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### Spectres of Art

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## SPECTRES OF ART

LARS BANG LARSEN AND MARCO PASI

Before we discuss the way in which spiritualism has been appreciated in modern and contemporary art, it is important to reflect on the broader cultural context in which it has been perceived.

It is easy to consider the views of spiritualism as an affront to rational thought: spiritualists are seen to refuse the modern order of things because they believe in the lively activities of the non-human, and are concerned with ghosts and entities that lack body and substance.

The fact that spiritualist art, on the other hand, has often been met with resistance is less obvious and more counterintuitive. Western culture is hardly prone to understand creativity as a rational activity. Conventionally, the artistic subject – emotionally or perhaps erotically charged – lies outside the social norm, and cliché has it that the artist cannot afford too much self-control unless vital flows of intuition and inspiration be limited. We readily accept that common sense has little to do with art making.

So why is it that spiritualist art has been belatedly acknowledged by the art institution?

Following World War II, the occult was for decades tainted by its appropriation by fascism. Nazism's myths of Aryan supermen included occult lore of superior mutant races, millennial kingdoms and privileged secret knowledge. It is also in the post-war era, however, that the occult surfaces as a phenomenon in the media mainstream – a bankable role for the occult that we recognise today from numerous media of popular culture, including TV series such as *The Returned*, and (pseudo-)documentaries featuring mediums and haunted places.

In essays from the 1950s, Theodor Adorno addresses both issues. First of all, he responded to the fascist takeover of the occult. He pursued the thesis that modern

society is not so enlightened as it would like to think, but fundamentally split between forces that work for the betterment of society and forces that are barbarian and dehumanising. To Adorno, twentieth-century totalitarian regimes were outcomes of such ambiguous processes of modernisation; hence there was not necessarily a contradiction between Nazism's cult of death and its techno-industrial vision for society. Adorno also sees modernity's authoritarian and irrational impulse as a feature of the capitalist world's culture industry. By churning out standardised, repetitive consumables and pandering to infantile needs of consumers, the culture industry issues a veiled call for the consumer to fall in line and adjust to authority. The presence of the occult in mainstream media – Adorno's example is the astrology column in the respectable *Los Angeles Times* – represents to him a cowering and disorienting of people, who in an alienating world look for compensation for individual weakness; in this case the compensation is not the fascist Big Brother, but occult higher powers that similarly lead the way at the cost of “the neglect of interpretative thinking.”<sup>1</sup>

However acute Adorno's critique of the occult may be historically, and for the political reality of today, he does not take the *antiauthoritarian* history of spiritualism into account. This is a history that has only been recovered by historians towards the end of the twentieth century. It is now a historically well-established fact that since the nineteenth century certain spiritualist groups confronted religious authorities, and demanded freedom from dogmatism and ecclesiastical monopoly on spirituality. Spiritualist meetings were often platforms where political radicals such as suffragettes and abolitionists could speak their mind. More than just parlour games in darkened

rooms, spiritualism articulated an active resistance against social institutions – something that no doubt did not help its cultural standing.

In the 1960s, the counterculture’s appetite for everything otherworldly and subversive made it adopt the occult. Whatever anti-authoritarian power the occult may have had, it did little to restore respectability for the spiritualist movement – exactly because the countercultural update of the occult was intended to be dissonant to a Western, bourgeois concept of culture.

If we now change our perspective and look at the present cultural status of figures of the ghost and the spectral, the picture is a different one. Something has changed. Seen against the backdrop of a historical denigration of spiritualism, the contemporary need to make ghosts and the spectral legible is striking. This is not only the concern of many contemporary visual artists, who in the last decade have begun to engage with spiritualist methods or cultural histories, and thereby reach out to an artistic underdog of Western art and thinking. Significantly, ghosts and the spectral are also abundantly present in the writing of many prominent theorists who – so to speak – ought to know better.

