letter after he had taken notice of her work, indicates that hand reading was a subject of interest to him.

Yet, Einstein's interest and openness about occult phenomena was severely hampered by his popularity, leading to his (probably rightful) feeling of being exploited by others because of his fame. As Kugel has shown in his 1994 article – and confirms in the enhanced version forthcoming – Einstein was affected

100. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 115–19, 206, 234, 252, 321–22.

101. Nagel, “From Chiromancy to Psychochirology.”

102. Bettman, “Über die Vierfingerfuche”; Friedeman, “Handbau und Psychose”; Kühnel, “Die Konstitutionsform der Hand”; cf. Nagel, “De psychochirológ Julius Spier,” 195–96.

103. Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*; Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*.

by the occult *Zeitgeist* but rejected his interest and involvement in it. Only, he did so half-heartedly. The case of Mrs. Akkeringa illustrates that Einstein was genuinely intrigued by what he witnessed, but twisted this when queried about her. A similar reaction of distancing himself from his personal interest arose when Fritz Goro, who photographed Einstein while Margaret Mamlok read his hands, asked Einstein to allow him to publish some of those pictures. In no way did Einstein want to be quoted as if he valued hand reading in any way. On the other hand, if Goro and Mrs. Mamlok made it clear that she had read his hands but did not let Einstein's fame reflect to her, he had no objections.

Most likely Einstein judged critically what he was told about himself by Marianne Raschig, Julius Spier and Madame Sylvia, for that is what he did when Margaret Mamlok had sent him her analysis. After all, Einstein was, as he shared with Madame Sylvia, a Doubting Thomas.

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Conjuring Strange and Ancient Larvae: Barry William Hale and the Negotiations of Occult Performance*

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Abstract

Barry William Hale is an Australian artist and occultist whose art and performance has effectively crossed boundaries between occult-friendly spaces and traditional arts venues. What I will be exploring in this essay is the interplay between the artist's own conception of his work and the other conditions of performance that inform its reception and interpretation. While Hale's work sits within a long tradition of occult performance art that seeks to both produce a transformative effect and introduce symbols and concepts to a wider, non-practitioner audience, I argue that the venues in which these works are performed provide their own interpretive frameworks that inform the audience, creating a layer of safety and social acceptance for spiritual practices/traditions that would otherwise be considered heretical or taboo.

Keywords: occult art; performance; museums; festival; ritual; ethnography

I first encountered the work of Barry William Hale (1969–) in 2010 at the Esoteric Book Conference in Seattle, where he was performing with his group, NOKO210, on the Saturday evening show. Hale is a large, imposing mountain of a man who is in total control of his physicality. He has a presence, but more importantly, he is present. The stage was set very sparsely with three elevated screens and a station to the side where someone was programming sound, light, and images. Hale took to the stage and walked around a circle. From what I recall, there was already a sigil or group of sigils on the floor within a circle.

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He then quietly sat down and began a low, rhythmic droning with his voice, reminiscent of Tuvan throat singing. Suddenly, images and colors were being projected at a very rapid-fire pace on screens to the left, right, and behind him. It was clear to me that the placement of each image was designed to hit the same central point on each screen so the viewer was being brought to the same visual point repeatedly. I can barely recall most of the images, but I absolutely noted the recurrence of Enochian tablets, and the “angelic language” allegedly revealed to John Dee (1527-1608) and Edward Kelley (1555-1597) in the 16th century. Hale was on his knees, rocking back and forth to his own droning voice as the images on the screen flashed quickly. I looked around and the audience was transfixed. Paralyzed. I thought to myself: “This guy is good!” before I, too, succumbed to the sound and the lights.

Thankfully, after NOKO210’s performance, there was an intermission so we could stretch our legs and clear our heads, and that is when a member of our party exploded: “How could he do that?! I didn’t consent to that! What did he just program into my brain?” I admit I was slightly embarrassed by this outburst. My immediate response was that this was a ritual art performance and my friend was probably just overreacting, but then I shifted frame and started asking myself some hard questions about my own reaction from an anthropological perspective. Yes, this was an artistic performance, but it was also a ritual. What, in fact, was my role in this event? Participant? Observer? Did I just take part in a conjuration of something I did not understand or consent to? Most importantly, if I dismiss this as “just an art performance,” is this, perhaps, suggesting that the spiritual content is not to be taken seriously? Did the venue and context itself frame this as “art” and not “religion”? Suddenly so many questions emerged that I decided perhaps I should sit down with the artist.

This paper is the result of a series of conversations and interviews between myself and the occult performance artist Barry William Hale regarding his performance process, his art, his practice, and where his work sits in relation to

a wider tradition of occult ritual theater. This is an ethnographic study reliant on interview data and conversations with Hale, including comments from his collaborator Scott Barnes.

What I will be exploring in this essay is the interplay between the artist's own conception of his work and the other conditions of performance that inform its reception and interpretation. While Hale's work does sit within a long tradition of occult performance art that seeks to both produce a transformative effect and to introduce symbols and concepts from the Western occult corpus to a wider, non-practitioner audience, I argue that the venues in which these works are performed provide their own frameworks for interpretation that inform the audience and create a layer of safety and social acceptance for spiritual practices and traditions that would otherwise be considered heretical or taboo. Although Hale is, in fact, presenting religious material to an audience in a way that is meant to be transformative, this narrative is competing with the narratives of both artistic and ethnographic display that provide a comfortable space for these rites to be safely witnessed. Ultimately, these performances become coded as "art" for the audience rather than "religion," which may prescribe the role of the audience primarily as observer rather than participant. If these performances are more accurately characterized as art rather than religion, what might the implications be for artists like Hale who hope to cultivate a greater public understanding of contemporary occult practice as a legitimate subset of Western religious traditions?

Barry William Hale and NOKO210

Barry William Hale is an Australian visual and performance artist whose work draws on a number of artistic and spiritual traditions including Aleister Crowley's (1875–1947) religion Thelema, indigenous Mexican magical traditions, Haitian Vodou, and Palo Mayombe. Additionally, Hale is an accomplished martial artist, and he also works with somatic practices and neurofeedback in both his spiritual and artistic work. The impact of both these practices is also evident in

his performance pieces. Hale's performance art is the product of NOKO210, a 25 year-long partnership with Scott Barnes and also formerly with Michael Sturm. Barnes, who is not an occult practitioner, creates the soundscape and programs the images, while Hale constructs and performs the ritual activity. Despite their longstanding collaboration, they have performed publicly as NOKO210 under a dozen times. They have performed in a range of venues internationally, from arts festivals as large as the Australian Biennale to museums and esoteric events attended primarily by practitioners.

Much of Hale's early personal background with performing public ritual reflects his time in an Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) Lodge that was very involved with performing public rites as a form of cultural and social outreach. This not only inspired the development of his performance, but also influenced his approach to exploring the sacred in more public spaces and creating transformative experiences for people outside of his spiritual tradition. Hale still wants to influence the public conversation and create a more open reception to occult imagery and practice, but he also wants to impact the religious culture in which he is involved. He notes that part of his work is to expand the culture of Thelema from within:

I think that my early exposure to the Order "down under" and the environment encouraged performing magical rituals in public and also combined with my own endeavors to expand Thelemic culture to include an artistic and broader cultural perspective.¹

Much of the dialogue inspiring this paper was informed by two of Hale's magical projects which generated several performance pieces. One, *Hypercube 210*, is the ritual I witnessed at the Esoteric Book Conference in Seattle in 2010. *Hypercube 210* is a complex work relating to linguistics and the Enochian angelic language developed by John Dee and Edward Kelly. For the 2011 performance of this piece at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, Hale wrote:

This project represents a new direction in the esoteric research and investigation of the Enochian Magical System, with particular focus on the *Lingua vel Adamica*, or the

1. Hale, personal correspondence, August 2, 2017.

Enochian Alphabet, received in the 15th century [*sic*] by Dr. John Dee, consultant to Queen Elizabeth I, and Edward Kelley, and popularized in modern occult circles by Aleister Crowley. HYPERCUBE 210 comprises twenty-one discrete elements, analogous to the twenty-one letters of the Enochian Alphabet, these are arranged into a triptych where each of the seven compositions structurally references its numeric correlate: Engaging in esoteric ritual through abstracted experimental sound and visuals, erupting into what is traditionally considered a fine arts arena.²

The second magical project which informed this paper is Hale’s long-term spiritual relationship with the winged deity Beelzebub. Beelzebub, often translated as “Lord of the Flies,” is considered to be a prince of demons and has been associated with both Satan and Lucifer. Hale’s spiritual relationship with this entity has inspired a number of artistic works in a variety of media. *Legion 49* is a grimoire of stunning graphic icons of the servitors of Beelzebub inspired by the tradition of *papel picado*, or cut paper art, which in Mexico is associated with Day of the Dead altars. His hour-long multimedia piece, *The Conjuraton of Beelzebub*, published as a DVD by Fulgur Ltd., is a long form, non-narrative sound and image project which is completely unmediated for the viewer by any contextual material. Here is Hale’s description:

The work is articulated in a sevenfold structure which takes the participant to the arcane deserts of the Middle East into Plato’s Cave and through the inverted spire of the infernal chapel, opening the Gates of Hell, conjuring Lord of the Flies and his legions. [In terms of] Musicology the work locates and maps loci of Luciferian eruptions into popular culture, sampling and working with sources appropriate to these periods; from medieval pacts and grimoires through to the devil beat of early jazz and seventies Satanic rock, departing with the prophetic first emanations of the Order 41.³

Similarly to the live performance of *Hypercube 210*, this piece has a deeply somatic quality caused by rapidly flashing images and droning music that ebbs, flows, speeds up to a frenzy, and then slows down like a long arc of a pulse.

2. “NOKO: HYPERCUBE 210 at Adelaide Fringe Festival,” LASH TAL, accessed July 28, 2017, <https://www.lashtal.com/1399-old-news/>.

3. Hale, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

There have also been several live performances based on this magical project, one of which was at the Australian Biennale in 2010.

History of “Occult” Ritual Performance

Despite the impressive and contemporary use of technology, much of Hale’s performance is inspired by the same principles of immersion and the promise of a change of consciousness that have driven occult ritual performance art since the nineteenth century, and this sense of lineage is an important feature of Hale’s personal narrative about his work. By way of a brief detour, there have been several nuanced debates by scholars of contemporary esotericism about the nature of the term “occult” as it relates to the wider history of esotericism.⁴ Occultism, as used in this essay, is a modern social and cultural manifestation of esoteric practices which coalesced in nineteenth-century France, resulting in a flowering of organized groups and esoterically focused institutions such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society, to name perhaps the most influential. The phrase “occult revival” is still in popular usage referring to this flowering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, implying a rediscovery or continuation of past practice. Yet Owen and Strube in particular characterize contemporary occultism as defined not by revival but by conditions of modernity and engagement with scientific and often progressive discourses.⁵ Hale’s work explicitly reflects this synthesis and this history, particularly as he sees his own blending of technology and esoteric practice in art as exemplifying those historical features. Nevertheless, despite the modern nature of occult identities, the idea that occult practices have

4. Marco Pasi “Occultism”; Hanegraaff, “Occult/Occultism”; Hanegraaff, “Esotericism Theorized,” 162. Hanegraaff’s attempts at providing an overarching “etic” category of the term occult based on responses to disenchantment and secularity have not been uniformly accepted.

5. For wider discussions about the modern occult milieu and progressive thought, see also Strube, “Occultist Identity Formations Between Theosophy and Socialism in Fin-de-Siècle France” and Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*.

ancient lineages and universal resonances is also important to understanding how modern practitioners, such as Hale, position their work.⁶

As Hale relates his own story he intentionally situates his performance within a wider tradition of occult theater derived from the nineteenth century combining somatic, ecstatic, and symbolic elements. As Edmund Ligan has detailed in *The Theatre of the Occult Revival* (2014), from the late nineteenth century occult ritual theater has trodden a fine line between art and ritual, and it has often been promoted in spaces and in ways which blur the line between artistic spectacle and religious event. This leads to questions about how we might characterize these sorts of performances.⁷ Customarily, we expect religious ritual to be conducted in a space that is sanctified and custom built for that purpose such as a church, temple or synagogue. Religious ritual in the West is normally not conducted in places that are “secular,” such as museums or art festivals, and the people who witness and participate generally know and understand the nature of the ritual in which they are participating. While church services, for example, may operate under an open-door policy, they are normally not public events.

By comparison, since the late nineteenth century occultists have been using the blurred lines of ritual and theater to inspire spiritually uplifting experiences for a broader audience, and in more public venues. Spiritualism, which was skyrocketing in popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, relied on the cultivation of high theatricality by the medium to create an atmosphere where the otherworldly could be conveyed and experienced by participants in a more public environment and outside of a strictly ritual context.⁸ While séances were certainly not billed as theater, they were recognized as entertainment and were perhaps more closely allied to popular entertainments of the day such as some carnival acts.⁹ However, the skills, conventions and performative elements drawn

6. See also Strube, “Occultist Identity Formations,” 569.

7. Ligan, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival*, chap. 1, Kindle.

8. Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 42, 49-74; Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments*, 3-4.

