"The three Fox sisters of Rochester, originators of the spirit-rapping movement" (caption by Edward Tylor)
Source: Edward Tylor's diary
PRM2009.148.2
Image courtesy the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

Animism meets Spiritualism: Edward Tylor's "Spirit Attack," London 1872.

Erhard Schüttpelz

1.

Recent research has subdivided the phenomenon known as "spiritualism" into a variety of local practices and motivations. However, this does not mean we are finished with the broader picture of "spiritualism" as an international movement closely associated with a single founding event (the Fox Sisters and their "rappings"), and transmitted primarily by travelling mediums, which appealed to both autodidact and academic audiences. In fact, the latest research into regional and variant practices only throws the international movement into sharper relief. What is now clearer is how spiritualism served as an international lingua franca, a sort of international pidgin differently creolized in various locations. Seen in this light, transatlantic spiritualism consists of the transposition of local necromantic practices into the vocabulary of a highly mobile international lingua franca, and vice versa.

There were several kinds of "translation" at work. First, as very early observers like Frank Podmore grasped, the appearance of the rapping spirits in provincial upstate New York became the founding event of spiritualism thanks to its transatlantic transfer, itself part of a broader transmission via mass media and media tours.[1] Mesmerist techniques of "induced trance," long widespread in continental Europe, were now discovered in the Anglo-Saxon countries as a necromantic technique. They became the subject of public discussion there, but now associated with events that would previously have been classified as a kind of poltergeist. Moreover, via Great Britain these techniques now returned to Europe, where they emerged as a sensation and a novelty in the fashion for "table tapping" and the public appearances of mediums. This view of international spiritualism will doubtless be modified in the light of recent work, but even the most up-to-date accounts of spiritualism's emergence retain this figure of its transatlantic transfer, spanning the "Spiritual Atlantic," an area also connected with the colonies, and, thanks to Kardecism, with South America.

Second, new practices centered on the translation of spirit messages. Since the Fox Sisters, this translation had repeatedly been conceived in terms of recoding, and, more broadly, of communications technologies. "Tapping" and unsemantic "rumbling" became comprehensible when understood as an alphabetic sequence corresponding to an arithmetic code. From this point, it was only a short step to comparisons with telegraphy and Morse code: the American idea of the "spiritual telegraph."[2] Until the end of the nineteenth century, transatlantic spiritualism was marked by high expectations regarding the place of new information technologies in spirit communication. This

1 Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism,* 2 vols., (London: Methuen, 1902).

2 Werner Sollors, "Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Celestial Telegraph, or Indian Blessings to Gaslit American Drawing Rooms," *American Quarterly,* no. 35 (1983): 459–480.

belief was seen as both verified and falsified in the development of what were then "new media" (for example, photography, the invention of radio transmission). It further manifested itself in the ongoing concern with the recoding of messages received from spirits. The first translation took place in the gap between the human medium and the technical apparatus, but it depended on the inseparability of the two. "No spirit messages without a personal medium," remained spiritualism's fundamental axiom, even when an automatic technical apparatus seemed to render the human medium superfluous. No matter how elaborate spiritualism's cosmology became, its minimum requirements remained, first, a commitment to the inseparability of human mediums and technical media, and, second, to new technologies and techniques that would maintain their association.

Third, the foundation of transatlantic spiritualism did not consist of the discovery of new kinds of spirits or messages. Rather, its styling as a founding event was the result of a widespread debate, which amounted to a permanent work of translation between competing versions of the Fox Sisters' story. This debate—between the versions of believers and opponents, between faithful adherents and skeptical demystifiers—was further marked by defections and conversions. Having begun with the first publications on spiritualism, the debate made the Fox Sisters the prisoners of a lifelong regime of apparitions and unmaskings, a process that ended late in their lives with their self-revelation and subsequent recantation. With regard to transatlantic spiritualism, it thus makes little sense to attempt to isolate an uncontroversial or essential practice. The controversy around spiritualism, the debate on the possibilities of telecommunication—in a sense, this is what spiritualism actually *was*. More precisely, we might give this mode a deliberately modernist name: the debate is the "International Style" of spiritualism. As the debate came to a close towards the end of the nineteenth century, its self-appointed historians emerged from both camps—adherents[3] and skeptics.[4]

In this spiritualist International Style, no practices or mediums could escape the tension between revelation and unmasking. Neither were any completely removed from mass media: ever since the Fox Sisters had climbed the podium, the movement was fundamentally concerned with the publicizability of spirit communications. As the historian Michael Hochgeschwender has shown, the mass marketing of religious revelation was already a significant phenomenon in the USA, even before the public appearance of spiritualism.[5] Hence the international debate around spiritualism constantly oscillated between private spaces and mass media, between skepticism and persuasion, between self-marketing and journalistic campaigns of unmasking. Even at this point, private spaces could count on a level of regular reportage, already with its own generic rules.