For instance, in one of his last books, *Specters of Marx*, the philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote of the globalised world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union as being haunted by an unredeemed Marxist critique of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Another philosopher, Joseph Vogl, has developed a critique of finance capital in the guise of a *Specter of Capital*, which “appears as a cipher for those powers from which our present takes its laws”.<sup>3</sup> In her *Ghostly Matters* (2008) Avery Gordon describes haunting as a sociological method that connects fact and fiction to evoke those subjects and voices which have disappeared from history.<sup>4</sup>

Such academic discourses point to a renewed sensibility towards the imaginary of which spiritualism is part. There is a cultural, even existential need for the repressed figures of the ghost and the spectral. They are no longer simply seen as insubstantial and inauthentic. Something about our current

condition cannot be expressed without them. A spiritualist imaginary may be called upon for a dramatization of contemporary capital’s so-called immaterial relations of production. The manifestation of a ghost through a physical body is called a materialisation by spiritualists. Today it is the sublime connectivity and intangible transmission of digital technologies – out of reach of human perception and of the old symbolic orders – that are determining our lives more than ever. In general, the occult tests the limits of the visible. One can call the culture of the occult a non-visual culture: it describes a withdrawal from the regime of visual identification, and, from a contemporary point of view, defies the easy exchange of images in our world of proliferating screens. Spiritualistic phantasmagoria may be used to inquire into the fleeting materiality of things and objects, because it offers a vocabulary and a dramaturgy for the imperceptible. It is concerned with strange, affective appearances, and detects relations between bodies where there does not seem to be any: every turn of the table during the séance becomes a signifying micro-drama; every shudder of the medium becomes an intelligible gesture. Hereby we can forge connections to non-human realms and, ultimately, to the fact of death. Maybe we need spiritualism’s untimely, hybrid, out-of-place, sensuous imagination to connect us with the many radical ambiguities of contemporary life, or, to use Derrida’s pun, the ‘hauntology’ that we live.

This discussion of the cultural evaluations of spiritualism may seem like a sweeping approach to take for a contextualization of Houghton’s work. However, some of the answers to the questions above lie in the way in which spirit art overreaches a conventional art concept by violating the autonomy and the categorical hygiene we use in order to separate religion from science, art from society, ritual from method, artistic genius from an ordinary individual. The problem with spirit art is that it has never respected the limits of art history or aesthetic philosophy, but has broader, socio-cultural underpinnings. Today we are probably more ready to accept the distributed mode of Houghton’s authorship in terms of her being part of a

collective, made evident by the fact that somebody else was always there with her, whether it was the ‘spirit guides’ with which she communicated or her fellow explorers of the other world, such as Mrs Guppy, Mrs Honeywood and the others she mentions in her writings.<sup>5</sup> This is all a far cry from the self-relying author. Instead, spirit art was often a group affair, and came out of the togetherness of the spiritualist scene.

This brings us to the question of how we should understand Georgiana Houghton’s art today. For contemporary spiritualists – whose role in the preservation of her works has to be gratefully acknowledged – her drawings still have the same spiritual message and power she saw in them when they were produced. This is more than understandable. But what about the artistic and cultural value of these works? What kind of language do they speak to us, especially if we do not share the religious and metaphysical assumptions that were so important to the person who materially created them?

It is certainly incorrect to assume that the cultural establishment never paid any attention to spiritualist art. There were several attempts at making sense of it, as well as of other forms of creativity that flourished within spiritualism from its very beginnings. And yet, in spite of this persistent, if intermittent, interest, the world of nineteenth-century spirit art still remains largely an unexplored continent. The only large collections that include this kind of art are those specializing in ‘art brut’, or ‘outsider art’. The rest can be found in the archives of dedicated organisations, such as the College of Psychic Studies in London and the Victorian Spiritualists’ Union, both of which are lenders to the present exhibition. But this is surely just the tip of the iceberg. Judging from the number of spirit artists we see mentioned in the spiritualist press of the time, we can easily conclude that much has been lost, destroyed, or lies at best in some yet unexplored archives. It is therefore already a small miracle that significant spiritualist works from Houghton’s time have reached us at all.

