

CHAPTER ONE

CHANNELING¹

Joan: I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.

Robert: They come from your imagination.

Joan: Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

G.B. Shaw, *Saint Joan*

CHANNELING: A BRIEF CHARACTERISTIC

The term channeling refers to the conviction of psychic mediums that they are able, under certain circumstances, to act as a channel for information from sources other than their normal selves. Most typically, these sources are identified as discarnate “entities” living on higher levels of being, but the complete range of channeled sources mentioned in the literature contains almost everything to which some kind of intelligence might be attributed². In many cases, a state of trance appears to be required, during which the entity takes possession of the medium’s body to communicate either by the speech organs or (less usual in the New Age context) by automatic writing. The trance in such cases may vary from a state of complete or almost complete dissociation, during which the medium has no conscious knowledge of what happens, to a very light trance in which part of the medium’s consciousness remains able to witness the channeling process as an outside observer. If all channeling phenomena could be associated with trance, we would be permitted to regard channeling as a special case of the well-known—if still insufficiently understood—phenomenon of religious dissociation, which under different and not always compatible labels (such as “ecstasy”, “trance”, “spirit possession”, “mediumship”) has been the object of much research³. However, some of the phe-

¹ Relevant general sources: Klimo, *Channeling*; id., ‘Channeling Research’; Anderson, ‘Channeling’; Babbie, ‘Channels to Elsewhere’; Hughes, ‘Blending’; Riordan, ‘Channeling’; id., ‘Channeling: A New Revelation?’; Hanegraaff, ‘Channeling-literatuur’; Hastings, *Tongues*.

² Not only such entities as ascended masters, spirit guides, angels, extraterrestrials, various historical personalities (Jesus, Paul, etc.), God/the “Ultimate Source”, gods and goddesses of antiquity, and the collective unconscious or Universal Mind, but also “group entities”, incarnate or discarnate animals (dolphins, whales), nature spirits or “devas”, gnomes, fairies, plants, and finally the “higher self” of the channel. One particular channel even claimed to be in contact with “The Committee”: a geometrical consciousness comprised of a line, a spiral and a multidimensional triangle (Ridall, *Channeling*, 9).

³ The terminology is far from fixed. See for different approaches and theories, as well as case studies, Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*; Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*; Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*; id., *Possession*; Crapanzano & Garrison, *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*; Sharma, ‘Ecstasy’; Crapanzano, ‘Spirit Possession’; Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality*.

nomena classed as channeling do not seem to involve trance at all, notably the cases of inner dictation in which the medium hears a voice dictating messages which (s)he writes down in a fully conscious state. If, following the emic view of New Age believers, we accept both these phenomena and trance communications as different aspects of channeling, the only common denominator appears to be the fact that people receive information—messages—which they interpret as coming from a source other than their own normal consciousness. We may slightly specify this by adding that this source is believed to represent a level of wisdom or insight superior to that of most humans (although it is not necessarily or even usually regarded as all-knowing and infallible). Communication with such sources is sought for the purpose of learning and guidance. In contrast, communication with spirits of the recently departed—as in classical spiritualism—is not characteristic of New Age channeling.

CHANNELING AS ARTICULATED REVELATIONS

In the literature about the phenomenon, an effort is usually made to define channeling in abstract terms. According to Jon Klimo,

Channeling is the communication of information to or through a physically embodied human being from a source that is said to exist on some other level or dimension of reality than the physical as we know it, and that is not from the normal mind (or self) of the channel⁴.

Arthur Hastings refers to channeling as

...a process in which a person transmits information or artistic expression that he or she receives mentally or physically and which appears to come from a personality source outside the conscious mind. The message is directed toward an audience and is purposeful⁵.

The differences between these two definitions are not without significance, but the implications do not need to concern us here. Of more immediate interest is the fact that historians of religions, if presented with these definitions, would probably recognize both as attempts to demarcate the general class of “religious revelations” rather than “channeling” specifically. This somewhat sobering realization provides us with a good starting point for evaluating the nature of channeling from the perspective of the study of religions.

Unfortunately, although one might expect the comparative study of religious revelations to be of obvious importance in the systematic study of religions, remarkably little research has in fact been done in this area. We do not yet possess a usable cross-cultural theory or typology of revelations, and this makes

⁴ Klimo, *Channeling*, 2.

⁵ Hastings, *Tongues*, 4.

it difficult to reach an adequate evaluation of channeling. Th.P.van Baaren's 1951 dissertation about *Conceptions of Revelation*, one of the very few studies of the subject, suffers from an excessively inclusive definition of revelation, and from a methodical concentration on the source (or "author") of revelation which betrays a theological background⁶. Given the fact that only the form and content of revelations, as mediated by human beings, is accessible to others (whether believers or researchers), a modern comparative study of revelations might more fruitfully focus on this form and content than on the supposed author. Nothing essential would be lost in such an approach, because all relevant information about the author is necessarily contained in the form and content itself. However, I know of no major attempts in this direction.

Still, one particular terminological distinction can be made which is implicit in the work of Van Baaren. This is the identification of "inspiration" as a special, and prominent, mode of revelation. Van Baaren defines inspiration as '...oral or written communications from a deity to the world, in which the former uses a human being as medium.'⁷ This definition is confirmed by G.Lanczkowski: 'The concept of inspiration ... indicates a form of revelation, which is ultimately based on the conception of a substantial conveyance of the divine spirit As immediate divine action, inspiration results in knowledge and communication of supernatural insights.'⁸ On the basis of such definitions, it is clear that channeling must be regarded as belonging to the general class of religious inspiration⁹. Regarding channeling as "inspiration" has only one disadvantage. The secularization of its original meaning has resulted in a close association of "inspiration" with the realm of artistic and literary creation. The underlying belief that artistic creation is, indeed, the result of divine revelation is no longer dominant today. Consequently, "inspiration" has become a rather weak term to use for the phenomena under discussion. For this reason, I prefer to speak of "articulated revelations", which has the added advantage of making its status as a subgroup of religious revelations explicit.

