

**‘The higher order of the
natural laws and the wrong world
of hysterical mediums’:
Medicine and the Occult ‘Fringe’
at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century
in Germany**

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BEGINNING IN THE 1880S the popularity of hypnosis increased dramatically. Its official introduction into the world of science came in a lecture given to the *Académie des Sciences* by Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93) in 1882, although this institution had twice condemned hypnosis under the name of animal magnetism in the previous century.¹

The history of psychotherapy is often presented as a direct and steady evolution from the exorcisms of the priest Gassner up to Mesmer's theory of fluidism, which was then deposed by the introduction of the term 'hypnosis' by James Braid (1795–1860) in 1843 and Hippolyte Bernheim's (1840–1919) theory of suggestion in 1884. It has been stated that in the course of the nineteenth century there was a transition from a so-called prescientific era, dominated by speculations about 'fluidal' and occult forces, to the scientific era of experiments and positivist description. According to this interpretation, at the beginning of the twentieth century the scientific world had turned away from mesmeric hypotheses and practice, which were finally forced underground. Such a banishment actually occurred. However, it was not only the result of heated arguments between scientists and amateurs, but

also within scientific bodies, and these conflicts were not only due to the experimental falsification of the theory of Mesmer's fluidum. Here I intend to show certain social and cultural factors that together determined what research was done to differentiate hypnotism and mesmerism (or, more generally, occultism).

By the end of the nineteenth century occultism was often understood in the context of mediumistic phenomena. A medium – mainly in the state of trance (also called somnambulism in the first part of the century) – could produce psychical phenomena: telepathy, clairvoyance, looking into a body and giving diagnoses or therapeutic advice, or the automatic writing of messages given by presumed spirits. Physical phenomena, such as spirit rappings, table levitations, materialisations (even of ghosts) and moving objects at a distance could also be produced. Most of these phenomena had already been observed and described by mesmerists during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was because paranormal phenomena often appeared during the hypnotic trance of the medium that many scientists interested in hypnosis became involved in psychical research.

The 1880s saw the beginning of 'scientific occultism',² described as 'parapsychology' by the German physician Max Dessoir (1867–1947) in 1898. As part of scientific occultism it became his job to examine these phenomena under scientific control and to explain them. (It was mainly unpaid work.) Most of the scientists involved in psychical research wanted to challenge 'materialistic' science, to show the primacy of the soul over matter and to found experimentally based metaphysics.³ There were two alternative hypotheses about the nature of the occult phenomena: the 'spiritualist' one, that explained them by the intervention of 'discarnate agencies', and the so-called 'animistic' hypothesis, that assumed the phenomena were caused by unconscious human psychological forces.⁴ Confronting this topic had also become necessary for German researchers for several reasons:

1. the spiritualist movement, and the foundation of many spiritualistic circles and societies,
2. the organisation and professionalisation of the mesmeric healers (called 'magnetopaths' in Germany),
3. the demonstrations by stage-'magnetiseurs' and professional mediums,
4. the appearance of the theosophic movement,
5. the neo-mesmeric phase inside academic medicine and the foundation of scientific societies for psychical research,

6. the efforts of physicians to introduce hypnosis as an experimental method and as a treatment inside academic medicine.

The Reception of Spiritualism in Germany

THE SPIRITUALIST MOVEMENT DEVELOPED in America during the middle of the nineteenth century and spread quickly through England and France. The speeches delivered by the American somnambulist Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910)⁵ under trance formed the basis of the natural philosophical, cosmological view of the world held by spiritualists. According to them, the spirits chose the transmission of thoughts as their means of communication. The phenomena that occurred at seances (knocks, the moving of tables and the appearance of spirits) were interpreted as experimental proof of the overlapping of the spiritual world and the material world. This terminus of experience, which followed the definitions of natural science, appeared in the frequently used expression of 'experimental spiritualism'. But spiritualists were not really supporters of scientific empiricism. Although it is true that they dissociated themselves from occult traditions of secrecy and appealed to the observable, they had their own definition of 'high science'; they wanted to base knowledge on the personal experience of 'everyman'. The truth of spiritualistic doctrines was to be reflected in the mass of individual testimony, not in the application of impersonal methods. The final standard of judgement was the individual consciousness, the personal experience, which did not reflect the contemporaneous ideal of scientific method. By contrast, psychical researcher and chemist William Crookes (1832–1919) did apply the scientific ideal to spiritualistic phenomena:

The spiritualist tells of bodies weighing 50 or 100 lbs. being lifted up into the air without the intervention of any known force; but the scientific chemist is accustomed to use a balance which will render sensible a weight so small that it would take ten thousand of them to weigh one grain; he is, therefore, justified in asking that a power professing to be guided by intelligence, which will toss a heavy body up to the ceiling, shall also cause his delicately-poised balance to move under test conditions.⁶

The spiritualist mediums of the second half of the nineteenth century were, so to speak, the successors of the somnambulists of the early days of the nineteenth century.

In Germany spiritualism did not become popular until the end of the 1870s, manifesting itself in the formation of numerous societies (e.g. *Zentralverband deutscher Spiritisten und Spiritualisten*) with their own

publications, such as the *Zeitschrift für Spiritismus*, *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus*.⁷ It was made popular by, among others, German doctors returning from America (e.g. Bernard Cyriax and the spiritualist-mesmeric dentist and the Revolutionary of Baden, Georg von Langsdorff).⁸ During this time in England the chemist and physicist William Crookes had begun to introduce systematic experiments with mediums in England, for the scientific control of which he used technical aids, including photography and electric instruments of measurement.