There are different moments in the history of the appreciation of spiritualist art, and it may be useful to mention them here.<sup>6</sup> If there is a common thread that connects most of them, it is probably the idea that creativity does not depend on rational processes, but is rather related to particular psychological conditions that seem to challenge the integrity of the self, such as frenzy, enthusiasm, exceptional forms of inspiration, or even madness. This is, after all, a ‘romantic paradigm’ that had a long-lasting influence on the conceptualisation of art throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. After the popular success of spiritualism in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was in the context of psychology that these specific forms of artistic creativity could first be appreciated. This is the period in which dynamic psychiatry emerged, with the elaboration of various theories of the unconscious that would eventually lead to the establishment of psychoanalysis. As has been pointed out by several scholars, these new developments had their roots in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of animal magnetism, and were therefore also related, either directly or indirectly, to spiritualism itself.<sup>7</sup> Psychoanalysis was the most successful of these new psychological theories, but it was certainly not the only one. Other approaches emerged in the context of psychical research, and more particularly in the writings of one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, the Cambridge scholar Frederic W.H. Myers (1843–1901). In his book *Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death*, which was published posthumously in 1903, Myers discussed the problem of artistic genius, and referred specifically to automatic drawing as a particular case of what he called the “subliminal uprush”.<sup>8</sup> For Myers, a whole dimension of the human mind lies beyond the threshold of consciousness. He called it the “subliminal”, as opposed to the “supraliminal” of normal consciousness. But, unlike Freud’s theory of the unconscious, his supposition was that the dimension of the subliminal was superior to that of normal consciousness, because it gave access to

extraordinary forms of knowledge. Spiritualist mediums, with their practice of automatism and trance, had found a way to tap into this collective psychic reservoir. For Myers artistic genius manifested itself when an artist was able to combine the inspiration coming from the “subliminal uprush” with his “supraliminal stream of thought”, that is, his conscious mental processes.<sup>9</sup> Myers’s approach was similar to that of the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920), who around the same time published his famous study of the medium Hélène Smith (pseudonym of Catherine-Elise Müller, 1861–1929).<sup>10</sup> Myers was much more open than Flournoy to the existence of discarnate spirits and their communication with our world, even if he considered it more as a scientific hypothesis than as a matter for belief. Whatever the differences between Myers and Flournoy, the point is that both formulated psychological theories through which it was possible to attach a positive value to spiritualist experiences, particularly in relation to artistic creativity. It was a significant change from earlier psychiatric interpretations of spiritualism, which tended to see it mainly as a manifestation of insanity and abnormal behaviour. This new appreciation influenced the work of psychiatrists such as Hans Prinzhorn (1886–1933), who theorised the potential therapeutic effects of the practice of art for the mentally ill, and who in 1919 began to collect their artworks at the psychiatric hospital of Heidelberg in which he was working.<sup>11</sup>

The door was now open for further appreciations of spiritualist art, which would finally move out of a strict psychological framework and enter an artistic one. After the rise of the avant-gardes in the early twentieth century, with their exploration of alternative forms of perception of reality and of the self, it was only a matter of time before a new curiosity for spiritualist art would emerge. This happened with Surrealism, which on the one hand was interested in the historical records of spiritualist art practices and on the other tried to experiment with the same practices and adapt them within its own