9. Natale, “The Medium on the Stage,” 240.

from the theater heightened the experience of the participants and created an atmosphere of liminality and unrehearsed spectacle. Still, the participants were not being introduced to bodies of sacred narrative in any sort of formalized manner that might be considered initiatory or socially transformative.

In both France and Britain, the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of more generally traditional theatre spaces and theatrical conventions to promote occult ideas to a wider audience. Art and occult ritual shared audiences, venues, and techniques that were interchangeable, and in the 1890s a tradition of occult performance developed that was much more art than religion. It was performed in secular contexts and venues, yet the performances were not secular by design. Dennis Denisoff argues that the late nineteenth-century journal *Borderlands*, founded by W.B. Snead, which was largely an attempt to promote scientific discourses around Spiritualism, was instrumental in also promoting the idea that mainstream theatre could be a useful vehicle in bringing occult matter to a wider audience as part of a broader cultural shift focusing on spiritual development.¹⁰ Very likely, this perspective was not only the result of the public interest in theatrical séances, but was also due to the impact of the Cambridge Ritualists and the publication of James Frazer's (1854–1941) *The Golden Bough* in 1890, which should not be underestimated in inspiring this early generation of ritual performance.¹¹ Frazer and, perhaps more critically, Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928) argued that myth emerged from the earliest religious ritual expressions, and theater later developed from performances of myth.¹² In that vein, many of these early ritual performers intended to give the audience what they believed was a primordially religious experience. Through combining symbol, theatrical, and ritual techniques, they would cause an altered state of consciousness and provide the audience with

10. Denisoff, "Performing the Spirit."

11. Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School*, 45–66; Van Kleek, "The Art of the Law," 67.

12. For a review of Harrison's primary impact on myth and ritual theory see Carpentier, "Jane Ellen Harrison and the Ritual Theory," 12–13.

a “primitive” religious experience that transcended time and history, possibly resulting in a wider societal moral uplifting.

In France, the Symbolist performances within the late Salons de la Rose + Croix organized by Joseph Peladán (1858–1918) from 1892 were other early examples of transformative occult theater practice. Symbolist theater was designed to inspire the experience of eternal truths in the audience through the use of heavy-handed imagery, metaphor, color and sound, a sort of spiritual technology of theater. While the actors were meant to deliver their lines in a detached iconic fashion, the audience was intended to sensually engage with the performance through costume and interactivity.¹³ Peladán’s Salons were meant to be reforming efforts which would redirect the attention of the participants away from the material and towards the perennial and spiritual.¹⁴ Like the occult performers who followed him, Peladán sought to recreate a theatrical experience which harkened back to a time when theatrical performances were religious rites.¹⁵ In his *Prométhéide* series, Peladán strategically employed ritual-like speech and gesture to create an immersive and liminal environment for the viewer, designed to be spiritually transformative and initiatory in nature.

Similarly, from about 1890 onward, members of the Golden Dawn employed similar technologies and techniques to augment their traditional performance skills in private ritual, as well as in the development of theatrical productions outside the context of the Golden Dawn. Florence Farr (1860–1917) may have been one of the most innovative Golden Dawn members in this respect. Farr was a ritual theater pioneer and leading member of the Golden Dawn who not only wrote, acted, and directed, but she also developed somatic techniques for theatrical and ritual use both inside and outside of the Golden Dawn context.¹⁶ Her “cantillated poetry,” which she also called “the music of speech,” was inspired

13. Deak, “Kaloprosopia: The Art of Personality,” 7.

14. Monaghan, “Peladán’s Symbolist *Prométhéide*,” 404.

15. Deak, *Symbolist Theatre*, 127; Monaghan “Peladán’s Symbolist *Prométhéide*,” 412.

16. Pécastaing-Boissière, “Wisdom is a Gift Given to the Wise.”

by Irish and Homeric oral poetry techniques, and it involved a musical reading of poetry accompanied by a psaltery, the techniques of which she later detailed in her 1909 book *The Music of Speech*. The technique seemed to evoke a trancelike state in the audience, and she applied it in her role as Aleel in Yeats's 1898 production *The Countess Cathleen*. While there has been a great deal of scholarly focus on her collaborations with W.B. Yeats (1865–1939) and her Golden Dawn-related writings,¹⁷ she should also be recognized in her own right for the development of ritual theatrical techniques and her productions with Olivia Shakespear (1863–1938), *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk* and *The Beloved of Hathor*, both of which were designed to communicate eternal truths through mythic theater.

Aleister Crowley's 1910 *Rites of Eleusis* was a series of seven publicly performed rituals designed to invoke the "energies" of each of the seven classical planets, and marks a turning point in the use of certain performative and sensory elements meant to induce an ecstatic state. Tracy Tupman argued that the Rites were "one of the first attempts in the twentieth century to consciously create a psychological connection between theatrical and religious practice within the western hegemonic society."¹⁸ While Crowley was building on the idea of producing a transhistorical spiritual experience for participants, he very explicitly employed ecstatic techniques in the performances, including drumming, dancing, and chanting, all of which were designed to produce altered states of consciousness in the audience.¹⁹ This was a deliberate attempt to cultivate what Crowley considered to be "exotic" and "primitive" elements within Western occult ritual. He believed that the religious rituals of non-Western cultures were more liberating and that these ecstatic elements would provide participants with an atavistic religious experience.²⁰ While Farr was incorporating techniques that

17. Laity, "W.B. Yeats and Florence Farr," 620–37; Johnson, "Florence Farr: Letters to W. B. Yeats," 281–322; Hassett, "Where the Blessed Dance: Florence Farr," 37–64.

18. Tupman, "Theatre Magick: Aleister Crowley and the Rites of Eleusis," ii.

19. Crowley, "The Rites of Eleusis: Their Origin and Meaning," 384; also Van Kleek, "The Art of the Law," 67.

20. Lingan, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival*, chap. 4, Kindle.

might be considered somatic and meant to inspire trance-like states, Crowley, inspired partially by Symbolist theatre, was attempting to bring his audience, and even more so the participants, into an active state of religious ecstasy.²¹ Crowley's promotion and use of these techniques somewhat informed the general trajectory of ritual construction among modern occultists and Pagans. Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), inspired partially by Crowley and perhaps more significantly by his time in Sri Lanka and Borneo, also incorporated ecstatic elements into the corpus of rituals of what is now called the Gardnerian tradition of Witchcraft with the same aim of reconstructing a “primitive” ritual experience for participants, which he believed was foundational to cultic rites.²² Ultimately, techniques which produce an altered state of consciousness, particularly chanting, drumming, and dancing, became common features in the ritual landscape of eclectic religious Witchcraft (Wicca).

Although Hale's work might be described as “edgy” and sits comfortably in the artistic and festival venues where it is most frequently observed, his work owes a great deal to some of the techniques used by the occult ritualists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, many of Hale's ideas about the process and efficacy of his work are perfectly resonant with the theories of ritual, transformation, and efficacy which drove early occult ritual theater. Here, Hale's personal description of his process hearkens back to Crowley's characterization of the “primitive” elements that he included in the Rites of Eleusis:

These [sonic] elements blended together [with the magical incantations, ritual props, projection/video] are for me a trance induction. It is worth mentioning that the essential elements inherent to our ritual performance partake of some of the earliest articulations of spiritual technology associated with shamanism—which include voice, sound and light. Although we used technology contemporary to our age, essentially I believe there is little or no difference.²³

21. Brown, “Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*,” 12–13.

22. Ligan, *The Theatre of the Occult Revival*, chap. 5, Kindle; see also Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, 46–47.

23. Hale, personal correspondence, September 9, 2015.

Hale's collaborator in NOKO210, Scott Barnes, noted that they are using the tools at hand to achieve the same ends as earlier ritualists in the Western tradition:

Just as strict protocols and preparation are often required for the successful performance of a Magical Rite, the correct construction of a magical circle, making and consecration of ritual tools, the preparation of talismans, so too the meticulous integration of associated data specific to the magical operation in the preproduction and production of the sound materials. For example; magical formulas, names, codes, numbers and permutations that relate to the specific Magical Operation are greatly considered and integrated into the very sound production itself. Much in the same way magical Kameas or [magical] Squares might be constructed or Gematric applications are standardly used in some magical operations. The only difference here is that the data feeds into parametric aspects of the sound production which is a data sonification.²⁴

Matters of Definition: Performance Art or Religion?

However, do Hale's rituals fall primarily in the category of religion, or are they more comfortably defined as performance art? And what features might influence how we might define them? It seems that Hale's work crosses into several different categories which influence the reception and interpretation of his work by an audience. Ritual and theater are, of course, historically and formally linked, and Hale's work is both. Rituals can be civic and secular or religious in nature, and as a rule are marked by an expectation of transformation. Yet, performance too relies on participation and transformation. William Beeman notes that ritual and performance have many shared defining features. For this discussion, I have listed the most salient of his observations here:

- Performance is purposeful enactment or display behavior carried out in front of an audience.
- Performance aims to change the cognitive state of participants.
- Some performers are more effective in this than others.
- Performance is collaborative behavior.

24. Barnes, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

- Performance is iterative, ongoing, and ultimately unpredictable in its results.
- Performance takes place within culturally defined cognitive frames that have identifiable boundaries.
- The most effective performances are those in which the performers and audience achieve full engagement with the performance activity through “flow.”²⁵

Hale in his own narrative more frequently aligns himself with the history of occult and religious performance than the tradition of secular performance art. This emphasizes the religiosity of his performance and reinforces a sense of artistic and spiritual lineage. Yet his work also sits within the wider tradition of secular performance art incorporating elements of ritual and religious themes that are contextualized more securely as “art” and not “religion.” Of course, Hale, being very artistically literate, is aware of how he sits within this grouping as well. Two different articles published in August 2017 in the online art journal *Artsy* addressed the recent upturn in “shamanic” and “mystic” practices among artists.²⁶ However, most of these performance artists, unlike Hale, are not performing within a religious context as adherents of particular practices. These artists may be providing a commentary on religious behavior or iconography, although they frequently employ elements of ritual or religiosity to cause a change of consciousness or awareness in the audience such as drumming or dance.²⁷

The distinction is that Hale is a religious practitioner, using themes and techniques drawn from his own ritual and religious practice and presenting them to an audience in the context of performance art. He is not an outsider appropriating these images, although it is noteworthy that he is not performing rituals from the Thelemic corpus such as the Gnostic Mass in these primarily artistic venues. As such, his work is part idiosyncratic performance art, part religious ritual, and part cultural display.

25. Beeman, “Religion and Ritual Performance,” 36.

26. Thackara, “Why Shamanic Practices Are Making a Comeback in Contemporary Art”; Artsy, “The *Artsy* Podcast, No. 45.”

27. See particularly Thackara, “Why Shamanic Practices Are Making a Comeback in Contemporary Art.”

Hale is one of a number of contemporary esoteric artists who are also practitioners and who have used ritual and symbolic elements to communicate esoteric principles roughly within a secular artistic context. Perhaps the most well-known is the pioneering filmmaker Kenneth Anger (1927–), whose Thelema-inspired works were not only rituals depicted on film. Anger believed they were also invocations and magical workings designed to impart mythic truths to the viewer.²⁸ Orryelle (1969–) is another Australian visual and performance artist who conducts ritual performance art and installations in a variety of gallery and festival spaces, with the intention of transforming the audience through myth, alchemical symbol, and explicit initiation. Orryelle characterizes their work in a similar manner as Hale:

The Metamorphic [*sic*] Ritual Theatre Company work and play with breaking down the border (an artifice of theatre as entertainment only) between ritual and theatre, i.e. public rather than private magical rites which are (to varying degrees according to the nature of each production) a combination of pre-meditated/rehearsed and indeterminate spontaneous elements. We recognize the ritualistic roots of drama in (for example) the Rites of Dionysos in Ancient Greece, and seek to return its transformative power, taking ‘theatre’ beyond its usual bounds of ‘pretending’ into the realm of Becoming. We don’t just act our characters, we Invoke them or related deities and/or archetypes.²⁹

Another contemporary occult artist who has found success within a fine art context is Elijah Burgher (1978–). Burgher, who is originally from Chicago and is currently based in Berlin, works primarily as a visual artist who has incorporated performance, sex magic, and idiosyncratic magical symbols into large scale canvases. In 2011, the art magazine *Art21* described one of his performance pieces:

The artist sites [*sic*] his fascination with ritual and symbol as born out of a queer connection to mysticism through the likes of William Burroughs and Genesis P. Orridge, among others. Although he does not disclose the meaning of the symbols he creates for

28. Carel, “Illuminating Lucifer,” 24–33; Allison, “Magick in Theory and Practice”; and Brook, “Puce Modern Moment” especially for discussions of Turner and liminality in Anger’s work.