The Consolidation of the Mesmerist Healing Movement

AFTER 1870 ANOTHER BRANCH of 'experimental psychology' was formed beyond academic circles. Lay persons and doctors joined together to found professional neo-mesmeric societies.⁹ One of the reasons for the foundation of these professional organisations was the threat of petitions brought before the *Reichstag* by the doctors. In these petitions they demanded that the 'liberty to cure' (*Kurierfreiheit*)¹⁰ should be abolished. Beside the naturopaths and homoeopaths, the magnetopaths formed an important movement inside the alternative medicine of that day.

In 1909 there were 2,478 'quacks' registered in Prussia (i.e. healers without permits). Among them were 284 magnetopaths, 392 homoeopaths and 544 practitioners of natural healing.¹¹ It is likely, however, that a large number of magnetopaths and spiritualist-mediumistic healers were not organized or registered. In addition there were also doctors, homoeopaths and practitioners of natural healing who used mesmeric methods.¹² The magnetopathic movement was profoundly divided regarding the attitude towards hypnosis, spiritism and telepathic or clairvoyant capacities developed by magnetized patients. They agreed about the existence of an invisible force, but there were great differences in the interpretation of its nature. Some of the magnetopaths practised distant healing and worked together with clairvoyant mediums who gave diagnoses ('looking into the bodies') and therapeutic advice.¹³ Others strictly distanced themselves from such practices.¹⁴ Most were very critical towards hypnosis: magnetism would restore the inner harmony of the body and the soul, whereas hypnosis would only address the imagination of patients without 'inner' recovery. Above all, many thought that hypnotherapy would have dangerous effects by weakening the nerves.¹⁵ The magnetopaths also condemned hypnotism or magnetism on the public stage purely for entertainment and business purposes. For the authorities 'mystical treatments', to which also magnetism belonged, were part of the most problematic areas at the focus of the fight

against quacks. In a report by the scientific committee on medicinal matters (*wissenschaftliche Deputation für Medizinalwesen*), hypnotic treatment was put on a par with magnetism, and the induction of the hypnotic state was presented as an 'extremely dangerous operation', as it led to a complete loss of self-will analogous to anaesthetisation. If not used properly, hypnosis could lead to serious health damage and even cause death.¹⁶ In 1902 the Prussian Minister of Culture issued a decree which called for all lay practitioners to register with the district doctor responsible without further demands and to give extensive details as to their person and to their commercial healing practices. Furthermore, they were obligated to keep records of their patients and to allow official inspection if required. The legislative proposal to ban lay medicine, which was presented to the government of the *Reich* in 1908 and intended as part of placing extensive restrictions on lay healers in general, included the complete prohibition of hypnosis and magnetic healing by lay healers.¹⁷ This would have meant the end of the activities of the magnetopaths. The Society of German Magnetopaths (*Vereinigung Deutscher Magnetopathen*) protested directly to the government in the form of a letter. However, the proposal received no support in the legislature, and it was lost from the public eye at the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁸

The Demonstrations of Stage-'Magnetiseurs' and Professional Mediums

ITINERANT MEDIUMS AND STAGE-'MAGNETISEURS' toured Europe. It was through these public shows that most of the doctors were first confronted with hypnosis; for example, the 'magnetiseur' Carl Hansen (1833–97) visited Germany and Austria in 1879/80 and research was initiated by a number of doctors in the wake of his visit.¹⁹ In 1880 the physiologist Rudolf Heidenhain (1834–97) published the results of his studies in which he confirmed the genuineness of hypnotic phenomena, such as muscular rigidity, positive and negative hallucinations, etc.²⁰ However, he described these as being purely physiological and denied the existence of a magnetic 'fluidum'. To motivate his investigations, Heidenhain said he wanted to act against a new form of superstition by which people were led astray, for example the apparitions demonstrated by Hansen.²¹ Hansen's performances met with official resistance as well. In 1881 the Prussian Minister of Culture commissioned a report on Hansen's demonstrations from the scientific deputation on medicinal matters (*wissenschaftliche Deputation für das Medizinalwesen*). Based on the study by Heidenhain, the department decided

that damage to one's health through hypnotisation could not be ruled out. On 12 May 1881 the Ministries of the Interior and Culture decreed the banning of public performances by Hansen or other 'so-called magnetiseurs'.²² It was not only the argument of potential damage to people's health which played a role, but also such objections as the disturbance of 'peace and order', the promotion of superstition, and also – and this was something new – the possible temptation of misuse. There was fear that criminal acts suggested under hypnosis might be carried out.²³

Together with the medium Slade, the German astrophysicist F.C. Zöllner undertook several experiments in Leipzig in 1877/78 under the watchful eye of numerous scientists (Ernst Heinrich Weber, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Wilhelm Wundt, Carl Friedrich Ludwig, Carl Thiersch). In one experiment two wooden rings were threaded onto a rope which was then knotted into a loop and sealed. A short while after the rings lay intact at the foot of a small table. Fechner and Weber vouched for the genuineness of these phenomena. Wilhelm Wundt, however, wrote a very influential and critical statement, rejecting the experiment.²⁴