Articulated revelations may come to human beings in different forms. Although it would be tempting to compare the different channeling modes with the modes

⁶ Van Baaren, *Voorstellingen van openbaring*. See definition on p. 12.

⁷ Van Baaren, *Voorstellingen van openbaring*, 97.

⁸ Lanczkowski, 'Inspiration: Religionsgeschichtlich', 773-775 (my transl.). Cf. also Carpenter, 'Inspiration', 256-259.

⁹ This requires that we understand terms like "deity" or "divine", as used by Van Baaren and Lanczkowski, in a wide sense. Since angels, for instance, apparently qualify as dispensers of divine revelation although they are not "deities" or "divine" themselves, the "higher entities" contacted in channeling must also qualify because they represent the "higher world". Strictly spoken, the terms used by both Van Baaren and Lanczkowski are problematic because they display hidden theological presuppositions. A metaphysically neutral alternative would be "meta-empirical beings", as proposed by Platvoet, *Comparing Religions*, 30.

of receiving articulated revelations found in other religions, the absence of a general comparative study and typology of revelations puts such an endeavour beyond the scope of this study. However, there is one particular way of putting channeling “into context” historically which we do need to discuss. This is because the approach is both widely accepted and manifestly wrong.

Instead of regarding New Age channeling as an example of the general category of (articulated) revelations, there is a strong tendency to turn the argument around and claim that all revelations of the past are to be regarded as channeling. This view was introduced by Klimo in his pioneering study of 1987, and has been rather uncritically adopted by almost all commentators since¹⁰. It asserts that “channeling” is a universal phenomenon which can be found in most or all religions throughout history. This claim has considerable popular appeal, because it strongly suggests that the New Age phenomena give us a new and exciting perspective on the real nature of old stories about revelations. By studying the process of channeling in its modern manifestation, or so it is suggested, we will be able to find out what really happened to the Old Testaments prophets, to Muhammed, and many others. Channeling, in effect, is perceived as the master key to understanding religion.

Now, as a *hypothesis* the idea that channeling and other revelations share the same etiology is completely valid and indeed very interesting. It certainly deserves serious and unbiased study. However, our present state of knowledge does not permit us to regard it as more than an hypothesis. First, the scarcity and inherent limitations of sources about ancient religious revelations make their identification as “channeling” highly speculative: we do not know for sure what happened, and we should not pretend that we do. Second, and more important, neither do we know to what extent the different channeling phenomena, and *a fortiori*, religious (articulated) revelations in general have to be attributed to, and can be explained in term of, one single process. At the moment, both channeling and “articulated revelations” are mere container concepts which do not necessarily imply a deeper similarity between the phenomena falling under them. “Association by similarity” in this case would require that we understood, beyond reasonable doubt, the processes involved in the production of revelatory phenomena, and were able to explain them in a unified way. The fact that we do not possess such an explanation is obscured in most studies of channeling by a characteristic argumentative strategy. Typically, authors do not start with empirical descriptions but with abstract definitions of “channeling”. These definitions—two of which were quoted above—use the production of information apparently coming from other sources as a sole criterion, while ignoring differences in the way this information is ob-

¹⁰ Anderson, ‘Channeling’, 6; Babbie, ‘Channels to Elsewhere’; Riordan, ‘Channeling’, 97; id., ‘Channeling: A New Revelation?’, 105-106; Hastings, *Tongues*, 6.

tained. Such a procedure is quite legitimate for delimiting the otherwise pluriform category of “articulated revelations”, but it does not imply any deeper connection between the phenomena belonging to this category. Nevertheless, these definitions are then used to jump to the arbitrary conclusion that the phenomena belonging to the category thus defined are essentially *one*, in other words, that there is one basic *process* responsible for the appearance of revelatory information. A provisory association on the basis of abstract criteria is thus wrongly presented as proof that the phenomena in question are similar in essence. When this has been successfully accomplished, it is easy to point out that revelations outside the New Age context also fall under the definition, that they are therefore also examples of “channeling”, and that a study of contemporary New Age channeling can lead to the identification of the process behind revelations in general.

When the arbitrariness of this procedure is recognized, the glamorous implications of “channeling throughout the centuries” are perceived to be premature at the very least. Our conclusion about the status of channeling in the context of the study of religions is less exciting: “channeling” is an *emic term used in the New Age context to refer to the general etic category of “articulated revelations”*. It is no more and no less than that. The attempt to present channeling as an etic term must be dismissed as an apologetic strategy for convincing the public of the validity of New Age channeling.

This conclusion has, of course, no bearing on the validity of New Age channeling as such. It may or may not be a valid source of revelation regardless of its similarity or dissimilarity to other reported revelations. Whatever the final verdict on channeling will be, at least there can be no doubt about its central importance in the genesis of New Age religion. Many of the fundamental New Age beliefs, as we will see in Part Two of this study, have first been formulated in channeled messages. It is therefore fair to say that, in spite of the tendency among New Age believers to emphasize personal experience as the exclusive basis of religious truth, New Age religion must to a large extent be considered a religion of revelation (*Offenbarungsreligion*).

CHANNELING MODES AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES

The phenomena classed as channeling fall into several groups. First, we have cases of trance channeling, in which the depth of the trance may vary from very light to complete or almost complete dissociation. Second, we have various kinds of automatisms, like the ouija board and automatic writing¹¹. Third,

¹¹ Anderson (“Channeling”, 6) uses “automatism” as a general term for both groups, defining it as ‘behavior, usually speaking or writing, for which the subject denies voluntary control’.

there are cases of clairaudient channeling, either or not combined with clairvoyant vision of the communicating entity. As a fourth group, we may decide to include what Jon Klimo refers to as “open channeling”. This concept will be explained and discussed below¹².