29. Orryelle, “Metamorphic Ritual Theatre.”

his sigils, he sees his actions as a means of exposing the body and revealing queer desire to transmute societal shame and violence. After Burgher lights candles, mixes his blood with paint and slowly paints a pattern on the canvas on the floor, he carves the same pattern onto his body and then masturbates until he ejaculates on the canvas. He treats the camera as a silent witness, never making direct eye contact or addressing the viewer.³⁰

Like Hale, Burgher has exhibited in a variety of high art and museum spaces, including the 2014 Whitney Biennale, LAXART in Los Angeles and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. Anger, Oryelle, and Burgher are only a few examples of practitioners who have successfully employed occult practice within the milieu of fine arts as a way of pushing the boundaries of both fine art and the occult, challenging the nature of artistic spaces and the role of the audience. Yet these artists are also, notably, not presenting rituals that belong to any particular occult tradition in artistic venues; thus, although they are practitioners, their ritualized works are not located strictly within a tradition, so they themselves are blurring the lines between religion and art.

The Role of Venue in Interpretation

It can be argued that the venue and framing of Hale's performances within the context of museums and festivals mediates/mitigates the occult content. Context and venue greatly impact the ways in which an audience will receive and understand a performance. Assumptions about how religious rituals work are different than our expectations about secular theater or artistic performances, and despite the intent of the ritualist, the context in which the performance happens does shape and transform the reception. When a sacred performance happens in a secular space, does it transform the secular, as these rites presume, or does it turn the sacred into a spectacle? Museum and festival spaces have their own discourses which shape the content that they contain. Museums carry a particular type of

30. Perel, "Gimme Shelter/Full Frontal."

objective authority,³¹ while festivals cultivate a “time out of time” and create their own sense of liminality within the festival space.³² It then becomes impossible to interpret a religious performance on its own terms without also taking into account the conventions of the environment in which that performance occurs. Thus, while the ritualist intends to uplift the “mundane” space, the ritual then also becomes subject to the discourses of exhibition.

The fact that Hale’s rituals are not easily identifiable as “occult rituals” is very likely a contributing factor to their public acceptance. In fact, many of the elements which Hale might feel characterize a religious ritual also characterize performance in general, as noted above in Beeman’s commentary. While Hale draws on identifiable Western esoteric principles, images, and ritual practices, his creative use of technology and media stretches the conception of “ritual,” and thus he instead intersects effectively with fine art spaces to the degree that some spectators might only experience the somatic impact or simply enjoy the aesthetic experience. Despite the creation of sacred space and the inclusion of widely recognizable religious expressions such as chanting, these pieces still do not entirely meet the visual expectation of what people would consider a religious ritual. It is likely that the intent of the ritual may not be clear to the audience, if the audience can identify it as a ritual at all. For instance, Hale does not wear any identifiable religious garments during his performance. In other words, if it looked more like what people imagine a “traditional occult” ritual to be and less like performance art, more people might have a different, less positive reaction. The multimedia elements also serve to distance the audience’s thoughts from conventional displays of religiosity.

The tradition of public occult ritual performance with which Hale aligns himself was initially structured within wider cultural discourses of public

31. MacDonald, “Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition,” 1-21; King, “Rhetorics in a Museum Space,” 671-88.

32. Falassi’s *Time Out of Time*, 1-7, provides classic definitions of festival type and space. For recent discussions of festivals as complex economic events, see Hauptfleisch, “Festivals as Eventifying Systems,” and Cudny, “The Phenomenon of Festivals,” 640-56.

displays of religion. In the late nineteenth century, occult ritual was performed in a variety of public venues, including theaters and galleries, because the theatrical format had the ability to attract new audiences outside the occult milieu. This sort of evangelizing, however, is not Hale's intent, although the religious content of these performances is very important to him, and he does want an audience to be transformed. While earlier occult performance artists were trying to make occult ideas more accessible, Hale is not. His work is complex and specialized, and there is very little context or mediation provided for his audience. Hale is, however, bringing occult ideas and images into a public space quite comfortably. Certainly the venues that he performs in, art galleries and festivals, provide spaces for widening the public exposure to iconography, key concepts, and ritual forms that are present in Western esotericism and which are often hidden and shared only with people who are actively part of that tradition. So how are these performances most likely to be read by audiences?

Marco Pasi has asserted that one key feature of esoteric art is that it forces an encounter with the oppositional and reactionary, and that these elements form part of the impact of the work.³³ There is no doubt that many people would find elements of Hale's religious expression and his artistic projects to be heretical, and one can comfortably hypothesize that many people would not be comfortable in participating in a ritual designed to invoke demonic forces such as the legions of Beelzebub. However, in this case, there are external discourses of the secular space which construct an additional layer of interpretation to the ritual and which also serve as a comfortable space from which to engage in or witness transgressive religiosity.

The art or festival context of these performances further exoticizes a religious tradition that is already socially and culturally marginal, and associated with resistance and opposition. As such, it may be that performances of occult rituals in secular contexts further reinforce the challenging relationship between occult

33. Pasi, "Coming Forth by Night," 106-7.

practice and religiosity in that audiences are not forced to view them as sacred or religious events. The projection of “heresy” may potentially add to the power of Hale’s work for an unfamiliar audience. Aleister Crowley’s public ritual performances would certainly have been attempting to subvert conventional morality, not uplift it, and Crowley surely knew that the scandalizing elements of his performances were also powerful for both performers and audience.

However, Hale and his collaborator Scott Barnes disagree with the premise that the reception of occult art relies on the heretical or the fetishized. They note in particular the influence of Theosophy on Modernist art, which, being mainly abstract and lacking explicit representational symbolism, is often still not immediately recognized as having any esoteric content. Hale and Barnes have experienced widespread acceptance in art and festival venues with pieces where they, as artists and ritualists, are extremely open and honest about the work that they are doing. Barnes noted: “I tend to see the work I do with BWH (Barry William Hale) as a very traditional and conservative form of expression. The use of markmaking/ritual object, voice, gesture and available sound making devices to structure performative rituals are some of the most established of human activities.”³⁴ Here, Barnes recalls the “transhistorical” nature of these sorts of expressions which are, he might argue, common to the human experience, regardless of the religious context and therefore resonant as artistic expression. Yet, even if Hale and Barnes do not feel that their work is heretical, Beelzebub is essentially a “heretical” entity and rebellious to his core. However, Hale maintains that occult symbols and rituals are frequently sensationalized and stripped of the religious context, an understanding of which would give them more legitimacy and respect.³⁵ He feels that esoteric and occult traditions should be more readily acknowledged as part of the spectrum of world religions.

34. Barnes, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

35. Hale, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

The Ethnographic Gaze

Hale's work also sits comfortably within the wider context of ethnographic display and performance in that it is a religious performance taking place primarily for non-practitioners outside of a dedicated sacred environment. It may be that this context helps the audience to feel comfortable with challenging material by "Othering" it. Hale has noted the similarities between his performances and environments where other "exotic" (mostly non-Western) rituals are performed for educational purposes. Indeed, Hale and Barnes have already drawn formal similarities between their work and that of other, non-Western traditions, and it may well be that the audience also situates their work in that category. Hale further frames a comparison with a Tantric performance of a Chod rite "in which one imagines dismembering the body and feeding its constituents to the hungry ghosts and beings of other planes."³⁶ Hale notes that witnessing Chod would be serious and intense for the viewer, but he does not believe that a lack of cultural context impacts the ability of the audience to be transformed by the ritual.³⁷

The ethnographic gaze is not absent from fine art spaces, and some artists explicitly incorporate this distancing into their work. In fact, it may be that the increased globalization of the *biennale* as a space for showcasing non-Western and experimental artistic formats, is encouraging a conceptual space for culture-based art which incorporates an anthropological sensibility.³⁸ As Sassatelli notes, the rising emphasis on *biennales* as ways to expand the audiences for fine art, is also creating the conditions for a renegotiation of the boundaries of fine art outside of traditionally Eurocentric models.³⁹ The globalization of these spaces is therefore conducive to the inclusion of immersive experiences that may reference a variety of experiential, cultural, and interpretive systems in the way that Hale's does. For example, the 2017 Venice Biennale had a "Pavilion of the Shamans"

36. Hale, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Byrne, "Contemporary Art and Globalisation," 169.

39. Sassatelli, "Visual Arts Festivals and Globalisation: The Rise of Biennials," 43–44.

which included religious performances by indigenous Brazilians and “chill out” areas designed to look like Amazonian ceremonial spaces. Commentators noted that these pieces rehashed primitivism and touched on “noble savagery,”⁴⁰ but other art commentators exploring this trend echoed the arguments of Hale and artists before him that these sorts of displays are providing the audiences with primeval experiences that are necessary to balance the alienation of modern life.⁴¹ It is worth noting that, for much of the religiously tinged art using shamanism or non-Western ritual as a device, the anthropological frame of these art pieces contains an antimodernist commentary where ritual is equated with the “primitive” and the non-Western. This is true even when these techniques are used by non-Western artists such as the South Korean artist Park Chan-Kyong (1965–) who references Korean shamanism in his work as a critique against the Korean loss of tradition.⁴² This antimodernism, however, is absent from Hale’s work. While he uses what he considers to be ancient religious technologies, any “Othering” is not an attempt to specifically invoke the primitive. Instead, he is speaking to the cross-cultural and the comparative.

Performing ritual in secular spaces that are designed for performances and images designated as “art” allows for a cushion of safety and emotional distance for the viewer. The art museum in particular is a constructed space of secular truth and objective viewership. The authority of the art space provides a particular framework for the viewing experience which is rational and contemplative and not intended to be emotionally driven, even though that which is viewed can produce intense emotional responses. As such, challenging and even heretical ideas find protection in the museum because they are to be viewed critically and objectively. Carol Duncan notes that museums are also themselves spaces of liminality and performance where visitors come to ritually perform contemplation within a space of authority. The museum, too, generates its own

40. Davis, “In the Venice Biennale’s ‘Viva Arte Viva,’ Shamanism Sneaks Back Into the Picture.”

41. Thackara, “Why Shamanic Practices Are Making a Comeback in Contemporary Art,” 2017.

42. Chae, “Park Chan-kyong.”

ideals of transformation, purification, and enlightenment for the visitor.⁴³ Thus, it shapes and, in some way, confines the experience of a visitor and directs an appropriate relationship with the art or performance being viewed.

If the space for viewing that which is labeled as art is proscribed, how might that shape the relationship between the audience and the occult ritual artist? Does it keep them from questioning or consenting to participation in a ritual that might be objectionable to them? To some degree, yes. Although Hale is open about the nature and meaning of the performance and the rituals that he and Barnes enact, any element which may be considered to be taboo or heretical will be in some sense deflected by the directive of the space to witness and contemplate. Additionally, since Hale's work is "Othered" by the discourses of cultural performance, the audience may not interpret elements in the performance as explicitly heretical. Unlike *Piss Christ*, Andres Serrano's (1950-) "blasphemous" photograph of a plastic crucifix submerged in a jar of urine, or other overtly transgressive works with a religious element, the general viewing public may well be more receptive to Hale's works and more responsive to the sensory impact rather than the symbolic content because it is presented as religious experience rather than religious commentary. It is important to reiterate that Hale does not see his work as inherently transgressive. He does not intend to produce offense or shock, yet, it must be acknowledged that the category of "occult" art does naturally suggest heresy, resistance, and a challenging relationship to Western religiosity, so the potential for an interpretative frame of heresy must be confronted.

Hale notes that his work has impacted people from many different backgrounds and walks of life, and attributes this not to the performative qualities, but to the innate ability of esoteric material to move some people: "...it is always surprising who this type of art speaks to, more often than not it is people that you would not expect. I think that it has something to do with how esoteric content touches some cultural archetypal substrate or resonates some chord."⁴⁴

43. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 20.

44. Hale, personal correspondence, August 11, 2017.

However, two of his observations regarding audience response were notable. First, Hale commented that some esotericists were critical of his work and disagreed with his using this format to display material they thought should be for the initiated only. Ironically, then, a response grounded in an experience of taboo and heresy came not from outsiders, but from insiders. Second, Hale observes that those who came from religious or spiritual traditions that contained ecstatic elements connected with his performance more heavily.

[T]here [have] been many examples of people who are more familiar with different cultural traditions because of ethnicity [or prolonged exposure] [who] have had almost a greater context to understand what we are doing through their experiences of spiritual diversity. One such example was that one of the old members of the collective's parent and partner came [to] one of our art gallery performances, and afterwards said words to the effect that they understood finally what we did now, and drew parallels to their exposure in Jerusalem to a variety of ecstatic Hasidic groups. They themselves were children of the secular Jewish generation, well-educated and not religious and I believe it was the context of our material being validated within a high art context that made the whole thing accepted.⁴⁵

This supports the theory that while these ritual performances are, in fact, read as religious performances, the cultural context and signification as “high art” helps predispose the audience to not experience them specifically as “occult rituals.” And Hale’s and Barnes’s emphasis on the “primitive” and cross-cultural elements of ritual technique do, in fact, help provide a comparative context for audiences that may be familiar with them.

Role of the Audience as Ritual Participant

While it can be argued that the venues and frameworks within which Hale performs create the conditions for the audience to be in a dynamic with the performer that is more distanced and contemplative, this is not altogether satisfying. I keep returning to my friend’s reaction to Hale’s performance and his assertion that his consent was being violated by being witness to or participating in rituals he did not

45. Hale, personal correspondence, September 8, 2015.

understand. If Hale is explicitly using elements designed to alter the consciousness of the audience, this changes the dynamic between performer and audience. An altered state of consciousness is a common response for an audience member during a performance, but when this is combined with images that are seeding a magical intent for the performer with an intended outcome, to what degree does that make the audience complicit in the magical act? What role does Hale's audience take in these performances, and what sort of transformation is supposed to occur? Is the audience observing, participating, or are they in some way co-ritualists?