Zöllner wanted to prove the existence of a fourth dimension, a space into which material things go, in which the dogma of rigidity of substance has no place. For Zöllner spiritism was the expression of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual world in the fourth dimension.²⁵ He also used his experiments with spiritualism to express a basic criticism of the science of his times. The harsh rejection of Zöllner's experiments demonstrated the failure of the attempt to introduce spiritual or generally occult themes to scientific investigation. In Germany, the line of demarcation between scientific culture and academic or non-academic anti-culture seemed to be more clearly drawn than in other countries.²⁶

The Appearance of the Theosophic Movement

IN 1875 THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatzky in New York. Theosophy was of great significance for the blossoming of occultism. The underground teachings of Mrs Blavatzky were published in Germany shortly before 1900 and spread and repeated in many smaller circles. It is an eclectic mixture of elements taken from Western and Eastern occult traditions, which were summarised in a new system and enriched by a few aphorisms of Indian origin.²⁷ It is partly through the Theosophic Movement that practices such as yoga and meditation were popularised in the Western world. Many psychical researchers were adherents of theosophy (e.g. the majority of the members of the first society

for psychical research founded in Germany, the *Psychologische Gesellschaft* in Munich) (see below).

In addition to circles involved in theosophy and spiritism or psychical research, many other occult groups were founded in Germany after 1875: the ariosophs (in particular the *Thule Gesellschaft*, which was strongly associated with the *völkisch* movement), astrologers, gnostics, Rosicrucians, Masonic Lodges, the New Thought Movement imported from the United States, the Mazdaznan Movement, etc.²⁸ It was an extremely heterogeneous scene, operating more or less underground, seeking new spiritual orientations outside the established churches.

The Neo-mesmeric Phase within Academic Medicine and the Foundation of Scientific Societies for Psychical Research

FROM THE END OF THE 1870S experiments in hypnotism on hysterical female patients began at the hospital of the Salpêtrière in Paris. The medical historian Anne Harrington has shown that Jean-Martin Charcot and others first came into contact with hypnotism through the early experiments with metallo-therapy.²⁹ The physician Victor Burq gave Charcot the idea of putting pieces of metals and magnets onto the patients with the aim of transferring symptoms from one part of the body to the other or even from one patient to another. This phenomenon was called *transfert*. Baréty, a medical doctor, created the concept *force neurique rayonnante* (radiating energy of the nerves) and demanded the rehabilitation of fluidism by the *Société de Biologie*. Jules Bernard Luys (1828–97) carried out experiments in the hypnosis school of the Charité concerning the long distance effects of medicines: sealed bottles which were filled with different medicines and placed close to patients who were expected to react accordingly. Opium induced sleep and valerian caused them to behave like cats. It was even reported that the touch of a bay leaf converted an atheist into a loyal Catholic. Hippolyte Baraduc (1850–1909) photographed a supposed biomagnetic field as scientific proof of the authenticity of the phenomenon and constructed a 'biometer' in order to detect the human aura. Photography played a very important role in attempting to objectify the phenomena in early parapsychological research. Some smart photographers made a good business with the selling of 'ghost-portraits' which were produced by double exposure.³⁰

In Luy's *laboratoire d'hypnologie* at the Charité hospital there was intensive co-operation with representatives from the occult circles: from 1889, it was supervised by Gérard Encausse (who became renowned in these

circles as 'Papus'). Colonel Albert de Rochas, the leading French occultist, was invited by Luys to carry out biomagnetic research. Occult journals, like *L'Initiation*, *Le Voile d'Isis*, *La Paix Universelle*, *La Chaîne Magnétique*, reported regularly on these neo-mesmeric findings.³¹ Harrington notes a

quite remarkable dialogue between representatives from élite culture and representatives from popular culture; between people operating from under the banner of medical orthodoxy and people speaking from the margins of science and medicine; between hospitals and scientific societies ... (la Charité, la Société de Biologie), and basement occult groups, ...

This dialogue seems to have endured for about 20 years.³²

Established scientists, such as the psychologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947) and the physiologist Charles Richet (1850–1935),³³ who received the Nobel Prize for the discovery of anaphylactic shock in 1913, successfully undertook experiments with *suggestion mentale* (mental suggestion).³⁴ They hypnotised patients from a distance (even several kilometres) and asked them mentally to perform acts. All this was discussed in scientific circles and published in reputable scientific journals, such as the *Revue Philosophique*.

In 1888 the father of the theory of suggestion, Hippolyte Bernheim, mentioned in the preface of his publication *Suggestion and its Therapeutic Effects* that he had performed his own experiments ('with hundreds of persons') to test the effects of medicines over distance and the transmission of thoughts. He talked of achieving no clear results and left unanswered the question of whether these phenomena existed independently from suggestion.³⁵

In the 1880s numerous lay circles and scientific societies were founded which busied themselves with hypnotism, mediumism, mesmerism, prophecy, telepathy, etc. The most well known of all was the English Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882. Members of this society included famous scientists, such as the philosopher Henry Sidgwick, the classical philologist Frederic Myers, and the physicist and winner of the Nobel Prize, Oliver Lodge. They gathered scientific proofs pro and con to test the controversial phenomena of occultism.³⁶ The German equivalents were the *Psychologische Gesellschaft* in Munich (1886), led by the private scholar Carl du Prel (1839–99) and the physician and hypnotist Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929), and the *Gesellschaft für Experimental-Psychologie* in Berlin (1888) under the physicians Max Dessoir (1867–1947) and Albert Moll (1862–1939) and the philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906). In this context many experiments were carried out to test the existence of thought transmission, which Frederic Myers would later call 'telepathy'.³⁷