As noted above, the ultimate nature of these different modes—let alone how they are related—is far from clear at the moment. Although they are obviously different, they are probably not distinct in an absolute sense. There are many examples of mediums starting in one mode and switching to another in the course of a gradual process of development. Usually, they end up specializing in one particular mode. I will discuss some examples of such developments found in the literature. The comparison of these cases appears to suggest a certain correlation between the different channeling modes on the one hand, and the extent to which the medium is able to control the channeling process on the other. Although this correlation may not be strict and absolute, it provides a preliminary outline for a phenomenology of channeling.

Channeling may be either *intentional* or *spontaneous*¹³. In cases of spontaneous channeling, the channel is more or less at the mercy of the comings and goings of the revelations. Intentional channels have control over the phenomenon and can usually produce it at will, either or not using specific techniques. Because it is widely believed in New Age circles that channeling is a natural ability which is latent in everybody, the phenomenon of intentional channeling has resulted in the publication of do-it-yourself books with instructions for getting in touch with one’s personal guide¹⁴. However, it is not denied that some people are more gifted than others. Most of the revelations central to New Age religion have been produced by “natural channels”. In most of these cases the channeling process started spontaneously, taking the medium by surprise. Jane Roberts, one of the undisputed “classics” of channeling, describes how she received her first revelation on september 9, 1963, while quietly sitting at the table:

¹² Klimo (*Channeling*, 185-201) describes some more channeling modes. His category of “physical channeling”, in which the medium or entity affects the physical environment (healing of illnesses, materializations, moving or bending of objects), does not involve the ‘communication of information’ and is therefore not covered by Klimo’s own definition. Moreover, this group is very characteristic for classical spiritualism, but not for New Age channeling. I also exclude dream channeling. It is true that people may interpret dreams as revelations, and that New Age believers often attach great importance to dreams as carriers of intuitive insights. There is therefore some justification in Klimo’s opinion that dreams qualify as channeling, but this is not what is commonly understood by the term even in the New Age subculture itself. Klimo’s category of “sleep channeling”, finally, involves higher knowledge believed to be “implanted” in the brain during sleep and remembered later. This, also, qualifies as channeling according to Klimo’s definition only in a technical sense. It appears to refer to a belief rather than to a phenomenon or experience.

¹³ Klimo, *Channeling*, 185-186.

¹⁴ For instance Ridall, *Channeling*, and OtC (abbreviations like this one refer to the New Age sources analyzed in Part Two. Cf. the list in the appendix).

Between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force, as if my skull were some sort of receiving station, turned up to unbearable volume. Not only ideas came through this channel, but sensations, intensified and pulsating ... It was as if the physical world were really tissue-paper thin, hiding infinite dimensions of reality, and I was suddenly flung through the tissue paper with a huge ripping sound. My body sat at the table, my hands furiously scribbling down the words and ideas that flashed through my head. Yet I seemed to be somewhere else, at the same time, traveling through things. I went plummeting through a leaf, to find a whole universe open up; and then out again, drawn into new perspectives.

I felt as if knowledge was being implanted in the very cells of my body so that I couldn't forget it—a gut knowing, a biological spirituality. It was feeling and knowing, rather than intellectual knowledge ... When I came to, I found myself scrawling what was obviously meant as the title of that odd batch of notes: *The Physical Universe as Idea Construction*. Later the Seth Material would develop those ideas, but I didn't know that at the time.¹⁵

Seth was the name of the entity who would later introduce himself as responsible for this revelation. The first message was apparently received by automatic writing, but Roberts describes how she gradually developed via some intermediate stages into a full-trance intentional channel displaying the typical characteristics of “spirit possession”. After Roberts had entered a deep trance, Seth would use her body for the purpose of verbal communication. During a channeling session Roberts's general behaviour and facial expression would become distinctly male, and her voice would drop dramatically.

While Roberts claimed to have been completely unprepared for the revelation of September 1963, other channels suggest that the revelation had been announcing itself for a long time. One of the most famous New Age channels, J Z Knight, describes her whole early life as a preparation for the meeting with her entity “Ramtha”. At a certain moment, a clairvoyant predicted that she would meet “the One” in the near future, and another saw “an awesome power walking with her”, whom she described as “on the same scale” as Jesus Christ¹⁶. Nevertheless, the decisive revelation came as a complete surprise: one evening while she and her husband were in an extremely silly mood playing with paper pyramids.

In jest, I grabbed one of the rejects off the floor, held it over my head, and proclaimed, “Attention, attention please, you are now about to witness a miracle. We are about to place our new brain machine upon the willing victim, upon whom nature did not smile with great intelligence. Carefully we place the pyramid in the aligned position, encompassing the entire head and face. In moments, gentlemen, you will witness a truly magnificent transformation.”

I placed it on my head, and through peals of laughter from myself and [my husband], I mumbled, “I sure hope it works”. After a few moments, I lifted the end of the pyramid just to eye level and, laughing so hard that tears were streaming

¹⁵ SM 11-12.

¹⁶ SoM 244-245.

from my eyes, I caught the glimmer of a bright light at the other end of my kitchen. The light was blurred by the tears, so I reached for a tissue and wiped the tears away. I blinked, and to my utter shock and amazement, there stood a giant man at the other end of my kitchen... just standing there, aglow.

This...thing...was made all of light, like golden glitter dropped through a ray of sunlight. His shoulders came to the top of the door, and it was as if the ceiling had disappeared to make room for his head. It was beautiful. ...