Hale acknowledges that this is a challenging question. He is fully aware of the complex and multifaceted role of the audience and the different ways that this sort of ritual may have an impact: an audience member can be a ritual actor, participant, observer, or simply acted upon depending on their background, and also depending on the potency of the moment of performance. He comments that the response to these performances will take place on a number of levels depending on what people bring to the experience. It can be a light show or a profoundly spiritual experience depending on the background of the observer. The question remains, does the active participation, level of belief, and awareness of the audience matter to the reception or the overall efficacy of the rite? Hale believes that these works do, in fact, objectively impact the ineffable, but he mostly places the onus of the efficacy of the ritual onto himself, as he is responsible for ensuring that the operation is completed correctly. In this respect, the audience is constructed as more witness than participant. Hale comments:

A magical ritual performed in whatever context is still the performance of a magical ritual regardless, and regardless of contextual reading. The ritual possesses its own inherent logic and language, it is prescriptive inasmuch as the elements and procedure are adhered to for its successful deployment. The essential elements must be in place; the construction of the ritual space layout, the ritual procedure is followed, the invocations or incantations are recited and the ritual stages is [*sic*] married with the sonic accompaniment, voice-symbols-movement-gesture-ritual tools or object are utilized, ostensibly all the essential elements are present and ritual is performed.⁴⁶

46. Ibid.

Hale notes, as with any art, that what the audience brings to it is what they take away from it; however, what may cause someone to be transformed or moved lies in a combination of the position and particular receptivity of the individual and efficacy of the rite:

I am sure that if someone [from a different religious tradition] was moved to tears at a folk song recited by a shaman [that the difference in tradition] would not have their experience invalidated. [B]ut it would not imply that through this interaction that the ancestors of the shaman weren't reaching out to the heart of a stranger, strumming the cord of universal sorrow. Or it could.⁴⁷

Here, Hale suggests the possibility that the audience response might be the result of an objective change in reality, regardless of the ability of the audience to apprehend it. One notable feature of Hale's art is that the somatic elements of the performance have the potential to impact the physical response of the audience, which may change the relationship of the audience to the performance. This factor takes the audience out of the space of objective contemplative viewer because they are being acted upon by the performer. This raises interesting questions about the power relationship of the performer to the audience and the ability of the audience to be passively and nonconsensually "programmed" by the ritualist with images and intents they do not comprehend. Although, as Beeman notes, a change in consciousness is a natural response to performance; in the case of occult ritual performance there is the explicit aim of introducing the audience to esoteric material while the audience has effectively been "entranced." At some point the question of belief and the audience's understanding of what is occurring becomes relevant. If the audience does not understand the nature and intent of the ritual, or if they are distanced, they may not in any way feel implicated in the ritual or that any issues of consent have been breached. However, if an audience member does have a relationship with this material in some way, they may feel as though they have a larger stake in the outcome of the ritual, and it is possible that

47. Ibid.

they may feel a potential lack of consent has occurred because they may possess suitable context to be offended by the material or its presentation.

Implications

There are implications for how the rituals and symbols of modern occult traditions are viewed and interpreted, depending on the contexts in which they are displayed. Although Hale is effectively bringing some very esoteric ideas and symbols to a new audience through performing in art and festival venues, he is still not performing religious rituals that are actually embedded within a tradition, and it is very likely that such rituals would feel out of place in those venues. The combination of esoteric material with non-ritual elements helps to provide ballast for the esoteric material that makes it acceptable. Elements that appeal to the audience's understanding and reception of comparative religious material, such as chanting and the display of religious symbols, also provide a context for people to experience Hale's art as a religious expression.

But can Hale be successful in his desire to introduce occult material to a wider audience *and* to help better position the “Western occult tradition” within the world's religious traditions? There may be more potential for the former than the latter. Because of the quality of Hale's work, he can secure prominent artistic and festival venues which absolutely provide excellent opportunities for exposure. However, without greater context for the audience it is unclear the degree to which they will position this material as part of the wider religious landscape. Regardless of this, given the immersive and somatic qualities of the work, the audience will likely be moved, and they may be inspired to investigate the traditions further.

Conclusions

There is no culturally defined space for the public performance—or even acknowledgment—of rituals from the Western occult tradition. Customarily, sacred spaces that are created by and used by occultists are highly secretive,

primarily because occult traditions are either considered to be operating outside of conventional religious practice or are only open to selected initiates. Additionally, with the exception of Freemasonry, most groups and individuals working within these traditions are normally not operating from any sort of publicly accessible or known temple space. As a result, the general public's exposure to any occult material is likely to be accidental, and may be treated as taboo and dangerous. Occult ritual performance puts the audience into the position of voyeur rather than participant, regardless of personal relationship to this material. While these may be public performances, their impact relies partially on witnessing that which is normally private, and that itself can produce an unsettled effect for the viewer. Ritual performance art offers the opportunity to observe a very intimate and rare activity, even when the effects are supposed to be experienced widely.

Barry William Hale's art is remarkably complex. He knows where he situates his work historically as a ritualist and an artist, and he has clarity about the ways in which his ritual performance can and does inspire viewers. As a magician, he is confident about his ability to effectively enact a ritual operation regardless of the perspective or background of the audience. Ironically, despite the generally heretical character of both occult material and of Hale's work specifically, the people who may have the most challenging response are the insiders who have the ability to make the most informed commentaries about the cultural context of the ritual practice. Indeed, occult practitioners may be generally less informed about the wider artistic milieu in which Hale's work is situated, and therefore experience the pieces more as "ritual" and less as art. Yet since another of Hale's intended outcomes is to broaden the cultural repertoire of occult practitioners, he has the potential to expand the horizons of his audiences in a variety of directions, and regardless of their relationship to this material, no one should go unmoved.

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Erik Davis. *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica and Visionary Experiences in the Seventies*. London: Strange Attractor Press; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019. 550 pp + 23 b/w illus. ISBN: 978-1907222764; ISBN: 9781907222870. Trade: \$34.95; paper: \$24.95.

Christopher Partridge. *High Culture: Drugs, Mysticism, and the Pursuit of Transcendence in the Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. 472 pp. ISBN: 9780190459116. \$34.95.

While the world's first psychedelic science research centers were opening in 2019, the psychedelic renaissance was already leaving its mark on religious studies with the publication of two field-defining books in the psychedelic humanities: Erik Davis's *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (2019) and Christopher Partridge's *High Culture: Drugs, Mysticism, and the Pursuit of Transcendence in the Modern World* (2018). Their celebrated arrival speaks to the shifting cultural climate of the academy, which has long embraced cultural prejudices that rendered the subject of psychedelics illegitimate. While both books briefly address the biases that historically suppressed interest in psychedelic experience within religious studies, they chart visions for a future of growing research in the "psychedelic humanities," which is yet in its infancy.

Written with a hip-shooting candor for style, Erik Davis's *High Weirdness* is both a page-turner and an intellectual *tour de force*. On the surface, it is a study of the thematic "family resemblances" connecting three literary psychonauts from the 1970s: Terence McKenna (along with his brother Dennis), Robert Anton Wilson, and Philip K. Dick. But it is also an experimental embrace of those very themes—a commitment to navigating through (and with) the weird, unknowable forces described in his source texts. Chapter one establishes a solid theoretical framework for the project, which serves as a guidepost for navigating the heady chapters to come. Davis describes the "weird" in terms of the anomalous and the queer, as that which refuses rigid categorization and

reductive explanation. As such, the weird takes on many forms: a social position, an aesthetic object, a genre of culture, a mode of enjoyment. Given the inherent slipperiness of a subject that cannot be constrained, Davis is careful to situate his project in conversation with William James's "radical empiricism" alongside Bruno Latour's "experimental metaphysics" as reference points. Building on the thematics of his earlier book, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (1998), Davis extends Latour's insight that a human creation can yet take "autonomous flight, its meanings and function no longer constrained by the human artifice that produced it" (26). By shifting the locus of subjectivity from individual agents to material-semiotic networks, Latour's theoretical perspective casts the book's psychonautic visions as information-rich renderings of the interface between symbolic scripts and material novelties, rather than as mere "hallucinations." From James, Davis similarly adopts a pragmatic orientation towards his texts, which means taking "them seriously without taking them literally" (22). This pragmatism forms the basis of Davis's own experimental orientation towards the texts, which he reads as networks of recursive encounters with—and reactions to—the unknown. In every case, these texts offer experimental engagements with extraordinary possibilities—metaphysical narratives that actively shape their subjects' perceptions even while they elude any absolute confirmation or closure.

Chapter two characterizes the 1970s as a liminal period marked by widespread rebellion and creative experimentation, tempered by a hefty dose of disenchantment and paranoia. Confronted with the "collapse" of 1960s aspirations for massive cultural transformations alongside a crisis of trust in traditional institutions, psychonauts in the 1970s turned to the power of storytelling to develop "centrifugal" forms of subjectivity through practices of occult exploration and creative re-invention. Fueled by a breakdown of conventional narratives, these psychonauts amplified their direct encounters with anomalous phenomena as a means of undermining dominant paradigms. The resultant writings documented

their efforts to strip away “social and familial imprinting” in order to “clear the ground for something different to emerge” (55). In every instance, this difference took the form of an encounter with a relational “other,” a call from beyond that transformed the self and exceeded any expectations.

Part two reads the McKenna brothers’ “Experiment at La Chorrera” as a rationalistic project of “weird naturalism” grounded in biology and alchemy, which pushes back against Wouter Hanegraaff’s characterization of the experiment as essentially delusional. In particular, Davis suggests that the machine diagram rendered by Dennis amounts to a real representation of high-dose tryptamine phenomenology rather than an embarrassing testament to failed science. Within a speculative framework of radical empiricism, that is, Dennis’s diagram represents an intertextual model of the very hermeneutics of resonance that seemed to structure the contents of the tryptamine trance by blurring the boundaries between subject and object.

Part three elaborates on this theme of boundary crossings by pivoting to Robert Anton Wilson’s techniques of “anarchist culture jamming” in *Illuminatus!* and *Cosmic Trigger*. In over-the-top mash-ups of esoteric traditions alongside outlandish conspiracy theories, Wilson draws the reader into “a state of political and ontological uncertainty” by destabilizing their expectations—including expectations about the usual distinction between “truth” and “fiction.” Unmoored from stabilizing frames of reference, Wilson cultivates a form of “maybe logic” that embraces what language can *do* once conceptual scripts are uncoupled from the usual search for final answers. Wilson’s writings explore how stories—including fictions—seem to “take on a life of their own,” shaping our experiences and influencing our subjectivity as a function of the attention we invest in them.

Finally, part four explores the writings of Philip K. Dick as they interface with his lifelong pursuit of extraordinary experiences. As Davis explains, Dick’s life was punctured by anomalous phenomena whose features elude simple categorization according to concepts drawn from either religion or psychosis. In

particular, Davis confronts the “hypergraphic” textual productions surrounding the events of “2-3-74,” which Dick described—in shifting terms—across fictions, essays, correspondence, and private journal entries. Davis argues persuasively that the contradictions and mutations evident across Dick’s various accounts reflect the literary nature of the event itself. Although Dick arguably “authored” 2-3-74 by “seeding his . . . field of consciousness with symbols and notions that authorized mystical attacks from without” (314), the event was fundamentally structured as an act of communication—an encounter with an “other” that transformed Dick’s subjectivity while evading any definitive attempt to explain or understand it. Davis argues that Dick’s fictions recreate the conditions of these weird, literary encounters with the unknown, to the extent that they function as prospective scripts for extraordinary experiences more than merely retrospective testimony. Dick’s complex, textual networks coalesce around the “hermeneut”—whether “psychonaut *or* . . . reader” (295)—with the aim of “successfully” reproducing (372) the anomalous experiences that inspired them in the first place. This explanation provides a theoretical mechanism of action to explain Dick’s reputation as a psychedelic author in the performative sense, “as the author of books that functioned *as* drugs” and not just books *about* drugs (277).

Although Davis sprinkles hints of his personal connection to the book’s topic throughout, the final section attests to the non-rational motivations that inform the author’s study. Davis ultimately reveals that *High Weirdness* is arguably a work of autoethnography, given his active participation in the very cultural currents that he chronicles here: “I have been blessed, and sometimes cursed, with my fair share of ecstatic, peculiar, enchanted, mystical, and sometimes paranoid experiences. I was friends with Terence, and got to hang out some with Bob Wilson” (382). As such, *High Weirdness* can be understood as what the authors of *An Art of Limina*¹ call a “further life of the work”: a type of performative

1. Neşe Lisa Şenol, “A Practitioner’s Commitment to Principle in Art: Review of ‘An Art of Limina,’” *Jacket2*, last modified August 24, 2011, <https://jacket2.org/reviews/practitioners-commitment-principle-art>.

scholarship that differs from traditional “interpretation” by participating in the very principles that underlie its object of study. As Davis attests, “I have tried to invite the reverberations of the weird into this study itself, not only in its objects but also in its method, its style, its esoteric overtones” (382).