These experiments, of course, reaped heavy criticism. For example, William Preyer published a statement in which he attributed thought transmission to involuntary whispering or to reading the muscles.³⁸

The community of psychical researchers paid great attention to such objections (which were also expressed within the community) and continually improved the rules governing their experiments in order to guard against unintentional or purposeful fraud and deception. For example, Charles Richet seems to have been one of the first to have introduced blind assessment and randomisation in psychical research. Beginning in 1884, Richet was concerned with whether a person could draw a card at random from a deck of cards and then, with concentration, communicate this card to another person. He also used a screen in order to hide the subject as a precaution against subtle cues. After these experiments, the Society of Psychical Research adopted the regular use of blind assessment and randomisation in its experiments. As Kaptchuk has shown, there were episodes of using blind assessment long before its widespread acceptance in biomedical research. It began in the late eighteenth century as a tool for demarcating orthodox medicine from deviant healing (especially mesmerism), but also as a defensive adaptation by proponents of irregular healing.³⁹

One of the most important negative statements concerning 'scientific occultism' came from the founder of experimental laboratory psychology, philosopher and physician Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920).⁴⁰ Wundt had already spoken critically about the experiments of the astrophysicist F.C. Zöllner with the medium Slade,⁴¹ thereby returning the accusation of materialism made by the spiritualists against science. In the materialisation of the spirits he saw a rough materialistic tendency, a sign of the 'cultural barbarism of our time'. As a representative of 'experimental psychology', which was still not fully established academically, he found the claims of the societies and circles which dealt in phenomena of the occult a provocation. This was because they referred to their investigations as 'experimental psychology'. He went as far as to maintain that these 'dilettantic' societies presented a danger to society, and he criticised the medical hypnotists, such as Forel, Moll and Schrenck-Notzing, because they held open the question as to the existence of clairvoyance or telepathy and other supernatural occurrences or even accepted it as a truth on the verge of being proved.

In contrast to other researchers (Hugo Münsterberg, Oskar Vogt, Theodor Lipps) Wundt was of the opinion that hypnosis was not suitable as a means of the experimental investigation of the soul, because the experiments were not controllable. Above all, he saw it as potentially

dangerous and thought that doctors alone should be allowed to use it for therapeutic purposes. According to Wundt, frequent hypnosis could lead to an ever increasing reduction in resistance in the central nervous system. On top of that people could, he thought, become more open to suggestion when awake. 'Hypnosis by medical dilettantes for apparently scientific purposes ... appears to me to be humbug, which cannot be tolerated according to the accepted rules of health and moral authorities.'⁴²

The relationship between the hypnotist and the hypnotised is described by Wundt as being unethical, as it could come to the complete and utter subjection to the will of the hypnotist. He shared this point of view with numerous physicians, as well as with the magnetopaths, a stand against which *many* medical hypnotists tried to fight again and again. Above all the results of research into thought transmission, for example by Richet, put into question the higher order of the laws of natural science.

What result can be drawn from this investigation? We would obviously come to the conclusion, that the world surrounding us is made up of two fully different worlds. One is the world of Kopernicus, Galilei and Newton, of Leibniz and Kant, the universe of eternal unchangeable laws, in which the smallest as well as the largest fit harmoniously into the whole. Next to this large world, which increases our wonderment and astonishment with every step which we go through it, there could be another smaller world, a world of good fairies and rapping spirits, of witches and magnetic mediums. And in this small world everything that happens in the large, superior world is turned on its head. All normally unchangeable laws will be put out of use from time to time for the benefit of ordinary, mostly hysterical persons.⁴³

This quotation shows that Wundt did not want a scientific examination of occult assumptions, because he saw that his own idealistic view of science – a rational order – was questioned.

At the same time, he described the mediumistic phenomena as pathological (just as hypnosis was): it was the crazy world of hysteria. This was the common way for Anglo-American psychiatry to view the spiritistic media from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. For example, one of the leading Victorian psychiatrists, Henry Maudsley, reduced the ecstatic visions of Mohammed, Saul and Swedenborg to epileptic attacks; spiritual visions and so-called 'supernormal forces' were seen as the result of an abnormal functioning of the nervous substance.⁴⁴