3   Alexander N. Aksákow, *Animismus und Spiritismus* (Leipzig: Oswald Mutze, 1890).

4   Podmore.

5   Michael Hochgeschwender, "Geister des Fortschritts: Der US-amerikanische Spiritualismus und seine mediale Vermittlung im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Trancemedien und Neue Medien um 1900,* ed. Marcus Hahn and Erhard Schüttpelz, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009), 79–96.

6   Bernhard Lang and Colleen McDannell, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

"Spirit-photograph of William Howitt (in the flesh) and granddaughter (in the spirit)" (caption by Edward Tylor)
Source: Edward Tylor's diary
PRM2009.148.3
Courtesy the Pitt Rivers Museum.

2.

For a public debate to be launched and for it to persist over time, there must be a certain common ground between opposed participants. Only when these points in common are no longer self-evident do debates dissipate, disappear, or transform into something else. However, in retrospect, this kind of common ground is often the most difficult aspect to properly comprehend. Spiritualism was marked by this structure between about 1850 and 1890, until the gradual waning of the debate's intensity around the later date. To sum up: What spiritualists and their opponents shared was an uncontroversial belief in the existence of a Beyond, and of a life after death. Precisely because it was shared and uncontroversial, however, this common belief remained largely unthematized in the controversy itself. Where it *was* addressed, it did not become an issue for debate. The crucial point is that the desire to prove and to concretely stage the communication of the spirits of the dead did not—in ideological terms—come from the margins of religion or of science. Instead, it emerged from the broad consensus of progressive-minded belief in the hereafter, a consensus spanning the late eighteenth and the whole of the nineteenth century. As Lang and McDannell have pointed out,[6] the idealizing "anthropocentric heaven" of progressive afterlife theories had succeeded in assimilating the hereafter with earthly life. Heaven was no longer centered on God, it was instead focused on mankind's mutual sympathy and ever-increasing cooperation, a process that incorporated both the living on earth and the dead in heaven. From this viewpoint, life beyond became a continuation of earthly life under more ideal conditions. There was "a new Heaven and a new Earth," requiring a belief that progress would be realized through communication, active cooperation, and practical mutual sympathy. In this way, earthly life and the hereafter not only came to

resemble each other; they, in fact, also approached each other. Moreover, the spiritualist heaven was the *modern* heaven, dominating, in the course of the nineteenth century, both Protestant and Catholic notions of the afterlife. So the battle lines between spiritualism's adherents and its opponents did not run through the imagination of the afterlife itself. Rather, the dispute lay with the controversial assertion—both practical and theoretical—that the convergence of the living and the dead should result in their *actual* communication. Hitherto, this convergence had been understood only in terms of progressive knowledge and mutual improvement through cooperation, sympathy, and communication.

Therefore, at the center of the debate between spiritualism and anti-spiritualism, we find an axiom that would not have made sense in other spirit-communication contexts, in Europe or elsewhere. This axiom posited that an anxiety-free and sentimental sympathy between the living and the dead was provable in practical terms, and that such a sympathy was the precondition of all communication between the living and the dead. Both the Beyond and its individual constituent spirit souls were actually constituted in this "sympathetic" fashion. In strong contrast with many—in fact, all—other European and non-European visitations of the dead, these were remarkably pacified spirits, which came both to assert and to perform a peaceful, amicable, fond communication.

3.

If we take into account this fundamental consensus between adherents and opponents of spirit communication, we can better understand the technical consensus reigning between the two groups. Opponents of spiritualism wanted to prove that communication with the dead was impossible, or impossible in this particular way. Every fresh claim had to be refuted anew, and a decisive refutation lay solely in the revelation of deception and of self-deception. General suspicion could be focused through individual acts of exposure, aimed at each human medium and for each technology used, incorporating the establishment of a Tribunal of Reference for the spirit summoned and leading to a decisive weakening of the credibility of a medium or a technique. Among spiritualism's opponents, the Tribunal of Reference was understood above all, as a means of identifying the tricks used to bring about an apparition. Spiritualism's adherents, by contrast, did not need to deny the possibility of tricks, deception, and self-deception—the broad existence of such things was readily admitted in spiritualist texts. Adherents could so easily make this admission because they were solely concerned with the real possibility of communication with the dead. This possibility, it was felt, could persist even in the face of unmaskings and refutations; it was identifiable in the remainder left unexplained by these revelations, their shadow side. Proofs of deception could thus even be seen as an ongoing refinement of spiritualism, a process by which intentional action and possible deceptions would be progressively dissociated from spiritual effects and their proofs, allowing a deepening and clarifying of the gap between human action and the realm of spirit communications. For the skeptic, proving the impossibility of spirit communications was as a zero-sum game: the spiritualist would