High Weirdness is an eminently quotable text, packed with pithy formulas, including the following: “Synchronicity . . . is an event of resonance that resembles a representation” (247). I would have appreciated more discussion of (or even citation for) the claim that psychedelics and their “anti-disciplinary politics” informed postmodernism more “than is conventionally acknowledged,” which has the potential to broaden scholarly interest in psychedelics throughout the humanities (261). There is also the thorny issue of diversity and representation. While I respect Davis’s acknowledgment of his focus on a group of (in his words) “straight white guys,” I take issue with his specific explanation for that decision. While it is true that the “most celebrated . . . druggy visionaries of the era” were male, he is incorrect in attributing this to a “white male privilege” that provided the necessary “confidence to sally forth into extreme experiences that risk psychopathology—as well as the bravura to report on the journey and its supposed significance afterwards” (37). Although women’s contributions have been virtually erased from popular histories of psychedelic literature, both Adelle Davis and Thelma Moss published mass-market paperback books during the 1960s about their own psychedelic experiences.² (Partridge similarly avoids contributions by female psychonauts; he quotes Adelle Davis in a single sentence of his book without providing any description of her.) Even though both women were working mothers, their accounts reveal the extent to which they intentionally risked “madness” while theorizing extravagantly in pursuit of self-knowledge through altered states. The actual reason for their obscurity has much more to do with imposed, patriarchal standards that the field at large has yet to fully acknowledge.

2. Lana Cook, “Empathetic Reform and the Psychedelic Aesthetic: Women’s Accounts of LSD Therapy,” *Configurations* 22, no. 1 (2014): 79-111, 145.

From the standpoint of genre, *High Culture* is a more recognizably a work of traditional academic interpretation, in that it maintains a clear subject-object divide with its subject matter. (That said, it could actually stand to be *more* “interpretive,” in light of Partridge’s tendency to allow quotations to “speak for themselves,” without additional analysis.) The introduction makes the case for scholars of religious studies to take the subject of psychedelics more seriously, largely by mirroring the arguments set forth by Wouter Hanegraaff in “Entheogenic Esotericism” (2012). Both authors cite “unacknowledged prejudices” within the dominant intellectual culture since the Enlightenment, which have perpetuated a proto-Protestant conflation of moral rectitude with hard work. From that vantage, the “effortless” insights attributed to psychedelics are *ipso facto* illegitimate, and all the more dangerous for muddying the distinction between authentic knowledge and its counterfeit facsimile. Within a narrower disciplinary context, both also note that religious studies has long harbored a dualistic separation between “spirit” and “matter” that locates mystical states “outside” of the material world, which immediately renders the notion of chemically-induced mystical experiences as nonsensical.

Partridge describes psychedelics as “technologies of transcendence” that reliably induce experiences “of that which is Other . . . [and] beyond the . . . everyday” (3). He argues that by revealing the constructed nature of ordinary experience, and by exposing “technologies of domination” involved in naturalizing *some* ideas as “common sense,” psychedelic gnosis “challenges those systems of meaning into which we have been socialized” and thereby clears the ground for new systems to take root (14). This is a useful articulation of a common refrain throughout the psychedelic literature, the implications of which exceeds its historical association with the supposed failures of countercultural utopianism. Despite the prevalent theme of nonduality within psychedelic discourse, Partridge repurposes the esoteric concept of “gnosis” in order to emphasize the “dualistic interpretative framework” involved in distinguishing extraordinary experiences from the

quotidian habits underlying the “everyday.” He tracks this phenomenon as it is articulated across different drug contexts, following a roughly chronological arc from Romanticism (opium and nitrous oxide), Victorianism (nitrous oxide and hashish), modernism (mescaline, psilocybin, and LSD), through postmodernism (DMT). His chapter on “Occultism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” is the most successful in its scholarly rigor, and makes a persuasive case for the significance of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875)—an African American occultist who developed spiritual practices with hashish—within the modern history of psychoactive drugs.

In his eagerness to make a case for psychedelic mysticism, however, Partridge often paints in overly broad strokes. While elaborating on the inadequacy of discursive language to communicate psychedelic gnosis, for instance, he arrives at the indefensibly reductive claim that the “only way others could understand the experience was for them to take the drug themselves” (15). This claim is appended to a misquoted line from Tom Wolfe that articulates a multiplicity of routes to ecstasy beyond drug use *tout court*. Further, many of the figures at the center of Partridge’s study—from Timothy Leary to Carlos Castaneda—explicitly experiment with poetic or “non-discursive” language in order to communicate such states.

In another misleading generalization, Partridge cites Castaneda to characterize a “psychedelic shamanistic perennialism” wherein journeyers transcend their “particular historical circumstances” to experience “not only the same nonordinary reality as others who have taken the same drug, but also the same nonordinary reality that our ancestors visited” (22). In actuality, Castaneda describes a “separate reality” that is still subject to time, and hence changes. As Peter Luce describes in *Getting Castaneda*, “These worlds are as complete and engulfing as ours; beings live and die in them, and we can visit them and live and die in them, too” (38); they also include gender differences (137).

These early missteps attest to an uneven familiarity with the various figures featured in *High Culture*, who range from Humphry Davy circa 1800 through the

twentieth century. Partridge admits to lacking a cogent understanding of Terence McKenna, and his portrayal of Castaneda is frequently misleading. As a literature scholar, I've spent years teaching Castaneda's sophisticated use of literary devices and rhetorical strategies in conveying non-ordinary experiences to his readers. These literary features undermine Partridge's simplistic explanation for Castaneda's historical appeal, which he attributes to Castaneda's academic "legitimation" of widely-held ideas: "little rhetorical skill was needed: like worshippers before a preacher, his readers simply wanted verification of beliefs they already held" (308). To the contrary, it is on the basis of Castaneda's *literary* sophistication that he is able to conjure approximation of non-ordinary experience for his readers—a fact that Partridge himself alludes to in a quote, merely four pages later: "this is no mere recounting of hallucinatory experiences," but rather "events that we [the readers] . . . have the opportunity to *experience*" (312, emphasis added). Partridge does not comment on the apparent contradiction here.

Problematic elisions are peppered throughout *High Culture*, including its opening section on Romanticism, which is my own historical specialization. Although Partridge equates "Romanticism's gnostic quest for transcendental subjectivity" with "detachment from the limits of embodied existence" (47), scholars of Romanticism have published extensively on the distinctly *embodied* sublime pursued by many Romantics, including Davy. Furthermore, Partridge minimizes the impact of nitrous oxide research on Romanticism, going so far as to claim that "unlike opium, the experience of nitrous oxide had little impact on Romantic literature and culture" (68). Although he notes in passing—without analysis—that nitrous oxide was described "in words not entirely dissimilar to contemporary descriptions of opium dreams" (63), my own research has demonstrated the extent to which Romantic descriptions of opium were themselves influenced by the discourse surrounding nitrous oxide.³ In fact, Partridge undermines his own

3. Neşe Devenot, "Medical Ecstasies: Chemical Synthesis and Self-Experimentation in Romantic Science and Poetry," *European Romantic Review* 30, no. 1 (2019): 1-24.

point later on that same page, where he observes that “the popular connection between nitrous oxide and Romantic philosophy was firmly established by 1820” (68). He does not clarify how the strength of this association is possible in light of how nitrous oxide (supposedly) had such “little impact.”

Some of the gaps in both publications might be attributable to the subject’s extraordinarily interdisciplinary demands at a time when the “psychedelic humanities” are still in their infancy. Partridge’s opening salvo should have cited the work of Roan Kaufman on hegemony,⁴ for instance, and of Richard Doyle on the sensitivity of psychedelics to “initial rhetorical conditions.”⁵ Also, since both Partridge and Davis demonstrate the inextricability of psychedelic religiosity with literary practices, this means that the future of psychedelic religious studies must develop in conversation with literary scholarship to a greater extent than either book evidences. The relative paucity of literary interlocutors might help to explain the absence of any references to new materialist scholarship in either text; as Tamsin Jones has pointed out in “New Materialism and the Study of Religion” (2016), religious studies has been slow to embrace new materialism as a practical and theoretical paradigm. Given the extraordinary conceptual overlap between new materialism and the theoretical concerns of both texts—new materialism is virtually interchangeable with what Davis calls “weird naturalism” or “visionary materialism”—I anticipate future cross-collaborations with scholars who are likewise exploring the status of religious experience within a “posthuman” world (a term used by Davis, but not by Partridge). As Jones explains, “new materialism . . . seeks to avoid . . . any dualism

4. Partridge presents his main thesis (on the power of psychedelics to circumvent hegemony) as an original contribution to the literature, but it is not; in particular, see Roan Kaufman’s *Ayagogy: Ayahuasca as a Social Change Agent and Learning Model* (Madison, WI: Inner Dimensional Media, 2016) and the section entitled “Ayahuasca as Antidote to Western Hegemony” of Neşe Devenot, “Psychedelic Drugs,” in *Gender: Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks*, vol. 7, *Nature*, ed. Iris van der Tuin (Farmington Hills: Cengage, 2016), 361-77.

5. Richard Doyle, *Darwin’s Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noosphere* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 23.

between spirit/mind and matter”; it also “posits . . . the *agency* . . . of the material world, rather than continuing with the fable of a subject who acts upon dormant and inert matter” (4-5). Once brought into conversation with these discourses, Davis and Partridge chart a future for psychedelic theory to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of social constructivism and physicalist reductionism, with implications that will ultimately touch on all of the humanities.

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Tim Rudbøg and Eric Reenberg Sand, eds. *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. x + 384 pp. ISBN: 9780190853884. \$99.00.

The academic study of Theosophy began to accelerate during the 1990s. Although, at that time, scholars felt its academic marginalisation keenly, today, Theosophy's historical and cultural importance can hardly be questioned. This acceptance is reflected in the five collections devoted specifically to Theosophy that have been published within the last decade.¹ What have been the main issues at stake in how Theosophy has been depicted over the last thirty years? A question that has particularly vexed researchers is the relation of Theosophy to Asian thought. Countering the simplistic identification of Theosophy with Hinduism or Buddhism that characterised the very earliest studies, scholars from the nineties onwards often drew on Edward Said in portrayals of Theosophy as involving an imaginative construction of India and a Westernisation of Oriental ideas. Important insights have been gained from analyses carried out within this framework, and they have raised crucial ethical questions regarding imperialist and colonialist abuses of power.

Challenges to this trend have emerged as part of what we might call a “transcultural turn” in the study of Theosophy. Drawing on perspectives influenced by post-colonial studies, these approaches do not deny the obvious Orientalism of the Theosophical Society, but emphasise—as constituent of that Orientalism—the contributions of subaltern Theosophists alongside processes of

1. They are: a special edition of *Literature and Aesthetics* edited by Zoe Alderton and Johanna Petsche (2011); Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein's *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (2013); my own *Theosophical Appropriations* (2016), co-edited with Boaz Huss; Julian Strube and Hans-Martin Krämer's *Theosophy Across Boundaries* (2020), and the volume under review (2020).

“cultural entanglement.”² Although this tendency has been gaining momentum over the last few years, it is not exactly new, since already some two decades ago, Gauri Viswanathan (2000) and Joy Dixon (2001) commented on the cross-fertilisations that occurred in the context of colonial Theosophy.

As the title of the work under review suggests, its centre of gravity lies with the former approach. As the editors state, the volume is “primarily based on the premise that the Theosophical Society originated in the West and thereby approached the East from that point” (10). For all that, *Imagining the East* is not entirely univocal, and the editors conclude that “we hope and anticipate that the much-needed global history perspective will be brought more strongly into the study of Theosophy and thereby help provide a more nuanced perspective on how Theosophy has been perceived and applied around the world” (378). There is evidence of a transcultural perspective in several places throughout the volume, with the most explicit statement coming from Michael Bergunder, whose chapter functions as a sort of “how to” for what he calls the “global history approach.” Be that as it may, I am rather puzzled by the inclusion of a piece (as excellent as it is) that has already been in print for over six years.³

Another niggle is that I would have liked to have seen more diversity among the authors. Of the thirteen contributors, eight are full or emeritus professors. Two are independent scholars and four are lecturers or associate professors. Only one is a woman. It would also have been nice to have seen the work of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows represented, especially as many of them are producing some of the most cutting-edge research.

2. Examples of recent studies that approach Theosophy from a transcultural perspective include Bergunder, “Experiments with Theosophical Truth” (2014); Mukhopadhyay, “The Occult and the Orient” (2015); Baier, “Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer” (2016); Mukhopadhyay, “A Short History of the Theosophical Movement in Colonial Bengal” (2016); and Mukhopadhyay, “Mohini” (2020). Several important contributions (including by Michael Bergunder, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Ulrich Harlass) have been published as part of a collected volume that emphasizes the transcultural perspective: *Theosophy Across Boundaries*.

3. See Bergunder, “Experiments with Theosophical Truth.”

The editors have taken care to cover a range of topics, which are treated in appropriate detail. The chapters also speak to, and develop, one another. For example, the importance of the idea of universal brotherhood, which is highlighted in Godwin's chapter, is later contextualised in contemporary Spiritualist ideas by Rudbøg. Unfortunately, the overlaps sometimes result in repetition. For example, A. O. Hume's biography is sketched twice. This is only an issue, though, if one reads the volume through from beginning to end and it is more likely that readers will dip in and out depending on their interests.