8. André Masson  
Automatic drawing, 1925–26  
Indian ink on paper, 315 x 245 mm  
Musée National d'Art Moderne  
– Centre Pompidou, Paris

artistic discourse. André Breton (1896–1966) presented automatism as one of the main components of Surrealist art, and the unconscious as the protagonist of valid artistic creation. Quite a few Surrealist artists, such as André Masson (1896–1987) and Yves Tanguy (1900–1955), experimented directly with the technique of automatism (fig. 8). However, Breton explicitly rejected spiritualist interpretations and saw automatic processes from a purely psychological and materialist perspective. Surrealist publications, such as the journal *Minotaure* (fig. 9), were filled with images of artworks by unknown medium artists,

who found themselves put for the first time side by side with established, highbrow artists. It was certainly progress in the acceptance and recognition of these alternative forms of artistic production, but it is hard not to see an aspect of appropriation there. Medium art was being admired by the Surrealists, but not really being given a voice. It was presented as a valid source for inspiration and experimentation, but there was no real dialogue with medium artists themselves, and their spiritualist worldviews were being rejected as illusionary or childish.

Prinzhorn’s collection and the new appreciation of medium art by the Surrealists were crucial steps towards the conceptualisation of ‘art brut’ by Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) after World War II.<sup>12</sup> Dubuffet was interested in an art that is not contaminated by culture and intellectualism, but rather manifests itself in its purest, rawest form. It is the art of persons who were never exposed to artistic training, such as social dropouts, people with mental disorders and mediums. The concept of art brut, or ‘outsider art’ (to use its most common English equivalent), obviously implied a social and cultural critique of the artistic establishment as it existed at the time, and tried to explode the traditional, formal confines of art. When it comes to our understanding of spiritualist art today, and more particularly of Houghton’s drawings, the concept of art brut is still most relevant.<sup>13</sup> In fact, whereas Surrealism was an artistic current, with its own historical trajectory and decline, art brut has now developed into an established conceptual framework for understanding certain art forms, a framework that is culturally, socially and materially supported by the existence of dedicated museums, galleries, and publications. It is, therefore, significant that, on the few occasions on which Houghton’s art was exhibited in recent years, it was done consistently within an art brut context.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of art brut has been tremendously important in giving visibility and cultural legitimacy to a whole dimension of human creativity that traditionally had been neglected by critics and historians because it did not conform to the canons of ‘higher’ forms of art. It has,



9. Cover by André Derain of *Minotaure*, vols. 3–4 (1933)

however, its own limits and ambiguities, as Houghton’s case shows. Including Houghton’s drawings within the category of art brut poses, in fact, a number of problems. On the one hand she does not seem to correspond to Dubuffet’s strict definition of art brut, because she did receive some form of artistic training before she became involved with spiritualism. She was therefore aware of artistic trends and developments in her own time and was directly or indirectly conversing with them while producing her own art. Furthermore, as the episode of her 1871 exhibition shows,<sup>15</sup> Houghton also saw herself as an artist who could and should be noticed, if not even adopted, by the artistic establishment. On the other hand, the problem with an art brut classification is that it does not leave room for differentiation based on artistic quality. Houghton’s



10. Hilma af Klint (1862–1944)  
*The Ten Largest (De tio största)*, no. 3,  
 Youth, Group IV, 1907  
 Oil and tempera on paper, 328 x 240 cm  
 Collection of Hilma af Klint Foundation, Järna, Sweden

inclusion in the category depends on the fact that she produced her art as a practising medium, but this seems to make her works indistinguishable from those of all other medium artists who are also entitled to be included in the same category without further qualification. When we look at Houghton's works today it is difficult not to see in them the seeds of an artistic modernity that had not yet taken shape at the time, but to which Houghton had found a way to have anticipated access. It is a modernity, and a power of

visual expression, that we find lacking in other spiritualist or automatic works that have reached us. The concept of art brut can hardly help us to make sense of the striking difference that clearly exists between Houghton's drawings and the typical spirit art produced by other medium artists in the same period, at least until the irruption of the artistic avant-gardes in the early twentieth century.