The Introduction of Hypnosis within Academic Medicine

AT THE END OF THE 1890S Schrenck-Notzing and Dessoir dissociated themselves from 'experimental metaphysics'. They had become disciples of the Nancy school of hypnotism, as was Albert Moll, and agreed that the magnetic doctrine of the invisible fluid was largely explained by suggestion. In 1892 Albert Moll published the results of his experimental research about magnetic rapport (understood to be the specific relationship between the 'magnetiseur' and his patient or medium postulated by the mesmerist theory, and characterised by a direct influence of a force or will).⁴⁵ His results were negative, and he concluded that the rapport was fully explained by suggestion. But he left the tiny possibility of distant influence. Most of the medical hypnotists, like August Forel, Eugen Bleuler and Ludwig Löwenfeld, shared this tentative positive view that did not go as far as to negate completely (a priori) the possibility of direct influences. They thought that the phenomenon was rather rare, emphasising that it might be too early for theoretical interpretations. They shared the opinion that it was not, at least, due to the action of departed souls and were convinced that one day there would be an explanation in the context of normal scientific causality. They declared that it was their duty to shed scientific light onto these phenomena in order to combat spiritual superstition, and that it was the only way to invoke a true enlightenment of the population.⁴⁶ They often used technical analogies in speculations about the nature of this unknown force, and telepathy was compared with the telephone or the radio-telegraph. At the turn of the century demonstrations of the existence of many types of invisible radiation (the discovery of x-rays by Wilhelm Röntgen, Hertz's electromagnetic waves and the invention of radio-telegraphy) made it more probable that there was a physical basis for paranormal phenomena. So Dessoir demanded that physicists should examine this field.

In Germany in particular, the main (scientific) experimenters in the field of occult phenomena were physicians who tried to introduce hypnotism into academic medicine.⁴⁷ This produced a conflict of roles: there was a growing resistance against hypnotism from the medical establishment, which was expressed in the debates about the danger of hypnotism and the frequent identification of hypnosis with spiritism, occultism and animal magnetism. The medical hypnotists tried to demonstrate that hypnosis as a therapeutic treatment and as an experimental method would not do any harm, if practised by medical experts. But they agreed with their enemies that treatments by lay hypnotists, lay magnetopaths and spiritists could have

harmful effects. Moll especially was engaged in the fight against lay healers, and compiled a number of critical reports to which other authors referred. In 1907 he summarised his results from the last two decades; he had not been able to observe anything, either from magnetic healing or clairvoyance, from mind-reading, spirits or other similar phenomena.⁴⁸

Moll and Dessoir wrote informative books about 'occult' themes, such as telepathy, spiritism and spiritual healing, but they freed these topics from the magic aura by explaining them as suggestion and conscious and unconscious fraud.⁴⁹ In order to establish hypnotism as a science, they had to dissociate it from real or supposed mysticism. On the other hand, they showed a more differentiated attitude in their textbooks about the theory and practice of therapeutic hypnotism, where they admitted that there were convincing experiments which indicated the plausibility of the existence of telepathy.⁵⁰

Moreover, the enemies of hypnotism characterised the state of trance as pathological. Considering the contemporary diagnosis of nervousness as a symptom of civilisation, hypnotic trance could only produce more harm. There was a call for educationally persuasive psychotherapies which were supposed to operate with the rational mind and to strengthen the will (a kind of 'gymnastics of the will') in order to resist the 'decadence' of the turn of the century.⁵¹ Despite a growing acceptance of medical hypnotism, it was still far from being integrated into academic medical training. Hypnotism and occultism were seen as dangerous for the public order, especially if they became too popular among the lower classes.⁵² From the 1890s onward, there was a climate in Germany that would only allow young sciences, such as (academic) experimental psychology and therapeutic and experimental hypnotism, to gain academic credentials if they maintained a critical distance from the occult fringe. In this context, it is not astonishing that Schrenck-Notzing,⁵³ Dessoir and Moll, the German pioneers of medical hypnotism, withdrew from a research programme which included the examination of mesmerism, somnambulism and spiritism, and that they developed interpretations of these phenomena that would fit into the dominant contemporary scientific discourse. On the other hand, they stated clearly that occult phenomena had to remain objects of study within science, opening the boundaries which others had previously drawn up.

The involvement of medical hypnotists in establishing hypnosis inside academic science was an important reason for the weakening of early scientific parapsychology in Germany (in addition to the lack of financial sponsorship or independent scholars). In contrast to Great Britain (Crookes, Sidgwick, Lodge, Myers), France (Richet) or the United States (James),

there was clearly a smaller number of established scientists engaged in this field, at least until the beginning of the 1920s. After the First World War, reactions against 'materialistic' science and the search for a 'holistic' world view promoted a renewed interest for this field in Germany.

Conclusion

BEGINNING IN THE 1880S German scientists – especially physicians interested in hypnosis – became involved in experimental research about paranormal phenomena (like telepathy and clairvoyance). This was particularly due to the growing popularity of the spiritualist movement, the professional consolidation of the magnetic healers ('magnetopaths') and the demonstrations of stage 'magnetiseurs' confronting many scientists for the first time with the phenomenon of the hypnotic trance. They were also stimulated by the foundation of scientific societies in England (especially the Society for Psychical Research). Attempts were made to approach mesmeric, psychical and spiritualistic phenomena 'without prejudice', which, if incontestably established, would found experimentally based metaphysics.

The development of psychical research and its reception were clearly influenced by shifting political, professional, moral and rhetoric objectives. The experimental efforts to discriminate between the effects of suggestion and the influences of a supposed unknown force led to the highest standards of positivist scientific methodology within psychical research. The examination of these topics also resulted in the development of a new psychological subdiscipline, the psychology of deception and belief.