A smile so divine parted his lips to reveal glistening, immaculate teeth. "I am Ramtha, the Enlightened One. I have come to help you over the ditch". The words were delivered in a most melodious manner.¹⁷

Here we have an example of a channel who claims to be able to actually see "her" entity. However, like Jane Roberts, Knight would later develop into a full-trance channel with Ramtha using her speech organs to communicate with the audience. In both cases what started as spontaneous channeling later developed into intentional channeling. Sometimes, however, the channel never gets used to the process and keeps resisting it, although without success. During the early 1960s, psychologist Helen Schucman began to experience visions and to hear an distinct "inner voice", both in her dreams and while awake. In October 1965 it started to tell her 'This is a course in miracles. Please take notes'¹⁸. When she finally and reluctantly obeyed, the voice proceeded to dictate the opening paragraph of what was to become, over a period of eight years, the 1188 pages of *A Course in Miracles*. Over the years the voice proved to be remarkably consistent, stopping the dictation when interrupted (by telephone calls etc.) and continuing at the next opportunity, if necessary in the middle of a sentence. Although Schucman finally resigned herself to the daily routine of taking dictation, she never really accepted the role which was forced upon her against her choice, and which conflicted with her atheistic persuasion. Her attitude is reflected in a remark she once made to a friend: "I know the Course is true, Bill", she said—and then after a pause, "but I don't believe it"¹⁹. In Schucman's case, the channeling process remained essentially spontaneous and never developed into trance channeling.

I discussed examples of spontaneous channeling which do or do not develop into intentional channeling. However, according to do-it-yourself books, intentional channeling can also be learned "from scratch", i.e., without any previous experiences of spontaneous channeling. It must be noted, however, that not one of the channels whom I studied (including those who authored do-it-yourself books) appears to have actually learned to channel in a purely intentional way, simply by applying techniques. They invariably report having had spontaneous psychic and/or channeling experiences beforehand. Edgar Cayce saw

¹⁷ SoM 10-12.

¹⁸ Skutch, *Journey*, 54.

¹⁹ Skutch, *Journey*, iv.

angels, invisible playmates and other “little folk” when he was a child²⁰. The voice of an angel helped him discover his psychic abilities²¹. Eva Pierrakos’s abilities appear to have appeared spontaneously in the form of automatic writing²². David Spangler had a powerful experience—similar to the one described by Roberts—at the age of seven. After he had tried to develop his abilities by practicing meditation, channeling experiences continued to appear spontaneously from time to time²³. Sanaya Roman had psychic experiences since her teens and spontaneously started to hear a voice when she was seventeen²⁴. Of course, no definite conclusions can be drawn on such an impressionistic basis, but the above seems to suggest that channeling indeed requires a natural aptitude, more or less comparable to musical talent. Although everybody can learn to make music, it requires talent to reach an adequate level of performance. Similarly, it may require a certain natural sensitivity to perform adequately as a channel²⁵. Furthermore, the evidence seems to suggest that while the trance and automatism varieties of channeling require some training on the part of the channel, who must learn to use and control his/her talents to achieve maximum effectivity, the hearing of inner voices does not require such training.

So what about completely intentional channeling on the basis of do-it-yourself techniques? Many New Agers claim to have learned channeling in this way; but, although they certainly do produce messages, few if any of these seem to have commanded wide popularity. While the most influential channeled texts appear to have been produced by “natural” channels, the messages of purely intentional channels seem on the whole to be rather unremarkable. If correct, this impression confirms the comparison with musical talent. Untalented players can certainly learn to make music in a technical sense, but only the ones with talent deserve to be called musicians. Comparably, it requires talent to become a real channel, but even the untalented may be able to learn channeling at least in a technical sense. If this comparison is valid, then what is it that purely intentional channels are really doing?

This is where Klimo’s concept of “open channeling” may come in useful. While channeling as normally understood concerns communications from ‘anomalous but identifiable sources’²⁶, open channeling in Klimo’s terms refers to ‘tapping information from other than individual identifiable sources.’²⁷. In this

²⁰ TiR 27, 37-39, 45.

²¹ TiR 47.

²² PST 240.

²³ RS 61-63 and 65-66.

²⁴ LJ 2.

²⁵ For channeling as “performance”, cf. Spangler, *Channeling*, 14-15.

²⁶ Klimo, *Channeling*, 186.

²⁷ Klimo, *Channeling*, 186.

way, Klimo wishes to accommodate into channeling 'traditional concepts of intuition, insight, inspiration, and imagination'²⁸. His motivation to do this is revealing: 'The importance of open channeling is that, by definition, it allows anyone to participate in the experience of channeling'²⁹. At first sight, this seems a particularly doubtful way of "proving" the universal significance of channeling, and it is not surprising that most later authors have dismissed Klimo's concept of open channeling as over-inclusive³⁰.

However, it seems to me that the concept of "open channeling" can indeed be very well defended as relevant for New Age phenomena. Klimo does not say that anyone who feels inspired is in fact channeling; he says that the concept of open channeling *allows* everybody to channel. What is more, by including the crucial words 'is said to' in his definition of channeling, Klimo has made it quite clear that the decision whether a given phenomenon is to be regarded as channeling ultimately depends on the personal belief of the channel (or his/her clientele)³¹. In referring to religious revelations, which are emically mediated in principle, this is indeed the only correct procedure³². It follows that, in terms of Klimo's own definition, the answer to the question whether "intuition, insight, inspiration and imagination" qualify as channeling must depend upon how these phenomena are experienced and interpreted by the person in question. If someone emically explains his inspirations as coming from a source existing 'on some other level or dimension of reality than the physical as we know it, and ... not from the normal mind (or self) of the channel' (= Klimo's definition) then for him these inspirations will be channeled revelations; but if he prefers to attribute them simply to the abilities of his own normal mind, then they will not. In principle, this argument applies to other forms of channeling as well, and to "articulated revelations" generally.