Perhaps the most logical term of comparison for Houghton's art is the equally extraordinary case of the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint (1862–1944; fig. 10). The two women were both celibate their whole lives, both trained in art before being involved in occult practices, both convinced of being the channels of important spiritual messages by means of their art, both rejecting direct authorship of their artworks, which they attributed to spiritual entities, and both forgotten or ignored during their lives – and for a long time after their respective deaths – by the artistic establishment. Af Klint's art was first presented to the world in the famous 1986 exhibition, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*.<sup>16</sup> The spiritualist, occultist and theosophical inspirations of high modernist abstract painters – among them Mondrian, Kupka, Kandinsky and Malevich – were here for the first time systematically acknowledged and contextualised in a major exhibition. The fact that af Klint had begun to paint in a non-figurative style a few years before all other protagonists of early abstraction, even if in the special context of her spiritual practices, was certainly one of the startling revelations of this exhibition. Since her first appearance in 1986 af Klint has come to be perceived as an extraordinary 'pioneer' of early twentieth-century abstraction, and she has in fact been presented explicitly as such in the latest major retrospective exhibition, which has toured in several European museums between 2013 and 2015.<sup>17</sup>

It would be tempting to present Houghton in the same way and to bank on the allure of her being yet another heretofore neglected precursor of abstraction.<sup>18</sup> Houghton's artistic corpus is, from a purely quantitative point of view, less impressive than af Klint's: we have today around 3,000

paintings by af Klint (basically all that she produced during her life), many of which are in very large format. We have on the other hand, pending further discoveries, no more than 46 drawings by Houghton, and all of medium or small format. But other aspects may be more interesting than quantity or size, such as the fact that Houghton, unlike af Klint, wanted to present her spirit drawings in an institutional artistic context and actively worked to make this happen. And it is, of course, not irrelevant that Houghton began to produce her 'abstract' drawings at least forty years before af Klint began to produce hers. But, apart from these comparative exercises, which could easily end up being idle speculations, it is the very idea of 'anticipation of abstraction' that needs to be problematised. On the one hand, this idea is based on a paradigm of linear development, which sees every moment in the history of art as a necessary step forward after the previous one has been exhausted and superseded. We can wonder whether this paradigm is still tenable today.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, in spite of the stylistic affinities, it is important to keep in mind that there remains a crucial difference between medium artists such as Houghton and af Klint and the main actors of early abstraction, such as Kandinsky. This lies in the fact that Kandinsky did not only paint abstraction, he also theorised and to that extent 'invented' it. The new style was associated with a theoretical discourse that implied a self-conscious positioning in relation to more traditional and established artistic styles. This artistic self-consciousness is certainly much less evident in the case of Houghton and af Klint, who in the end always attributed whatever originality their works had to the agency of spirits and not to their own theoretical thinking.

What is perhaps more significant than assessing who 'won the race' to abstraction is engaging with a different set of questions, which concern the specific relevance of spiritualist and other esoteric practices for the creation of particular art forms that challenge existing canons and norms of expression.<sup>20</sup> Houghton's drawings surely make special sense to us today because we know what happened



11. Lea Porsager  
 'Coiled Adolescent Fern' from *Soil Solarization*  
 (a.k.a. the Sønderholm Experiment), 2014,  
 Styrofoam, 79 x 21 cm  
 Installation view from the exhibition *Believe not  
 Every Spirit, but Try the Spirits*, Monash University  
 Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2015