Since it would be impossible to discuss all thirteen chapters here, I will focus on four that particularly interested me. Joscelyn Godwin's chapter on the Mahatma Letters explores a variety of possibilities with regard to the letters' authorship, production, and inspiration. He provides lively and perceptive sketches of the two central recipients, A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume, discusses the letters' physical peculiarities, outlines the most important ideas contained in them, and gives an account of their afterlife. Since I am currently researching depictions of Mahatmas in Theosophical fiction, I particularly enjoyed Godwin's character sketches of the Mahatmas themselves. Clear and engaging, this chapter will prove indispensable to anyone starting out on a study of the Mahatma letters, as well as to those who are already familiar with them.

Patrick Bowen's chapter asserts that the instruction in yoga provided by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (H. B. of L.) from 1885 represents the earliest known example of the organized practice of yoga in the modern West. Drawing on a wealth of archival material, he argues that the endorsement of yoga by the Theosophical Society during the previous decade influenced the H. B. of L. Although Olcott and Blavatsky gradually turned away from yoga, Indian Theosophists continued to promote it, notably, the Arya Samaji R. C. Bary. It was largely due to Bary's efforts, claims Bowen, that yoga was incorporated into the teachings of the H. B. of L.

More research is needed on the legacy of this occultist promotion of yoga, and this means that some of Bowen's conclusions on this (relatively minor)

aspect of his chapter are necessarily speculative. For example, we know that some elements of Max Theon's Cosmic Philosophy found their way into the Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo via Mirra Alfassa (later known as The Mother), and Bowen suggests that Max Theon "retained an interest in Indian religions that showed possible yoga roots" and that the influence of the Cosmic Movement on Sri Aurobindo "might therefore be an early instance of the global circulation of yoga from India to Europe and back" (171). Bowen is cautious here, and rightly so, for as yet there is no evidence that Theon's knowledge of Hindu thought was anything other than minimal.⁴ Furthermore, Aurobindo certainly would not have needed Mirra's cosmic influences to steer him in the direction of yoga. None of this detracts, of course, from the veracity of Bowen's conclusion that the spread of occult-focused yoga involved "the complex interplay of modern forces" (173). Thanks to his excellent chapter, we now have a clearer picture of hitherto little-understood aspects of that complexity.

In a beautifully written chapter, David Weir demonstrates that Theosophy and modernism are parallel historical developments that share, as he puts it, "a sense of the erudite and recondite" (221). Weir takes the reader on a journey through the manifold Theosophical inflections to be found in the works of several proto-modernist and modernist authors: Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce. He identifies a trajectory of growing scepticism about Theosophy as modernism proceeds, with attitudes towards Theosophy evolving from Yeats's positive perspective, through Pound, who embraces the idea of a secret tradition, to Eliot, for whom scepticism coexists with some measure of acceptance. Once we reach Joyce, however, we have arrived at a sceptical and critical outsider. Weir analyses the varied ways in which these authors engage with Theosophical ideas and themes, whether as a source of inspiration, as a foil, or indeed (perhaps most interestingly) as both.

4. See Boaz Huss, "Cosmic Philosophy and the Kabbalah."

Paul Johnson's chapter, "Theosophy in the Bengal Renaissance," charts Blavatsky and Olcott's relationships with several Bengalis, arguing that the significance of the encounter between Theosophy and the Brahma Samaj has been underestimated. The mutual influence of Theosophy and the Bengal Renaissance reached its zenith, according to Johnson, during the "meteoric career of Mohini Chatterji" (244). Johnson argues that in his 1887 defection from Theosophy, Mohini wasn't so much rejecting Theosophy by embracing Christianity as "moving out of the orb of Blavatsky's influence by returning to the conciliatory and pro-Western stance of the early Brahma movement" (242). My own forthcoming work on Blavatsky's engagement with the work of Mohini (as well as another early Indian Theosophist, T. Subba Row) will develop these insights of Johnson's.⁵

In conclusion, *Imagining the East* provides a solid introduction to important figures, events, and texts in the history of Theosophical Orientalism, as well as several ground-breaking chapters that will be indispensable to future researchers. The volume will be of interest to students at the beginning of their studies and to scholars with more experience. General readers with an interest in the colonial-era occultism will also find something of interest.

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5. Chajes, "Nothing Personal: Blavatsky and Her Indian Interlocutors" (forthcoming).

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David J. Collins, S.J. ed. *The Sacred and the Sinister: Studies in Medieval Religion and Magic*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. 292 pp. ISBN: 978-0-271-08241-7. \$74.95 (hardcover) / \$39.95 (paperback).

Modern scholarly discussions of religion, science, and magic in the Middle Ages agree in general that the holy and the unholy are not opposed entirely; they are rather connected and even blended. This approach became more common after medievalist Richard Kieckhefer's claims regarding the tight entanglement between religion, science, and magic. He challenged the conventional understanding of magic—which posited that magic can be understood separately from religion and science—in his monumental book *Magic in the Middle Ages* (1989, 2014). *The Sacred and the Sinister* starts with the ambiguities that Kieckhefer so famously emphasized. The contributors further develop his arguments of ambiguity and ambivalence in understanding the holy and unholy. However, this volume also moves things forward. It argues that even if the distinctions between magic, science and religion are ambiguous, as Kieckhefer argues, medieval people did differentiate between categories—the holy and unholy; heaven and hell; sacraments and magics; saints and demons; spirits and materials; sacred and profane; religion and cult. A more thorough understanding of this process of differentiation, the volume contends, may lead us to clarify Kieckhefer's ambiguities.

This anthology reminds the reader that observing the ambivalence between holiness and unholiness is meant not to conclude anything, but to open more fervent scholarly discussions on the medieval dynamics in religious culture. The ten authors argue in their own ways that medieval people must have had ways to differentiate the holy and unholy, which might seem indistinguishable at first sight for us. For medieval people, this religious dilemma was not only related to matters of uncertainty, but of differentiation: how they could separate spiritual and demonic beings so that they could embrace or reject their beliefs

and practices on the communal or individual levels. These cognitive efforts to understand new phenomena and to include them in the boundaries of the conventional systems of beliefs and rituals should be understood as processes, which each author discusses in different periods and regions.

This volume consists of ten chapters distributed in four parts discussing holiness, unholiness, and magic, spanning from something traditionally accepted to something likely condemned as heretical or demonic by the medieval church. The editor, David J. Collins, starts his “Introduction” by referring to Kieckhefer’s article “The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe” (1994) to show that this eminent scholar’s interest in medieval saints and witches of contingent “competing identifications” (1), and different understandings of observers’ religious backgrounds, is shared by contributors discussing various topics from the most respected saints to demonic magic. Although the edited volume is very much steeped in Kieckhefer’s scholarship, readers interested in Kieckhefer’s writings might be surprised to learn that *The Sacred and the Sinister* considers a much wider range of topics, not just Christian struggles with magic but also violence, extreme sanctity, extraordinary physical states, conflicts with space and religious meanings, madness, and so on.

For example, in the first chapter of Part I (two chapters), “Traditional Holiness,” Claire Fanger suggests that the categories of holy and unholy are not crystal-cut in the hagiographies of Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224) and Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). She guides readers to the self-mortification of the saints who lived and received fame for extreme sanctity even before the fourteenth-century self-mortifying saints that Kieckhefer focused on. Sainthood and extreme sanctity allow Fanger to show ambiguities and distinctions convincingly by comparing and contrasting the processes of these saints’ abnormal holy behaviors, such as flying or extreme forms of penance, with the church’s efforts to normalize them within the tradition. In Part II (three chapters), “Conflicts over the Holy” by Elizabeth Casteen analyzes the word “raptus” in the mixed-

use of rape and rapture by the Holy Spirit, which can be confusing to modern readers. She argues that “*raptus*” often meant mystical rapture as a form of feminine piety in religious writings, especially the High and Late medieval hagiographies; by contrast, in a secular sense, *raptus* was associated with sexual violence. Casteen claims close connections between mysticism and violence. She also argues for rational logic behind the common usages of this word, showing that femininity was not only linked to the object of *raptus* but also connected to the vulnerable body of Jesus, which contributed to empowering feminine piety even though the law and literature still depict women as the victim of violence.

Clarifying ambiguities is continued in the third (three chapters) and fourth (two chapters) parts of this book, discussing unholiness, which is not entirely separable from the first and second parts’ discussions of holiness. In one of the chapters from Part III, “Identifying and Grappling with the Unholy,” Anne M. Koenig brings an example from the magicked madness of late medieval Germany, suggesting that medieval observers acknowledged the links and distinctions between possession and madness. According to her scholarly distinction, magically induced madness was understood as separate from naturalistic or medical reasons and treated as communally meaningful. This approach clearly presents that medieval people also standardized different treatments based on different causes between natural science and magic. Sophie Page, in turn, discusses demons trans-crossing their boundaries in the ninth chapter of Part IV, “Magic and the Cosmos.” This chapter explains the eventual acceptance of demons and magic by the church. This acceptance did not lead to a blending of the spheres of God and demons; on the contrary, this embrace of the new tradition was a part of the process to secure the celestial sphere’s separation from the demonic power present in this world.

Granted that this review cannot capture ten chapters thoroughly, it is essential to note that the authors demonstrate the gradual process of distinction where medieval people tried to resolve ambiguity in beliefs and practices. The

ambiguities could be the temporary by-product of their efforts to build new traditions of holiness in a wider scope, encompassing certain traditions that used to belong to the realm of magic and demons and were condemned by the church. By showing the efforts in part of medieval theologians, practitioners, and observers to create distinctions, the authors successfully demonstrate that the ambivalences in medieval Christian traditions of holiness and unholiness had to be explained eventually by the people living in this ambiguity. Simultaneously, these ambivalences also need to be explained by historians observing them with modern understandings despite that there is still some room to leave things temporarily intermixed during social and religious changes. In this view, the project can be seen as the by-product of the dialectical approaches that acknowledge the complexities of religion, magic, and science. Therefore, this volume, despite its diverse topics and approaches, should be understood as inheriting Kieckhefer's inspiring tasks to "strive to draw out the coherent from that seemingly incoherent and, at the very least, to explain the changes through time, the consistencies and variations between and across cultures, and the distinctive perspectives across social strata" (2).

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Anya P. Foxen. *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. ix + 322 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-008273-4. \$92 / £64.

In *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga*, Anya Foxen aspires to uncover hidden Western traditions of spiritual breath-movement practices that preceded and coincided with the evolution of modern postural yoga (MPY). Foxen's "harmonial" thesis builds on yoga scholar Mark Singleton's assertion that aesthetic physical culture practices of European and American women in the late nineteenth century, which he coined "harmonial gymnastics," influenced MPY developments.¹ Building on this premise, Foxen suggests that "non-lineage-based" or "non-devotional" American gym yoga of today is "only slightly genealogically related to Indian yogic traditions" (2), but more intimately derived from nineteenth-century "Euro-American harmonial physical culture practices" (40) and the early twentieth-century American Orientalist dance fad.

In augmenting Singleton's argument, Foxen constructs an analytical framework for harmonialism which is used throughout the text as a comparative background to "MPY." According to Foxen, the theoretical tenets for harmonialism are: 1) the belief in one reality in which the physical and spiritual are interconnected; 2) the idea that humans are connected with the cosmos through an intermediary principle such as "*pneuma*," "ether," or "spirit"; and 3) the idea that there are practical methods that we can utilize to bring the "human, cosmos, and the divine into alignment or harmony" (23). Thus, the emblematic title of the work — *Inhaling Spirit* — points at Foxen's concept of harmonialism, i.e., "spirit," which is (imagined to be) "inhaled" during breath-movement practices. Foxen's adoption of the term "harmonialism" is

1. Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 154-73.

admittedly investigated in “broad strokes,” as a way of “mapping the shape of ancient thought . . . into a scattered lineage of family resemblances” (66). Given that it touches upon numerous influences and various movement practices to build the core of Foxen’s micro-historical analysis, it is not surprising that some of these descriptions of lineages and the resulting interpretations are somewhat daring and overstated. In her reading of MPY through the lens of harmonialism, it is additionally troubling that Foxen largely neglects important sources of modern yoga and its South Asian roots.

In the first two chapters, Foxen imagines a harmonial heritage by tracing a history of interrelated ideas. She traverses a fascinating spectrum of “harmonial” (i.e., metaphysical) thought from ancient Greek concepts of the cosmic body, theurgy of Iamblichus to Medieval Platonism, and natural magic in the Renaissance. Following this Foxen segues into eighteenth-century mesmerism, the mystical revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg, and nineteenth-century Spiritualism and New Thought, thereby focusing on the contributions of Andrew Jackson Davis and Warren Felt Evans (who is mistakenly called “Walter”). Foxen’s exploration of Evans’s concepts of spiritualized breath connects the New Thought movement to physical culture as seen in her next chapters.