"Intuition, insight, inspiration and imagination" may therefore be emically regarded as channeling, and they qualify as examples of "articulated revelations" to the extent that they result in messages. Now, if we analyze the techniques offered for developing channeling abilities, we find that they consist largely of techniques for awakening and using natural intuitive abilities³³. They

²⁸ Klimo, *Channeling*, 199.

²⁹ Klimo, *Channeling*, 199.

³⁰ Notably Hastings, *Tongues*, 5-6, who remarks that 'it is not clear that the process of spontaneous creativity or intuitive thinking is the same process as one in which there appears to be an outside personality or entity'. This is correct but, as noted above, neither is that the case for the different channeling modes which are included by Hastings.

³¹ Klimo calls attention to this himself: 'Jeffrey Mishlove ... points out that a great deal rests on the phrase "is said to" in this definition. Clearly, it is the channels, their alleged sources, and the various followers of the phenomenon who comprise the rapidly growing worldwide channeling subculture, who say that the sources being channeled come from another level of reality.' (Klimo, *Channeling*, 2).

³² Cf. Van Baaren, *Voorstellingen van Openbaring*, 12.

³³ Cf. for instance Kautz & Branon, *Channeling*; Ridall, *Channeling*; Klimo, *Channel-*

appear to concentrate on setting aside or circumventing rational “ego” control by various means, allowing imagination and the “stream of consciousness” to express itself freely in speech. In principle, this does not require special talents but only the ability to trust oneself and “let go”. For instance, it is sometimes asserted that talking aloud *as if* one were channeling, without judging the contents, will help to trigger real channeling³⁴. Such procedures may easily result in messages, either or not attributed to specific other beings, but it is only to be expected that their content will often be rather close to the medium’s own beliefs. However, if we conclude from this that the source of these messages is “just the imagination” of the channel, we are making an emic statement, reflecting certain presuppositions about the nature of the mind which the medium is under no obligation to share. Indeed, many intentional New Age channels will emically assert—like Shaw’s Joan of Arc—that the faculty of the imagination is the medium for “divine” revelations. This presupposes a different set of presuppositions about the nature of the mind, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter eight. In the meantime, we may conclude that the concept of “open channeling”—understood as techniques for accessing normal intuitive abilities—is useful to account for purely intentional channeling.

This leads us to some general and preliminary conclusions and suggestions. Trance channeling and automatism seem to belong together to a considerable extent. These phenomena display an obvious similarity with “spirit possession” as known from shamanic contexts³⁵. In both cases, the shaman/medium typically starts his career with spontaneous experiences and/or possession symptoms. The person in question is thereby started on a development which results, in the successful cases, in the ability to control the phenomena and turn them into socially useful directions³⁶. This similarity provides a promising starting point for further comparative research.

The hearing of inner voices and the occasional seeing of visions, without trance and without the symptoms of spirit possession, seems to be a different phenomenon. It is not clear from the evidence that this subgroup of “channeling” involves a development resulting in increasing control over the experiences; they seem to retain an essentially spontaneous character. Rather than with shamanism and spirit possession, these channeling modes seem to be associ-

ing, part 4, which significantly discusses open channeling and channeling techniques in close connection.

³⁴ Ridall, *Channeling*, 109. Cf. Hastings, *Tongues*, 159, about ‘channels who speak impromptu or intuitively and consider this channeling’.

³⁵ In spite of the imagery evoked by the term “channeling”, however, New Age mediums may experience it not as “possession” by an alien entity, but rather as “blending” with another consciousness. This is argued by Dureen Hughes, ‘Blending’.

³⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism*; Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*.

ated with mysticism³⁷. Again, further comparative study of this connection would be welcome.

Finally, there are cases of channeling in which the medium is simply sitting quietly and relaxedly, usually with eyes closed, and talks to the audience in a normal voice. There are no obvious symptoms of spirit possession (seizures, voice alterations, etc.). Some degree of dissociation may be involved, resulting from deep meditative relaxation, but the extent to which such a state may be described as “trance” is probably a matter of definition. These kinds of channeling do not necessarily start with spontaneous phenomena and experiences: they usually result from practicing techniques for developing intuition and minimizing rational control, with or without the explicit aim of developing channeling.

Obviously, these distinctions are of a preliminary character. While I am reasonably convinced that the second type is different from the others, the relation between the first and the third is less clear. They may turn out to be different in essence, but it is also possible that they in fact represent two opposite poles of a continuum. Scholarship is probably not yet in a position to decide which is the case. Also, it must be noted that some cases of channeling do not seem to fit so well, notably Edgar Cayce’s practice of providing information while apparently asleep. So, many puzzles remain, which will not be solved here. More definitive answers will require a polymethodological approach combining the perspectives of (para)psychology and consciousness research, neurology, anthropology and religious history. In the meantime, the above distinctions must suffice for providing some orientation.

THE SOURCES

I will now briefly introduce the channeling sources selected for analysis in the present study. The abbreviations are used for reference in the rest of this study, especially in Part Two³⁸.

EDGAR CAYCE³⁹

TiR	Thomas Sugrue, <i>There is a River: The Story of Edgar Cayce</i>
SP	Jess Stearn, <i>Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet</i>
SOS	Harmon Hartzell Bro, <i>Edgar Cayce: A Seer out of Season</i>
ECR	Hugh Lynn Cayce, <i>The Edgar Cayce Reader</i>

³⁷ See for instance the discussion of “voices and visions” in Underhill, *Mysticism*, 266-297.

³⁸ For a complete alphabetical list of all abbreviations, see the appendix.

³⁹ For general information about Cayce, see TiR, SP and SOS. TiR is the most complete biography and SOS adds information about Cayce’s last years. SP largely concentrates on Cayce’s prophecies. For more objective information about Cayce, his son and grandson and the A.R.E. (see text), see Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 88-93. Cf. also Klimo, *Channeling*, 113-116. For a favourable theological analysis, cf. Drummond, *Unto the Churches*.