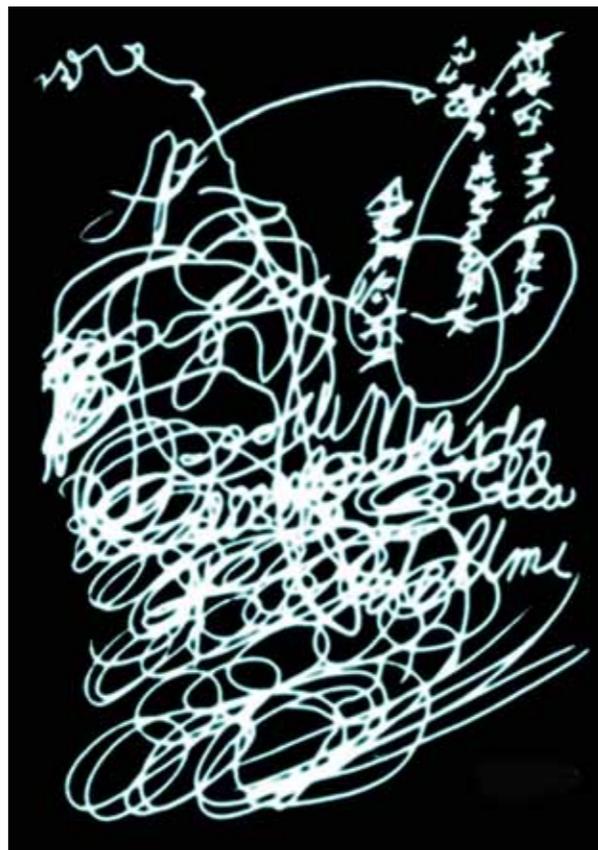
afterwards, namely that abstraction would emerge and turn out to be one of the most successful artistic innovations of the twentieth century. But if we try – so to speak – to abstract from abstraction, we realise that what is really astonishing in Houghton's art is the fact that her spiritualistic experiments empowered her to develop a radically different, innovative style and to be so confident in its qualities as to try to 'sell' it not just to the spiritualist community to which she belonged but also to the artistic establishment of her time.

That these practices continue to be perceived by some artists as inspiring and empowering is shown by the fact that, in spite of the stigmatisation and cultural marginalisation we alluded to at the beginning of this essay, they continue to have a presence up to our day in contemporary art. More than that, the number of recent art exhibitions and publications in which reference is made to the occult and related phenomena shows that this theme has become relatively fashionable in the last ten years.<sup>21</sup> To name but a few examples, artists such as Olivia Plender, Georgina Starr and Joachim Koester are interested



12. Film still from Joachim Koester's *Of Spirits and Empty Spaces*, 2012

in the historical record of spiritualism and occultism, to the extent of recreating atmospheres and situations, even if they do not experiment with them personally. In other cases, such as Lea Porsager (see fig. 11) or Chiara Fumai, practical, performative experimentation with occult techniques becomes crucial. But on a closer look, these distinctions may appear superficial. What is significant is the desire of some contemporary artists consciously to place themselves in an ideal continuity with earlier explorers of the self, being aware of the potential that this explorative work may have for artistic expression. It is telling for instance, that one of Koester's works focuses on John Murray Spear (1804–1887), a famous American spiritualist who was a close friend of Houghton and conspicuously influenced her work (see fig. 12).<sup>22</sup> This shows how spiritualism and other occult-related themes are part of a story that remains to this day largely unexplored. At the same time, artists today use them to irritate and displace dominant reality principles. The artist Susan Hiller, who has worked with these topics since the early 1970s (see fig. 13), puts it in this way: "I'm interested in the legacy of spiritualism and the occult in terms of the future rather than the past; in other words, I think our world view is very limited and needs a paradigm shift if we are to



13. Susan Hiller  
*From India to the Planet Mars*, 1997–2004  
Photographic negative in wall-mounted light box

survive. I'm not a believer. I always like to quote Freud's remark that an uncritical belief in psychic powers ... is an attempt at compensation for what he poignantly called 'the lost appeal of life on this Earth'.<sup>23</sup> Instead of setting out to establish new truths, Hiller points to the undeniable problems in our current definitions of reality – an approach to the occult that she shares with other contemporary artists. The aesthetic, experiential and political ambiguities of the occult makes it an apt vocabulary for questioning the categories through which we see the world.

The reflections presented in this essay are intended to offer some degree of historical and cultural contextualisation for those – and they are the vast majority – who come to discover Houghton's art now for the first time. But in the end, we also invite the visitors of this exhibition and the readers of this catalogue to try and appreciate her work by itself, letting themselves simply be touched by the pure energy of its colours and shapes.