Notes

- 1 See the classical studies on history of hypnosis and mesmerism: Henry Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York, 1970); Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge, 1992).
- 2 'Scientific occultism' was the usual expression in German-speaking countries for the Anglo-American 'psychical research', at least until the 1920s. The word 'psychical' itself was invented in 1856 by the chemist Robert Hare (1781–1858) to dissociate his research on spiritualism from the taint of quackery (quoted in Ted J. Kaptchuk, 'Intentional Ignorance: A History of Blind Assessment and Placebo Controls in Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 72 (1998), 410). It is also important to note that the word 'psychical' was consistently used as synonym for 'psychological' by spiritists and psychical researchers until the 1920s. Research about spiritualistic phenomena was regularly designated as 'experimental psychology'. There was a growing resistance to this practice from representatives of academic experimental psychology (see Wilhelm Wundt's comments in this paper). This semantic ambivalence shows the inner conflict of psychology about its object, which was initially divided between the study of the rational mind and the immaterial spirit.
- 3 The philosopher Thomas Davidson wrote to his friend William James in 1883:

Nothing can save Europe but a complete social regeneration. ... Moreover no social regeneration is possible without a moral regeneration, & no moral regeneration is possible without a scientific insight into the eternity of the individual, such as no philosophy now in vogue is able to give.

 In subsequent letters, James and Davidson discussed the possibility of new forms of secular religion that would have to be based on a renewed 'belief in new *physical* facts & possibilities' (James to Davidson, 30 March 1884, James Papers). Quoted in Deborah J. Coon, 'Testing the Limits of Sense and Science. American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism, 1880–1920', *American Psychologist* 47 (1992), 144.
- 4 The term 'animism' was introduced by another important figure in German scientific occultism, the Russian spiritist Alexander Aksakow (1832–1903), who in 1874 founded the first journal of psychical research in Germany, the *Psychische Studien*. 'Spiritualism' is the Anglo-American expression for the belief in incarnate agencies surviving human death that are supposed to communicate with the living under certain circumstances. In English, 'spiritualism' is synonymous with 'spiritism' (but without the belief in reincarnation); in German and French, there is a differentiation between 'spiritism' and 'spiritualism'. Especially in the Romance countries, 'spiritism' includes the belief in reincarnation (corresponding to the teachings of Alan Kardec, the founder of French spiritism). 'Spiritualism' means an idealistic world-view, which does not necessarily include belief in reincarnation. See Werner Bonin, *Lexikon der Parapsychologie und ihrer Grenzgebiete* (Bern, 1976), pp. 463–64.

- 5 Andrew Jackson Davis, *Principles of Nature, her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (New York, 1847).
- 6 William Crookes, 'Spiritualism viewed by the Light of Modern Science', *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Science* (1870) as quoted in Brian Mackenzie, 'Parapsychology and the History of Science', *Journal of Parapsychology* 30 (1978), 200, a review essay of R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York, 1977).
- 7 The history of spiritism in Germany is still unwritten. Useful information is to be found in Adolf Kurzweg, 'Die Geschichte der Berliner "Gesellschaft für Experimental-Psychologie" mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Ausgangssituation und des Wirkens von Max Dessoir' (unpubl. med. thesis, Free University of Berlin, 1976), Nils Freytag, "'Zauber-, Wunder-, Geister- und sonstiger Aberglauben". Preußen und seine Rheinprovinz zwischen Tradition und Moderne (1815–1918)' (unpubl. historical thesis, University of Trier, 1998) and Ulrich Linse, *Geisterseher und Wunderwirker* (Frankfurt, 1996).
- 8 Linse, *Geisterseher*, pp. 66–87.
- 9 The *Vereinigung der deutschen Magnetopathen* was formed in 1888 and in 1890 the *Bund der deutschen Mesmeristen* under the doctor and socialist-spiritualist Georg von Langsdorff.
- 10 This implied that legal permission to cure persons without medical licences was granted by the German Reichstag in 1869/70.
- 11 Das Gesundheitswesen des Preußischen Staates im Jahre 1909 (Berlin, 1911) quoted in Cornelia Regin, *Selbsthilfe und Gesundheitspolitik. Die Naturheilbewegung im Kaiserreich (1889 bis 1914)* (Stuttgart, 1995), p. 285.
- 12 In fact, two important figures of the German naturopathic movement, Reinhold Gerling and Oskar Mummert, tried to introduce hypnotism and magnetopathy as a part of natural healing methods. See Regin, *Selbsthilfe und Gesundheitspolitik*, pp. 142 ff.
- 13 F.J. Hering, *Der menschliche Magnetismus als vornehmster Heilfaktor, seine Freunde und Gegner* (Konstanz, 1903); Philipp W. Kramer, *Der Heilmagnetismus. Seine Theorie und Praxis. Neu bearbeitet und mit einer Abhandlung über unsichtbare (magische) Strahlen versehen von Ludwig Tormin* (Leipzig, 1907).
- 14 H.R. Paul Schröder, *Geschichte des Lebensmagnetismus und des Hypnotismus* (Leipzig, 1899), p. 622; Reinhold Gerling, *Spiritisten ohne Geist* (Berlin, 1912).
- 15 Jens-Uwe Teichler, "'Der Charlatan strebt nicht nach Wahrheit, er verlangt nur nach Geld". Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen naturwissenschaftlicher Medizin und Laienmedizin im deutschen Kaiserreich am Beispiel von Hypnotismus und Heilmagnetismus' (unpubl. med. thesis, University of Leipzig, 1998), p. 121.
- 16 Teichler, 'Der Charlatan', pp. 149 ff.
- 17 The medical profession was particularly active in the drawing-up of the draft law. See Teichler, 'Der Charlatan', pp. 144–56.