- ECRe Noel Langley, *Edgar Cayce on Reincarnation*
 ECMM Henry Reed, *Edgar Cayce on Mysteries of the Mind*
 ECSU Lin Cochran, *Edgar Cayce on Secrets of the Universe*
 ECA Edgar Evans Cayce, *Edgar Cayce on Atlantis*
 ECDS Glenn D. Kittler, *Edgar Cayce on the Dead Sea Scrolls*
 ECSJ Jeffrey Furst, *Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus*
 ECJC Anne Read, *Edgar Cayce on Jesus and his Church*

Edgar Cayce (1877-1945) is one of the most famous psychics of this century. In 1900 he developed laryngitis and lost his voice. When an amateur hypnotist put him into a trance, Cayce appeared to be able to correctly diagnose his own illness and prescribe a cure. News of the phenomenon spread, and people began to ask him for help with their illnesses. Cayce turned out to be able to give correct diagnoses even over great distances, and the accuracy of his "readings" (as the session transcripts were called) eventually made him famous. In 1923 Cayce met Arthur Lammers, an enthusiast of theosophy and the occult who introduced him to the idea of reincarnation. Subsequently, Cayce began to describe past lives while in trance, often explaining illnesses with reference to them. These past life readings eventually resulted in detailed information about historical and biblical events, forgotten cultures, and the like. Cayce would also give predictions of future events. All the readings were systematically taken down in shorthand by a secretary, which has resulted in a mass of written material. The publication in 1942 of the biographical novel *TiR* led to an unprecedented flood of requests for health readings; the resulting overwork probably hastened Cayce's death in 1945.

Cayce's son Hugh Lynn Cayce took charge of his father's heritage, reorganizing the *Association for Research and Enlightenment* (A.R.E.) which had been founded in 1931 for the purpose of studying and disseminating the readings. His aggressive publishing policy resulted in a wide popularity of books based on Cayce's readings. The A.R.E. has published verbatim transcripts of the readings in the "Edgar Cayce Library Series"⁴⁰, but better known are the many books in which key themes in the readings are compiled, commented upon and interpreted by others. Some of these sources seem to emphasize Cayce's own personal perspective, others stick closely to the actual text of the readings, and many others bear a heavy personal stamp of the author or compiler. ECR, for instance, strongly emphasizes Cayce's own conservative Christian beliefs. ECSJ largely lets the readings speak for themselves. In many of the most popular Cayce books, however, it is often difficult to distinguish between Cayce's ideas and those of his interpreters. ECMM, in particular, is basically a book by Henry Reed, who only seems to use the Cayce material as a pretext for presenting his own views. Over the years, Cayce's conservative Christian beliefs seem to have been increasingly ignored while the esoteric aspects of the mate-

⁴⁰ See SOS 403.

rial have been emphasized. For our purpose, this onesided reinterpretation by later commentators is important to note, but not crucial. We will be concerned with the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Cayce books in the New Age context, rather than with an attempt to recover the original meaning.

Although Cayce lived long before the emergence of the New Age movement, the books based on his readings have crucially influenced the development of the latter. They have been popular at least since the 1960s and have remained so up to this day. Many of the more recent books based on his readings are fully representative of modern New Age thought. The question remains to what extent his manner of conveying information can be called channeling⁴¹. Cayce only occasionally channeled personified sources (notably the archangel Michael⁴²). Normally no individual source was identified, but it is widely believed by Cayce's supporters that he in fact tapped into the collective unconscious of mankind. The Cayce phenomenon remains a borderline case both with regard to the source of the information and, as noted above, with regard to the process involved in the communication. Cayce is normally regarded as a channel in the New Age context, however, and we will follow this opinion here.

EVA PIERRAKOS⁴³

PST Eva Pierrakos, *The Pathwork of Self-Transformation*

Eva Pierrakos (1915-1979), daughter of the Jewish writer Jakob Wassermann, emigrated from Austria to the U.S.A. after the Nazi takeover. She married John Pierrakos, a co-founder of bio-energetics. Her mediumistic abilities first manifested themselves as automatic writing, but 'by meditating for long hours, changing her diet, and making the commitment to use her gift only for helping people ... she eventually succeeded in becoming a pure channel so that a spirit entity of high wisdom like the Guide was able to manifest through her and offer us the gift of his teachings'⁴⁴. This Guide never gave his name. Judging from the Pathwork material he seems to have answered questions, which suggests that the process was a form of trance channeling. No information is given about the time period during which the messages were received. An organisation seems to have emerged around Pierrakos, concentrating on public channeling sessions and workshop-like applications of the material, which is basically about healing and personal growth. Pathwork was incorporated as a non-profit educational foundation in 1972. At her death, Pierrakos left hundreds of channeled lectures, which were disseminated separately at first and seem to have influenced many people in this way. The compilation PST

⁴¹ Cf. SOS 107-108; ECSU 147ff.

⁴² ECSJ 342, 345.

⁴³ A very brief biographical sketch is included in PST 240-241.

⁴⁴ PST 240-241.

appeared in 1990. There are two Pathwork centers (New York and Virginia), and several study- and working groups in the U.S.A. and abroad.