#### NOTES

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- Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York and Abingdon, Routledge, 1994.
- Josef Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- See the previous essay in the present catalogue for more details about Houghton's acquaintances in the spiritualist community of her time.
- See Peter Gorsen, 'The Entrance of Mediumism into the History of Art. Inexplicability – The Surrealist Key', in *The Message. Kunst und Okkultismus. Art and Occultism*, exh. cat., Bochum and Cologne, Kunstmuseum Bochum, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008, pp. 169–82.
- See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, New York, Basic Books, 1970; and Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993.
- Frederic W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols., London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1903. Spirit drawings are discussed in vol. 1, pp. 100–01; and vol. 2, pp. 94–95 and 400–01.
- Myers, *Human Personality*, vol. 1, p. 71.
- Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars: Étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie*, Paris and Geneva, F. Alcan – Ch. Eggimann, 1900; English transl.: *From India to the Planet Mars. A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015.
- See Giorgio Bedoni, "'L'arte dei folli". Omaggio a Hans Prinzhorn', in *Arte, Genio, Follia. Il giorno e la notte dell'artista*, exh. cat., n.p., Mazzotta, 2009, pp. 201–15.
- See Lucienne Peiry, *Art Brut. The Origins of Outsider Art*, Paris: Flammarion, 2001. More particularly on the relationship between art brut and mediumship, see Michel Thévoz, *Art brut, psychose et médiumnité*, Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1999.
- See also the important discussion in Rachel Oberter, 'Spiritualism and the Visual Imagination in Victorian Britain', PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2007, pp. 27–28.
- The two most significant examples are the exhibitions 'The Message. Das Medium als Künstler. The Medium as Artist' at the Kunstmuseum Bochum, 2008; and 'Entrée des médiums: Spiritisme et Art de Hugo à Breton', at the Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris, 2012–13.
- See the previous essay in the present catalogue.
- The exhibition was held between 1986 and 1987 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. See the catalogue: *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*, New York, London and Paris, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1986.
- See Iris Müller-Westermann and Jo Widoff (eds.), *Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction*, exh. cat., Stockholm and Ostfildern, Moderna Museet, Hatje Cantz, 2013.
- Houghton was presented within this interpretive framework in the seminal article by Tom Gibbons, 'British Abstract Painting of the 1860s: The Spirit Drawings of Georgiana Houghton', *Modern Painters*, 1 (Summer 1988), pp. 33–37. The article was published not long after the 1986 Los Angeles exhibition on the spiritual origins of abstract painting, and explicitly takes its cue from it for a presentation of Houghton's work. As far as we know, Gibbons's was the first scholarly essay to focus on Houghton's drawings since she died in 1884. For another important discussion of Houghton as precursor of abstraction, see David Phillips, 'Abstraction and Truth in Nineteenth-Century Imagery', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 78 (Spring 1996), pp. 123–42.
- An important critique of this linear narrative can be found in Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History. A Study in Twentieth-Century Art and Ideas*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998. Smith's book is particularly relevant here because he is aware of both Houghton's and af Klint's cases, which he discusses in the broader context of his argument (see *ibid.*, pp. 70–71).
- On this point see Marco Pasi, 'Hilma af Klint, Western Esotericism and the Problem of Modern Artistic Creativity', in Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage (eds.), *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, Stockholm, Axel and Margaret Axson Johnson Foundation, 2015, pp. 101–16.
- See Marco Pasi, 'Coming Forth by Night', in Alexis Vaillant (ed.), *Options with Nostrils*, Rotterdam, Sternberg Press – Piet Zwart Institute, 2010, pp. 103–11; and Lars Bang Larsen, 'The Other Side', *Frieze. Contemporary Art and Culture*, vol. 106 (April 2007), pp. 114–19.
- On Spear and his relationship with Houghton see also the previous essay in the present catalogue.
- E-mail from Susan Hiller to Lars Bang Larsen, 20 April 2016.