- 18 Concerning the legal consequences, see Teichler, 'Der Charlatan', pp. 156–70.
- 19 His performances also helped to popularise magnetic healing in Germany.
- 20 Rudolf Heidenhain, *Der sogenannte thierische Magnetismus. Physiologische Beobachtungen* (Leipzig, 1880); Rudolf Heidenhain, *Hypnotism or Animal Magnetism. Physiological Observations* (London, 1888).
- 21 Heidenhain, *Der sogenannte thierische Magnetismus*, p. 4.
- 22 Teichler, 'Der Charlatan', p. 160.
- 23 Freytag, 'Zauber-, Wunder-, Geister- und sonstiger Aberglauben', pp. 282–83.
- 24 Wilhelm Wundt, *Der Spiritismus. Eine sogenannte wissenschaftliche Frage. Offener Brief an Herrn Prof. Hermann Ulrici in Halle* (Leipzig, 1879).
- 25 The fourth dimension played an important role in the theoretical writings of almost all modern art movements, beginning with cubism. See the catalogue of the exhibition '*Okkultismus und Avantgarde*' (Frankfurt a. Main, 1995).
- 26 Freytag, 'Zauber-, Wunder-, Geister- und sonstiger Aberglauben', pp. 297 ff.; Christoph Meinel, *Karl Friedrich Zöllner und die Wissenschaftskultur der Gründerzeit. Eine Fallstudie zur Genese konservativer Zivilisationskritik* (Berlin, 1991); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World. Spiritualism and psychical research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 391–97.
- 27 The British 'Society for Psychical Research' was engaged in revealing fraudulent manipulations undertaken by Madame Blavatzky; see Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp. 159–98.
- 28 Leopold Engel, *Internationales Adress-Buch vereinter Wahrheitssucher*, 2 Teile (Bitterfeld, 1896); Hans Freimark, *Die okkulte Bewegung* (Leipzig, 1912); Hans-Jürgen Glowka, *Deutsche Okkultgruppen 1875–1937* (Augsburg, 1981); Kurt Hutten, *Seher, Grübler, Enthusiasten* (Stuttgart, 1968); James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (Illinois, 1976); for the Mazdaznan Movement, see Wolfgang Krabbe, *Gesellschafts-veränderung durch Lebensreform* (Göttingen, 1974).
- 29 Anne Harrington, 'Hysteria, Hypnosis and the Lure of the Invisible: the Rise of Neo-mesmerism in Fin-de Siècle French Psychiatry' in W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd (eds.), *The Anatomy of Madness. Vol. III. The Asylum and its Psychiatry* (London, 1988), pp. 226–46.
- 30 See the catalogue from the exhibition of photography of the invisible: *Im Reich der Phantome. Fotografie des Unsichtbaren* (Osterfildern-Ruit, 1977). For a detailed historical study about the role of photography in the context of paranormal phenomena, see Rolf H. Krauss, *Jenseits von Licht und Schatten. Die Rolle der Photographie bei bestimmten paranormalen Phänomenen – ein historischer Abriss* (Marburg, 1992).
- 31 Many of these articles had been translated into German and published in occult journals in order to demonstrate the scientific character of these findings. For example, David Luys, 'Bericht über die photographische Registrirung von Fluiden, die den Fingerspitzen und den Augen lebender Wesen im physiologischen und

- pathologischen Zustände entströmen, Auszug aus den Sitzungsberichten der Société de Biologie (Sitzung vom 29. Mai 1897) nach der *Revue Spirite* 1897', *Die übersinnliche Welt* (1897), pp. 323–25; Hector Durville, *Der Fluidalkörper des lebenden Menschen. Experimentelle Untersuchungen über seine Anatomie und Physiologie* (Leipzig, 1912).
- 32 Harrington, 'Neo-mesmerism in French Psychiatry', p. 240.
- 33 Richet was the founder of French psychical research and experimented and published in this field throughout his professional life. For more details, see Stewart Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine: Charles Richet and the Origins of Physiological Psychology* (New Brunswick, 1993).
- 34 Pierre Janet, 'Notes sur quelques phénomènes de somnambulisme', *Revue philosophique* 21 (1886), 190–98; Pierre Janet, 'Deuxième note sur le sommeil provoqué à distance et la suggestion mentale pendant l'état somnambule', *Revue philosophique* 22 (1886), 212–23; Charles Richet, 'Un fait de somnambulisme à distance', *Bulletin de la Société de Psychologie Physiologique* (1885), 1–33; Charles Richet, 'Expériences sur le sommeil à distance', *Revue de l'Hypnotisme expérimental et thérapeutique*, 2 (1887/88), 225–40.
- 35 Hippolyte Bernheim, *Suggestion und ihre Heilwirkung* (trans. Sigmund Freud) (Leipzig, 1888), pp. XVI ff.
- 36 The aim of the British Society for Psychical Research was to investigate 'that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, and Spiritualistic'. Amidst much illusion and deception, they registered 'an important body of remarkable phenomena', 'which, if incontestably established, would be of the highest possible value' (leading to the experimental foundation of metaphysics). The Society wanted to approach these phenomena 'without prejudice' in a scientific 'spirit of exact and unimpassioned inquiry' (The Society for Psychical Research, 'Objects of the Society', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 1 (1882–83), 3–4. For more details, see Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London, 1968); Moore, *White Crows* and Oppenheim, *The Other World*.
- 37 Frederic W.H. Myers, 'Report of the Literary Committee', *PSPR*, 1, 147 (1882–83). He defined telepathy as: 'the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognized channels of sense'.
- 38 Wilhelm Preyer, *Die Erklärung des Gedankenlesens nebst Beschreibung eines neuen Verfahrens zum Nachweise unwillkürlicher Bewegungen* (Leipzig, 1886).
- 39 Kaptchuk, 'Intentional Ignorance', 411; see also Ian Hacking, 'Telepathy: Origins of Randomization in Experimental Design', *Isis*, 79 (1988), 427–51, 437.
- 40 Wilhelm Wundt, *Hypnotismus und Suggestion* (Leipzig, 1892). The statement is important, because it contains the central arguments against hypnosis and psychical research that characterized the debates in the following years.
- 41 Wundt, *Der Spiritismus*.