JANE ROBERTS/SETH⁴⁵

SM Jane Roberts, *The Seth Material*
 SS Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of the Soul*
 NPR Jane Roberts, *The Nature of Personal Reality: A Seth Book*

We have seen how poet and science-fiction writer Jane Roberts (1929-1984) came to be a channel for the “energy essence personality” Seth. The Seth books, based on the material as written down in shorthand by Roberts’s husband Robert Butts, are undisputed “classics” of modern channeling. Almost all of the later New Age channels mention Seth, together with Cayce, among their chief sources of inspiration. During the 1970s, when such literature was still relatively scarce, Roberts’s example encouraged many to take their own experiences with channeling seriously. The influence of the Seth books was no doubt enhanced by Roberts’s considerable literary talents. Hastings rightly remarks that ‘her writing is excellent and more poetic and imagistic than Seth’s. If he drew on her skills, he fared well’⁴⁶. Indeed, both Roberts’s own books⁴⁷ and those based on Seth’s words make fascinating reading. Both “authors” come across as highly intelligent, and this is reflected in the considerable complexity of the material. In Part Two of this study we will see that several of the basic metaphysical concepts which were to become normative in the New Age Movement were probably first introduced by Roberts/Seth. It remains an unresolved but highly relevant question to what extent these concepts reflect Roberts’s own earlier science fiction work.

A COURSE IN MIRACLES⁴⁸

CiM *A Course in Miracles: The Text, Workbook for Students and Manual for Teachers*
 T Text
 WfS Workbook for Students
 MfT Manuel for Teachers

If we were to select one single text as “sacred scripture” in the New Age movement, the sheer awe and reverence with which *The Course*—as it is fondly

⁴⁵ For general overviews, see Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 274-275; Klimo, *Channeling*, 28-34; Hastings, *Tongues*, 72-78. An analysis of Seth’s teachings is given in Hanegraaff, ‘Channeling-literatuur’, 12-20.

⁴⁶ Hastings, *Tongues*, 72-73.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, *God of Jane*.

⁴⁸ General information: Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 129-132; Klimo, *Channeling*, 37-42; Hastings, *Tongues*, 98-113 and Skutch, *Journey*. For analyses of the teaching: Hanegraaff, ‘Channeling-literatuur’, 28-33; Koffend, ‘Gospel according to Helen’, 74-90. A good commentary is Wapnick, *Meaning of Forgiveness*. Other books based on the “Course” have been written by Wapnick, F. Vaughan & R. Walsh, G. Jampolsky and Tara Singh.

called—is discussed by its devotees would make this huge volume the most obvious choice. Indeed, it is among those channeled texts which refute the often-heard opinion that channeling only results in trivialities. Although less original in content than the Seth messages, the *Course* impresses by its flawless consistency over a length of more than 1100 pages, and by the poetic quality of its language. Amazingly, several long parts of the text were later discovered to be written in Shakespearean blank verse (Iambic pentameters). The text implies that its author is Jesus Christ. The intention of the material is ‘removing the blocks to the awareness of love’s presence, which is your natural inheritance’⁴⁹. To this end, the main text (622 pp.) is supplemented by a workbook consisting of 365 exercises, one for each day of the year, and a brief manual for teachers. The “career” of the *Course* has been extraordinary. At first it was only disseminated by photocopies to some friends of Helen Schucman and her companion Bill Thetford, but as the fame of the *Course* was spread by word of mouth, the number of copies in circulation grew explosively. A nonprofit *Foundation for Inner Peace* was founded, which in 1975 published the *Course*. The original three volumes were later followed by a paperback, which has been a publishing success ever since. Large numbers of people profess to have been deeply influenced by the teachings⁵⁰. Many small groups have emerged in which the *Course* is respectfully studied, and an extraordinarily large number of commentaries have been published.

DAVID SPANGLER⁵¹

RBNA David Spangler, *Revelation: The Birth of a New Age*

CNA David Spangler, *Channeling in the New Age*

The American David Spangler may be regarded as the “theologian in residence” of the influential New Age community Findhorn in Scotland. Spangler, who reports having had psychic experiences since childhood, came to Europe in 1970 after his “inner guidance” had told him that he would find the keys for a next cycle of work there. Findhorn proved to be his destination. On July 31, 1970, Spangler began channeling an entity calling itself “Limitless Love and Truth”⁵². This resulted in seven so-called “transmissions” about the coming of the New Age, which form the core of RBNA. Under the inspiration of his guide, Spangler added a commentary which shows a profound influence of Theosophy in the tradition of Alice Bailey. RBNA was published by Findhorn.

⁴⁹ CiM Introduction.

⁵⁰ Cf. the video *The Story of A Course in Miracles. Part 1: ‘The Forgotten Song’, Part 2: ‘The Song Remembered’*. The second part contains a great number of personal testimonies.

⁵¹ General information: Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 428-429; cf. Bednarowski, *New Religions and the Theological Imagination in America*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1989; an interesting analysis is Rhodes, ‘New Age Christology of David Spangler’, 402-418.

⁵² RBNA 39-43; cf. Hughes, ‘Blending’: Spangler’s description of his channeling experiences seems to confirm Hughes’s preference of the term “blending” over “channeling”.

When Spangler returned to the U.S.A. in 1973, he discovered that the book had become a basic text in the emerging New Age subculture. This was somewhat embarrassing to him, because he disliked being looked at as a “psychic medium”. He decided to publish a second version of RBNA, with a new introductory part and some added transmissions received in 1975 from an entity called “John”. I have used this second version. Spangler’s reservations were to grow stronger over the years, as his New Age philosophy gradually outgrew its original theosophical framework, but he has never renounced his early work⁵³. In CNA, published in 1988, Spangler does show himself very critical of the popular channeling craze of the 1980s. Evidently worried about being lumped together with “talkshow-channels” like J Z Knight and others, he attempts to distinguish valid forms of channeling from phenomena merely representative of “New Age glamour”.

Spangler’s later work, which is very different from RBNA and not explicitly based on channeling, will be discussed in chapter five. RBNA, regardless of its status in the context of Spangler’s personal development, must be regarded as one of the foundational texts of the New Age Movement.

RAMALA⁵⁴

RR *The Revelation of Ramala*
 WR *The Wisdom of Ramala*
 VR *The Vision of Ramala*

The so-called Ramala messages were channeled by an anonymous English couple (“David and Ann”). The revelations started somewhere during the sixties and were made public in pamphlet-form. The compilation RR was published in 1978 in response to growing public demand. In the meantime the channels, led by their “inner guidance”, had moved to Chalice Hill House in Glastonbury, one of the focal points of New Age activity in England⁵⁵. This house was subsequently transformed into a successful New Age center.