Regarding Davis, it should be noted that harmonialism is a term based on Davis’s “Harmonial Philosophy.”² The twentieth-century religious scholar Sydney Ahlstrom created the umbrella term “harmonialism” or “harmonial religion” to denote mid nineteenth-century spiritualist and occult movements, of which Davis was a leading figure. Ahlstrom’s generalized terminology was then acquired by yoga scholars³ and Foxen follows by arguing that Ahlstrom’s “original” use of the harmonial term meant a “spiritual union or rapport with the cosmos” (146). More precisely, Davis’s cosmic rapport included the belief in

2. Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy: A Compendium and Digest of the Works of Andrew Jackson Davis* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Pub., 1917).

3. Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (London/New York: Continuum, 2004).

the immortality of the transcendent soul, astral projection, intergalactic travel, and trance communications with “peoples of other planets.” Foxen omits this background for harmonialism as a term and its use within yoga scholarship — which is notable in light of her overall emphasis on “family resemblances” (66).

In chapters three and four, Foxen draws from the scholarship of numerous historians to give an overview of physical culture developments from the Renaissance to nineteenth-century Swedish Ling gymnastics, before narrowing in on American Delsartism. Here again, she significantly expands upon Singleton’s research connecting Pehr H. Ling, François Delsarte, and specifically Genevieve Stebbins to the growth of MPY. Foxen explores American Delsartism as a form of theurgy, described as “a theory of aesthetics governing bodily movement, [that] in its highest form, becomes a sort of body language for the soul” with every movement as a form of communication (131). One note: throughout the book Foxen uses the misspelling “Delsarteism” instead of Delsartism. Additionally, within the text Foxen often summarizes and synthesizes insights from experts’ in-depth archival research and allocates their names to endnotes. As one example, she introduces biographical information about Stebbins (159) without properly crediting the dance historian Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter who is widely recognized for having unearthed Stebbins’s work.

Having distinguished Delsarte’s work in Paris from American advancements based on his theories, Foxen notes that by the early 1890’s Delsartism had become a “full-blown spiritualized practice encompassing breath and movement” (157). Foxen’s analysis revolving around women in the physical culture movement as part of the deep breathing discourse is well-arranged and her overview of the integral role women played in the broader Delsarte movement proves to be enlightening. However, Foxen complicates a portion of American Delsarte history by asserting Delsarte’s sole American student Steele MacKaye added exercises “drawn from Ling’s system” (136). This claim contradicts scholarship on Stebbins and historical evidence that credited her for being the first Delsartist

to have integrated Ling's movement exercises within her innovative physical culture system, known as Harmonic Gymnastics.⁴

At the end of chapter four, Foxen investigates "Oriental dance" in the early choreography of Ruth St. Denis and challenges the idea that St. Denis appropriated Indian Nautch dance or yoga, seeing as she described her own work as not trying to "reproduce any Oriental ritual or actual dance" (177). Although her choreography *was* imitative of Nautch dance, even if it was performed "semi-accurately" or her mudras were not done "very well" (285), Foxen accurately describes the creation of St. Denis's early work as a mixed repertoire of dance influences. Foxen argues that while St. Denis's Orientalist fantasy performance of an Indian goddess was indeed problematic, with her use of brown face and staging Indian men as props, she argues that St. Denis's creativity should ultimately be "interpreted against a backdrop of classically inspired harmonial idealizations of all dance" (178), where embodied spirituality and "expression become transcendence and authenticity" (265).

In chapter five, Foxen explores individuals who "tied their authority to the mystique of the Orient" (196) as seen, for example, through the medium Helena P. Blavatsky, the work of Pierre Bernard, and New Thought author William Walker Atkinson. She then turns to investigate the Oriental dance fad (206-21) through such figures as one of St. Denis's students Marguerite Agniel, a model and dancer, to argue that "the present form of postural yoga in the United States demonstrates one undeniable fact: it is the dancing girl's yoga gone mainstream" (190). However, what direct influence Agniel had – or even the "second generation of dancing girls" including Indra Devi and Swami Sivananda Radha discussed in

4. Nancy L. C Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 1999); Kelly Jean Mullan, "Harmonic Gymnastics: A Genealogy of Ideas," *Currents: Journal of Body-Mind Centering Association* (2016): 16-28; Kelly Jean Mullan, "European Antecedents to Somatic Practices," in *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*, edited by Martha Eddy, 71-82 (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2016); Kelly Mullan, "Somatic Herstories: Tracing Elsa Gindler's Educational Antecedents Hade Kallmeyer and Genevieve Stebbins," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 9, no. 2 (2017): 159-178.

chapter six — on future yogis remains unanswered. Neither is Oriental dance in and of itself described in terms of what it was these women were actually doing, other than saying it “relied on a set of movements that were believed to derive from the devotional forms of an unspecified Oriental culture” (209). Despite its inconclusiveness regarding what impact these women might have had, Foxen’s queries and biographical studies of these women are interesting.

Chapter six deals with South Asian modern yoga pioneers like Swami Vivekananda and Shri Yogendra and the “harmonial” publications of Stebbins. Foxen appropriately clarifies earlier scholarly misunderstandings that tended to confuse Stebbins’s breathing practices with the appropriation of yogic breath control (151, 230, 236, 241–43). Another concept that she rightly traces to Stebbins, but also to exponents of New Thought and Spiritualism, is the body as a “human battery” that could be “recharged” through breathing techniques and other psycho-physical practices, which are indeed reiterated throughout early twentieth-century modern yoga manuals (99–100, 162, 245–46). For Stebbins, as well as pioneers of modern yoga, the solar plexus became *the* locus to absorb “magnetic healing” and the equally restorative effects of breath-movement practices, constituting another useful investigation which Foxen then develops into the themes of chapter six (122–23, 170–71, 234). In treating several yoga pioneers in light of harmonialism, Foxen assesses Yogendra’s adoption of certain ideas and practices described by Stebbins in her influential *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) and she should be credited for uncovering these connections (240–44). In this discussion, the portions that treat yoga as “yoga” (and not harmonialism) are, however, relatively small. It is surprising that what was “yoga” for Yogendra, becomes “harmonialism” in Foxen’s analysis. This probably reflects the (at times admitted) hyperbolicism of her argument (231–35, 238, 259), including the statement that “we should not be calling some of the practices we see in the West today ‘yoga’” (263).

Exemplifying a strategy in her book, Foxen attempts to turn upside-down the indeed overwhelming presence that yoga holds in contemporary popular

culture. She wants to uncover an oversimplifying universalism that would tend to see “yoga” in any form of postural practice that involves breath and/or subtle body schemes, and makes clear that things are more complex (10, 62, 162, 258). Foxen reverses that argument and instead holds that the ubiquitous practice is harmonialism (which is Foxen’s quest for a more complex theory). The Epilogue to the book enforces this claim. In negotiating various approaches to studying yoga in the Epilogue, the author states that it is not desirable to understand yoga as a “pure,” unchanged, and monolithic practice, a view that would, as a result, tend to focus solely on its premodern sources (258–59, 264). It remains nevertheless problematic to largely decontextualize the Euro-American developments from the South Asian roots of yoga, or to place the latter mainly on the appropriating side as in chapter six. In negotiating an essentialist view of yoga and Foxen’s own construction of a universalist harmonial tradition, the book sometimes fails to purport a balanced argument.

It is commendable that Foxen endeavoured the colossal task of producing this book, which certainly seems likely to yield much debate considering its breadth and provocative propositions. Moreover, the validity of harmonialism as a theoretical and ontological framework is up for debate. While the history of Euro-American women’s engagement in Western forms of spiritualized physical culture is fascinating and certainly an under-researched area, the assertive claim that various practices from American Delsartism to “Oriental” dance became the yoga we find in fitness centers and studios today is not entirely tenable. It would require additional intensive historical study and methodical movement analysis of exercises with a narrower focus tracing the transmission of practices through educators and students to argue this point with such conviction. It could be said that this is not even exactly the point she is trying to make overall despite her brazen statements. It seems, rather, that Foxen is trying to unveil a narrative for Euro-American spiritualized movement practices that originated prior to postural yoga systems coming to the West, and that this history should

not be diminished. This, in and of itself, is certainly true as numerous physical culture historians have evidenced, and Foxen is one of the few scholars to have attempted to merge metaphysical history with physical culture, dance, and yoga studies. Foxen therefore sets a precedent for future research – which would indeed need a more thorough and deep engagement investigating questionable connections, similarities, and differences between concepts and actual practices within these fields – that could further contribute to understanding the development of modern postural yoga in North America. Foxen’s text perhaps could be considered as a light shining the way, even if as she says, her clusters of candles might produce a “flattering illusion” (261) for alternative origin stories of American yoga.

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Dylan Michael Burns and Almut-Barbara Renger, eds. *New Antiquities: Transformations of Ancient Religion in the New Age and Beyond*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2019. vii + 311 pp. ISBN: 9781781795040. \$100.00 / £75.00.

While the last few decades have seen the increased popularity of historical reception studies, such work has generally focused on philosophy and cultural products rather than the wealth of material to be found in religious practices, which, almost without exception, situate their origins in a more or less imagined past. The fruit of a 2014 conference of the same name held at the Institute for the Scientific Study of Religion of the Freie Universität Berlin, this collected volume marks an important step towards correcting this oversight. Four of its twelve chapters (ch. 2–5) take as their theme Goddess worship in modern Paganism, while a further four focus on Gnosticism (ch. 8–10, 12), with a remaining three on other topics – the worship of Antinous (ch. 6), modern Essenes (ch. 7), and ceremonial magic (ch. 11).

The first chapter, “From Aphrodite to Kuan Yin’– ‘The Tao of Venus’ and its Modern Genealogy” (14–49) by Almut-Barbara Renger, takes as its starting point an article published in an acupuncture journal in 2004, leading us on a careful examination of the threads that lie behind its promiscuous blend of New Age thought. The second and third chapters, Meret Fehlmann’s “Ancient Goddesses for Modern Times or New Goddesses from Ancient Times?” (50–75) and Caroline Tully’s “The Artifice of Daidalos: Modern Minoica as Religious Focus in Contemporary Paganism” (76–102), shift from a North American context to Greece, and specifically its reception as the site of an ancient matriarchal cult of the Goddess. Both use as one of their central case studies Carol P. Christ (b. 1945), an American religious studies scholar who abandoned the field to promote feminist spirituality, organising biannual pilgrimages in which women rediscover the sacred past. As they demonstrate,

this idealised reception of the Greek (and specifically Cretan) past, made possible by early archaeologists such as Arthur Evans, has since been problematised by more recent scholarly work. The last paper focusing on Goddess traditions is Kathryn Rountree’s “Transforming Deities: Modern Pagan Projects of Revival and Reinvention” (103–26), which explores the way in which the international (but originally North American) Goddess movement can be contrasted with more geographically and ethnically specific movements around the Mediterranean — Hellenism in Greece, Celtic-inspired paganism in northern Italy, and the creation of a new national goddess for Malta. Her discussion of the conflicts between Hellenists and archaeologists for access to and interpretative authority over ancient Greek sites leads to one of Rountree’s most important interventions — the different, and often irreconcilable, epistemological and discursive assumptions of religious practitioners and scholars, and the need for both to recognise the nature of their different claims.

Ethan Doyle White’s “Archaeology, Historicity, and Homosexuality in the New Cultus of Antinous: Perceptions of the Past in a Contemporary Pagan Religion” (127–48) focuses on cult of the “gay god” Antinous, the lover of the emperor Hadrian who died ca. 130, and whose worship ended in the fifth century before being revived, apparently independently, by several individuals from the 1980s to 2000s who have since formed multiple small communities using the internet. White’s article explores the tensions inherent in understandings of religious revival as creative production rather than pure reproduction, and specifically here on the question of Antinous’ “gayness,” an academically problematic concept in the wake of Michel Foucault’s work on the nineteenth-century “invention” of homosexuality. Yet, as White notes, whatever he was in life, Antinous has certainly been *received* as gay.

In “Reading History with the Essenes of Elmira” (149–74), Anne Kreps examines the Essene Church of Christ, one of many modern movements which claim the mantle of the ancient Jewish group. As Kreps points out, all of

these modern groups are, paradoxically, Christian, due to the Essene's modern scholarly reception as the forerunners of Jesus, a more spiritual alternative to Pharisaic Judaism. Kreps notes that this Church, though eclectic, claims a more explicitly, though largely superficial, Jewish identity than most of its competitors, a result of the influence of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls as filtered through the media.