- 42 Wundt, *Hypnotismus*, p. 22 (the quotation is translated by Wolf-Braun).
 43 Wundt, *Hypnotismus*, p.11 (translated by Wolf-Braun).
 44 There is a wonderful citation from William James (1901 Gifford Lectures on the Varieties of Religious Experiences) dismissing medical materialism:

Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate. George Fox's discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a symptom of a disordered colon. Carlyle's organtones of misery it accounts for by a gastroduodenal catarrh. All such mental overtensions, it says, are, when you come to the bottom of the matter, mere affairs of diathesis [auto-intoxications most probably], due to the perverted action of various glands which physiology will yet discover.

Quoted in Edward Brown, 'Neurology and spiritualism in the 1870s', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 57 (1983), 563.

- 45 Albert Moll, *Der Rapport in der Hypnose. Untersuchungen über den thierischen Magnetismus* (Leipzig, 1892).
 46 L. Löwenfeld, *Somnambulismus und Spiritismus* (Wiesbaden, 1907), pp. 70–71; Albert Moll, *Der Hypnotismus* (Berlin, 1890), p. 322.
 47 The situation seemed quite different in the United States, where mainly psychologists were involved in this research. Coon has shown that they could not avoid the topic because of private funds given to the universities for the study of spiritualistic and psychical phenomena. Some psychologists proved them fraudulent or explained them via naturalistic causes; others developed a new subdiscipline, the psychology of deception and belief. Coon argues that psychologists used their battles with spiritualists to legitimise psychology as a science and create a new role for themselves as guardians of the scientific world-view. See Coon, 'Testing the Limits of Sense and Science', 143–51.
 48 Albert Moll, 'Über Heilmagnetismus und Heilmagnetiseure in forensischer Beziehung', *Vierteljahresschrift für gerichtliche Medizin und öffentliches Sanitätswesen* 35 (1907), 1–21, 2 as quoted in Teichler, 'Der Charlatan', p. 116.
 49 Albert Moll, *Gesundbeten. Medizin und Okkultismus* (Berlin, 1902); Albert Moll, 'Kurfuschertum und Suggestion', *Die Woche* 5 (1903), 367–69; Albert Moll, *Hypnotismus, Tierischer Magnetismus, Spiritismus*. Medizinische Volksbücherei. Heft 16. (Halle, 1905); Albert Moll, *Prophezeien und Hellsehen* (Stuttgart, 1922); Max Dessoir, 'Gespenster Lebender', *Über Land und Meer* 61 (1889), 223–24; Max Dessoir, 'Zur Psychologie der Taschenspielerkunst', *Nord und Süd* 52 (1890), 194–221.
 50 Moll, *Hypnotismus*, pp. 321–24; August Forel, *Der Hynotismus oder die Suggestion und die Psychotherapie. Ihre psychologische, psychophysiologische und medizinische Bedeutung*

mit Einschluss der Psychoanalyse, sowie der Telepathiefrage, 8th and 9th ed. (Stuttgart, 1919), pp. 46–78.

- 51 Christina Schröder, *Der Fachstreit um das Seelenheil. Psychotherapiegeschichte zwischen 1880 und 1932* (Frankfurt a. M., 1995).
- 52 In a lecture about thought transference the psychologist Hugo Münsterberg mentioned that the healthy willingness of the population to work could be seriously disturbed by the artificial intensification of hypnotic states. He diagnosed the economic breakdown of certain rural areas as being the result of the addiction of the population to spiritism. Hugo Münsterberg, *Gedankenübertragung. Vortrag gehalten in der Akademischen Gesellschaft zu Freiburg i.Br. am 10. Januar 1889* (Freiburg i. Br., 1889), p. 12.
- 53 In 1892 Schrenck-Notzing married Gabriele Siegle, the daughter of the industrialist and national liberal member of the *Reichstag* Gustav Siegle (Stuttgart), thus becoming financially independent. He then started intensive research on the physical phenomena (materialisations) produced by mediums. He became the most prominent figure in psychical research in Germany until his death in 1929. See Gerda Walther, 'Dr.med. Albert Feiherr von Schrenck-Notzing. Leben und Werk', in Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing, *Grundfragen der Parapsychologie* (Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 11–31. Financial independence of the researchers was a very important factor in this field, because there was no public financing and even less private funding than in England, France and the United States.