“Ramala” is the “soul name” of the channeling couple, who appear to have developed a form of light trance channeling⁵⁶. The teachings are believed to come from about ten different anonymous “Masters”—as the entities are called —, but the majority of them has been given by a core group of three. It is believed that these Masters do not restrict their attention only to Ramala, but are also speaking through other channels all over the world. To Ramala, they give brief lectures (20-30 minutes) on a wide variety of topics, often in reac-

⁵³ Cf. Spangler’s chapter ‘Formative forces and the higher dimensions of spirit’ in RW (cf. chapter five).

⁵⁴ For an analysis of the teaching, see Hanegraaff, ‘Channeling-literatuur’, 23-28.

⁵⁵ For background see Hexham, “‘Freaks’ of Glastonbury”, and Bowman, ‘Drawn to Glastonbury’.

⁵⁶ RR xiv; WR Introduction.

tion to prior requests. Afterwards, David's personal guide, who calls himself Zen Tao, takes over to answer questions and engage in discussions with the audience. In RR these questions and answers are omitted; in WR and VR a selection of them is included after each lecture. The messages were selected 'on a purely subjective basis'⁵⁷, and the originals have been rather heavily edited and condensed; but, we are told, 'always with strict regard to the original meaning'⁵⁸. The teachings ended abruptly on June 11, 1989, when the "last channeling" was received. After this, the Masters have withdrawn, claiming that now is the time to live the message rather than just talk about it.

J Z KNIGHT/RAMTHA⁵⁹

R *Ramtha*
 RI *Ramtha: An Introduction*
 RIC *Ramtha Intensive: Change, the Days to Come*
 SoM *J Z Knight, A State of Mind: My story—Ramtha: The Adventure Begins*

J Z Knight (1946) tells the story of her life in SoM. We saw how she first met Ramtha, an ancient warrior from Atlantis who attained enlightenment during his only life on earth. Knight later developed into a full trance channel, who is completely unaware of what happens while Ramtha uses her body (she claims not to be aware of any time interval between the beginning and the end of a session). Her appearances on television talkshows and in Shirley MacLaine's books have made her one of the best-known channels in the U.S.A. As one of the most publicly visible mediums, Knight has strongly contributed to the popular image of channeling criticized by Spangler as "New Age glamour". Channeling has made her a star and brought in millions of dollars. Ramtha himself encouraged Knight to accept money in order to stem the flood of requests for help and guidance, also pointing out that it would be reasonable to expect some compensation for the large parts of her life irretrievably "lost" while channeling. Critics have, of course, found in these material rewards of the spiritual an occasion for cynical commentary. But Ramtha has become controversial within the New Age community as well. The increasingly dark and frightening, rather than positive and uplifting content of his messages has given rise to the speculation that, whoever the original Ramtha may have been, his place has now been taken by a less benign entity⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ WR Introduction.

⁵⁸ RR xiv.

⁵⁹ General information: Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 376; Klimo, *Channeling*, 42-45; and SoM.

⁶⁰ Klimo, *Channeling*, 44.

SANAYA ROMAN⁶¹

- OtC Sanaya Roman & Duane Packer, *Opening to Channel: How to Connect with your Guide*
 LJ Sanaya Roman, *Living with Joy: Keys to Personal Power and Spiritual Transformation*
 PPA Sanaya Roman, *Personal Power through Awareness: A Guidebook for Sensitive People*
 SG Sanaya Roman, *Spiritual Growth: Being your Higher Self*

Sanaya Roman is a well-known trance channel for the entity Orin, whose messages are basically about healing, personal transformation and inner growth. OtC, published together with Duane Packer, who channels DaBen, is one of the better known do-it-yourself channeling guides. The other three books, classed together as “The Earth Life Series”, contain channeled material including practical exercises.

SHIRLEY MACLAINE (KEVIN RYERSON, J Z KNIGHT, e.o.)⁶²

- OL Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb*
 DL Shirley MacLaine, *Dancing in the Light*
 IAP Shirley MacLaine, *It's All in the Playing*
 GW Shirley MacLaine, *Going Within: A Guide for Inner Transformation*

Shirley MacLaine is not known as a channel herself, but some of the best known New Age channels have become famous by figuring in her books. The Swedish medium Sturé Johanssen (“Ambres”) figures only in OL, and Jach Pursel (“Lazaris”) plays some part in IAP but remains in the background. J Z Knight and Ramtha are introduced in DL; MacLaine’s reaction to Ramtha was extremely emotional, and her spontaneous feeling that she had been his sister during his Atlantean life was confirmed by Ramtha⁶³. But MacLaine’s favourite was the full-trance channel Kevin Ryerson with his entities “Tom McPherson” and “John”. Ryerson plays a crucial part in OL, and returns in DL and IAP. All these books contain extended descriptions of the channeling sessions which provided MacLaine with the basic elements of her New Age convictions. Ryerson is also important because MacLaine’s TV-miniseries *Out on a Limb* (1987) featured him going into a trance and channeling McPherson and John live before the camera. Millions of people in the U.S.A. and abroad were thus first introduced to the channeling phenomenon by Ryerson’s example.

⁶¹ For some biographical information, see LJ and Klimo, *Channeling*, 141-144.

⁶² General information: Melton, Clark & Kelly, *New Age Encyclopedia*, 270-272. Most material about MacLaine is written from the skeptical perspective. See Gardner, ‘Issness is her Business’. Gordon, *Channeling into the New Age* should be mentioned for the sake of completeness, but can hardly be taken seriously as scholarship.

⁶³ DL 119.