Olav Hammer's "The Jungian Gnosticism of the Ecclesia Gnostica" (175-98) marks the shift in focus in the last third of the book to modern receptions of Gnosticism, focusing in particular on the Ecclesiastica Gnostica and its Los Angeles-based bishop, Stephen Hoeller. As Hammer notes, any reconstruction of Gnosticism faces considerable hurdles – the recent scholarly deconstruction of the term, the lack of evidence for it as a lived religion, and the strangeness of many of its key myths to modern readers. Hoeller's response is to use Carl Jung as an authoritative rediscoverer of ancient gnostic wisdom. Yet if Hoeller is dismissive of scholars who "quibble . . . over Coptic words" (192), Matthew J. Dillon demonstrates examples of much deeper engagement with scholarship in "The Impact of Scholarship on Contemporary 'Gnosticism(s)': A Case Study on the Apostolic Johannite Church and Jeremy Puma" (199-223). In the mid-2000s, a graduate student named Jesse Folks raised the problem of deconstructionist work on Gnosticism in the online message board for the Apostolic Johannite Church, beginning a debate in which both sides – one essentialist, one deconstructionist – deployed opposing scholarly perspectives in strikingly sophisticated and in-depth ways. A third, reformist, approach is demonstrated by the author Jeremy Puma, who instead seeks to reconstruct a more modest model of Sethian Gnosticism, using the work of scholars such as David Brakke alongside readings of the Nag Hammadi texts to (re)create rituals. While the Nag Hammadi codices are "celebrities" among the relics of ancient Gnosticism, Franz Winter reminds us that the first "Gnostic" text rediscovered by modern scholars was the *Pistis Sophia* of the Askew Codex, purchased by

the British Museum in 1785. In “Studying the ‘Gnostic Bible’: Samael Aun Weor and the Pistis Sophia” (224–53), Winter follows the story of its peculiar reception by the Colombian-born religious leader Samael Aun Weor (1917–1977), who understood the text in heavily psychologising terms; the discussion has a particular focus on the sexual practices advocated by Weor.

Jay Johnston’s “Binding Images: The Contemporary Use and Efficacy of Late Antique Ritual Sigils, Spirit-Beings, and Design Elements” (254–74) leaves Gnosticism largely – though not entirely – to the side to discuss the reception of the ancient world by three modern magical practitioners: Stephen Edred Flowers, who draws on the corpus of Greek Magical Papyri; Michael Ceccetelli, who uses Coptic sources including the “Gnostic” Books of Jeu; and Devo, whose Kemetic practice draws broadly on the symbolism of Pharaonic Egypt. Johnston’s work focuses on the intersection of sensory – and particularly visual – experience and the materiality of magical practice, as these authors interpret and recreate ancient images.

In the final chapter, “(Neo-)Bogomil Legends: The Gnosticizing Bogomils of the Twentieth-Century Balkans” (275–303), Dylan M. Burns and Nemanja Radulović discuss two Eastern European groups who locate themselves in the tradition of the medieval Bogomils, the nineteenth-century Bulgarian Universal White Brotherhood and the more recent Balkan Bogomil Council, which came to Croatia in 2009 after being founded in Russia in the 1980s. Assimilated to Gnosticism in perennialist models and their popular reflexes, the idea of the Bogomils takes on a particular Ethno-Nationalist inflection in the Balkans, allowing modern Eastern Europeans both to situate their mysterious predecessors within a long mystical tradition, and cast them as forerunners of phenomena as diverse as Marxism and Theosophy.

Many readers will have heard of some of the movements discussed in this rich work, but few will have heard of all of them, and they serve as excellent introductions to both modern and ancient historical questions. Yet despite their diversity, the chapters display recurrent concerns in the reception of ancient

phenomena: post-Christian responses to Christianity, gender relations and sexuality, psychologising approaches to religion, and the influence of modern esoteric writers (notably Helena Blavatsky and Carl Jung) – reminding us that religion is always a product of and response to its time and place. Similarly recurrent is the interaction between the religious groups and the academics with whom they share a claim to the past; the lack of a continuous tradition of interpretation connecting past and present means that scholars are often accorded authority in assigning meaning to archaeological remains (in the case of the Goddess groups) and texts (in the case of Gnosticism) (cf. Dillon p. 209), a fact which enables religious groups to draw upon academic reconstructions and authority, but which often leads to conflict as paradigms shift or religious groups try to assert their own legitimacy in a space demarcated by scholars. We also see that the passage between academic and religious spheres is not restricted to texts and theories, but also involves individuals, such as Carol P. Christ and Jesse Folks, who move between worship and academic study as their priorities change. For many people, including scholars, esoteric (or at least highly charged popular) interpretations of the past often serve as the initial spark which leads to an interest in history, and if the religious reception of the past is heavily conditioned by the scholarly works available to would-be founders (in their time, in their language), influence often flows in the other direction too, as the basic assumptions and research programmes of scholars are influenced by their pre-academic introductions to their fields of study. As an examination of this process, *New Antiquities* is an exemplary work, and it is to be hoped that future studies will apply its approach to an even broader range of ancient and modern phenomena.

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Francisco Rodríguez Cascante and Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, eds. *Subjetividades esotéricas: Estudios sobre masonería, espiritismo y teosofía en Costa Rica*. Puntarenas: Editorial de la Sede del Pacífico, Universidad de Costa Rica, 2019. xxiii + 397 pp. ISBN: 9789930968536.

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, an effort has been made in Latin America to provide a space for the study of esotericism. This endeavour has focused primarily on demonstrating the way in which various movements that are studied under the category of esotericism are in fact fundamental parts of the historical, social and cultural constitution of Latin American countries. For scholars it is fundamental, through the studies on esotericism, to contribute to a wider understanding of identity configurations and cultural productions of the region, and the existing multilateral and entangled dialogues and connections of these identities and products with the rest of the world. This is where *Subjetividades esotéricas: Estudios sobre masonería, espiritismo y teosofía en Costa Rica* (“Esoteric Subjectivities: Studies on Freemasonry, Spiritism and Theosophy in Costa Rica”) comes into play.

The book is a compilation edited by Francisco Rodríguez and Ricardo Martínez. It unites publications from prominent scholars on the subjects of Freemasonry, Spiritism, and Theosophy, and in particular their role in the history of Costa Rica, although it also touches a little upon other Central American countries, as well as Colombia. Composed of seventeen chapters, the book has eleven contributors, most of them from Costa Rica, with the exception of Otto German Mejía (El Salvador) and Massimo Introvigne (Italy). The reason why the book focuses on these three subjects is mainly historical; the three movements were, from the nineteenth to the first decades of the twentieth centuries, some of the most influential alternative configurations spiritually, socially, politically, and ideologically speaking to the prevailing dominance of the Catholic Church in particular, and of Christianity in general, in Costa Rica.

The book is a mixture of old, revised and new articles; six of the seventeen texts were written exclusively for the volume, six more are revised, edited or corrected texts, and five consist of old, unaltered articles. The rationale behind this composition stems from the fact that the development of studies on esotericism in the region, and in Costa Rica in particular, are still at an early stage. As the editors succinctly put it, the topics surrounding esotericism and its relationship with Costa Rican history have long been marginalized and kept outside the interests of academia. This is why the book is presented as a collective endeavour to shed light on the complex network of manifestations and movements connected to the field of esotericism with different social, cultural and historical realities.

The objectives of the book are not developed without problems. One particular issue underlines the whole volume: the lack of clarity on the involved scholars' position concerning the conceptual debates existing within studies on esotericism. For example, from the very beginning of the book there are at least two conflicting perspectives. In the Foreword, the Argentinian scholar Juan Pablo Bubello makes certain distinctions which, for their part, the editors of the book avoid. Bubello distinguishes the study of Freemasonry from the study of Western esotericism, and establishes close links between the two without putting them in the same category. Furthermore, Bubello discusses esotericism in terms of "Western" esotericism, following a tradition stemming in particular from Antoine Faivre's propositions. This is one of the concepts that has generated many heated debates in recent years (including in this journal).¹ For their part, the editors, without going into the subject in depth,

1. On this debate see Egil Asprem and Julian Strube, eds., *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Liana Saif, "What is Islamic Esotericism?" *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1-59; Egil Asprem, "Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism," *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 3-33; Michael Bergunder, "What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 9-36; Kennet Granholm, "Locating the West: Problematizing the Western in Western Esotericism and Occultism," in Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic, eds., *Occultism in Global Perspectives* (London: Acumen Publishing, 2013), 17-36.

abstain from using the word “Western” when mentioning esotericism, and they mainly utilize “esotericism” as an umbrella term to deal with the movements and societies comprising the contents of the book. They do not dedicate any paragraph into defining esotericism, but take it for granted that the studies in the compilation are within the study of it. In contrast to Bubello, then, who gives to Freemasonry a space different to that of Western esotericism, the editors use the word esotericism freely as the term containing the topics of the book, including Freemasonry. Unfortunately, both the editors and Bubello do not discuss or define their concepts or positions on the study of esotericism, creating a difference in the use of terms within the book with no rationale behind it. It would have been useful to have a bit more of debate on these distinctions, instead of having a foreword and an introduction with different but non-critical perspectives. Unfortunately, the contributors of the volume refrain as well from engaging in this conceptual debate.

The chapters comprising *Subjetividades* come to repeat some of the topics and information amongst themselves, most probably due to the selection of old, revised and new texts. As the space of this review does not allow me to engage all of the chapters, I will focus my review on a select view. I want to firstly mention three articles that give a clear state of the art of studies on esotericism in the country. Secondly, I want to focus on two articles that offer initial steps for new research.

The first text is Ricardo Martínez’s contribution to establishing clear definitions for Freemasonry, the Theosophical Society and Spiritism. Martínez gives a nuanced balance between the way these movements have been conceptualized in international scholarship and how, in the context of their conception and development in Costa Rica, they ended up being something slightly different, conditioned to the country’s history, economy and society. The author also explores what connects as well as distances these movements from each other in Costa Rica. An example he gives is the *Virya* lodge, the first Theosophical organization in the country and in Central America, which was configured in 1904

under the leadership of the Andalusian immigrant and artist Tomás Povedano de Arcos, who at the same time was Grand Master at the Great Lodge of Costa Rica.

Chester Urbina's chapter on the events surrounding the Colegio Superior de Señoritas, which, founded in 1888, was the first educational institution dedicated exclusively to the education of women in Costa Rica, is crucial in understanding the constant struggle between Freemasonry, the Theosophical Society and Spiritism on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other hand, in the country. With an impressive amount of detail and primary sources, Urbina outlines how the religious and ideological controversy involved even educational institutions, with the church trying to remove Esther de Mezerville, the director of the *Colegio*, from her position by accusing her of supporting the inclusion of theosophical ideas in the teachings the students were receiving. De Mezerville defended herself in the newspapers, denying these accusations. Fascinating to consider, perhaps, is the fact that she was not just part of the Theosophical Society but also a freemason.

Furthermore, some chapters discuss how the three movements became integral components in the country's history, and involved some famous historical figures. José Ricardo Chaves, for example, explains how the Theosophical Society had no strict political allegiance. This came to light during the dictatorship of Federico and José Joaquín Tinoco (1917–1919). Both Federico and his wife María Fernández Le Capellain (de Tinoco) were connected to the Theosophical Society, yet the opposition to Tinoco's regime was formed, in part, by theosophists.

Finally, I would like to highlight two contributions that greatly instigate the initial steps for novel research. These are Jacqueline Murillo's work on the presence of women in the history of Costa Rican Freemasonry, and Fernanda Gutiérrez's article on race, sociability, and esoteric movements in Costa Rica at the beginning of the twentieth century. Murillo problematizes the lack of discussion and research on women and esotericism in the country, like female figures such as the aforementioned Esther de Mezerville and María Fernández

Le Capellain,² who are important characters in the history of the esoteric movements, as well as for the development of ideas and events in the fields of society, education, politics and literature. Gutiérrez, in turn, emphasizes the importance of discussing the configuration of esoteric societies, such as the Theosophical Society in the Caribbean, in the context of the projects of “whitening” (scientific racism, social Darwinism, etc.) advanced in Latin America between 1830 and 1930. Through the analysis of the Costa Rican nation’s development and its objectives of moulding a white “racial homogeneity,” and the creation of esoteric societies happening at the same time, Gutiérrez points out how the national processes of progress and unity omitted, in many cases, both the indigenous and afro-descendant populations and their contributions in the configuration of Latin American culture.

To conclude, *Subjetividades* is an important introduction regarding research on esotericism in Costa Rica, and it will benefit the ongoing development of more academic projects on this topic, not just in the country, but in the Central and Latin American region. The approach to the study of esotericism in Latin America has until now been predominantly through the field of cultural history. The various articles comprised in this book focus mostly on problems of a historical nature. This perspective should be seen not as a limitation, but as an invitation to start working on Latin American esotericism through a more interdisciplinary approach, considering fields such as literary studies, material culture, anthropology, sociology and visual studies. This book then hints at a future where we could start having diverse interdisciplinary configurations, and therefore more research questions related not just to a historical approach. We could start taking into account, for example, gender and critical race studies, as Gutierrez initiates, or the material culture of Freemasonry, Spiritism, and

2. Capellain wrote the novel *Zulai* (1909) and *Yontá* (1909) under the pseudonym Apaikán. These are the books that deal metaphorically with the history of America and Costa Rica, the relationships with other cultures and nations, such as India and Egypt, and how these links can be found in the history of indigenous pre-Columbian people in the country.

Theosophy in current times. The three movements are constituent parts of the social dynamics of power occurring even today. The studies on esotericism can help in the acknowledgment of the religious, esoteric and ideological diversity that constitutes not just Costa Rica, but Latin America more generally. Within the context of hegemonic systems, discourses of belief and national identity, this is a region in which Christian religious institutions such as Catholicism and Evangelicalism have tried, among other actors, to avoid or suppress the mere idea that such diversity exists.

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