lose and the skeptic would win. By contrast, the adherents' idea of the proof of spiritualist communication was *not* as a zero-sum game. In this case, *both* parties would win; in fact, each would benefit from the gain of the other. This constellation—combining, on the one hand, the assertion of a possibility, and, on the other, the attempt to prove an impossibility—underlies the striking informality and calm in relations between adherents and opponents investigating dubious cases, with both parties secure in their respective positions.

In addition, as in any debate, there was always a hope of bringing the opponent over to one's own side: the hope of incorporating skeptics' efforts into a more successful summoning of the spirits, or, on the other side, the hope of turning the conjuring-up of spirits into a decisive disproof against itself. More generally, there was a wish to make mediums and their technical media into devices of skepticism and disenchantment (this was at stake in the Fox Sisters' defections at the end of their career), and—on the other side—to turn skeptics and disenchanters into spiritualist adherents, and perhaps even into mediums. There is a rich set of examples of these conversions in the spiritualist debate. But what are the general rules of this game?
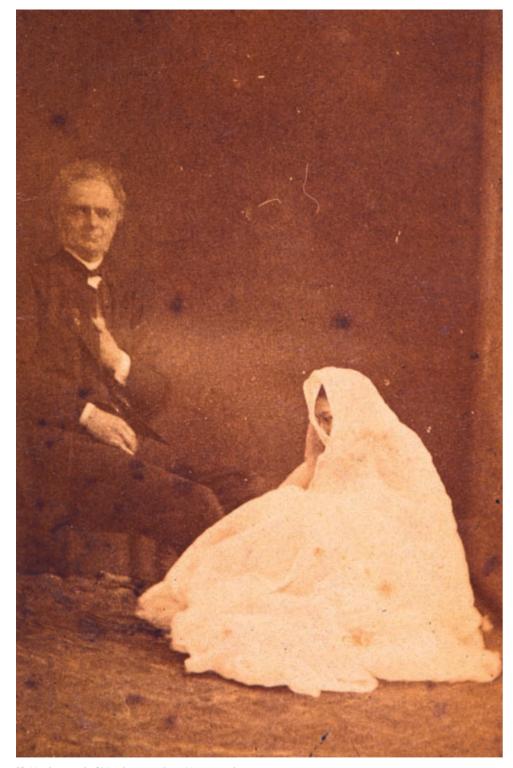
A conversion experience seems to include within it the sense of a previously known situation "turning" or "tipping" into something else, possibly into its opposite. A conversion could simply be a disillusionment. This was precisely the aim of spiritualism's opponents, who attempted to weaken the credibility of mediums, adherents, arguments, and practices to such an extent that individual spiritualists would simply become disillusioned. The historical record amply documents the skeptics' criminalistic patience and cunning in pursuing mediums and their performances and apparatuses.[7] On the face of it, these efforts at revelation and refutation seem convincing and straightforward, until we begin to consider instances in which declared opponents of spiritualism were unable to resist a séance's force. Or rather, they were unable to resist its *lack* of force, the amicable sympathy of the situation. On the side of the spiritualists, there was thus no "arms race" of tricks, no constant development of new ruses to out-do the skeptic in cunning and connivance.

In response to skeptics' "unveiling" attacks, adherents of spiritualism turned to another kind of attack—what I.M. Lewis called the "spirit attack."[8] This was a friendly and sympathetic attack by spirits, taking the form—quite unexpectedly for the skeptic—of a pronounced and unexpected sympathy and a relatively open encounter with an unknown. This ultimately took the form of an unknown (dead) individual, of whom the medium took possession in a trance, or by some kind of signal transmission, and who then addressed those present via the medium. The skeptic, in other words, was answered with a message of love. As the spiritualist Alexander Aksákow put it: "In fact, if we grant at all the existence of something beyond death, then this is most likely to be love, pity, our investment in those close to us, our desire to tell them that we continue to exist. And it is precisely these sentiments which most commonly 'motivate' spirit or soul interventions."[9]

7 Podmore.

8 I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

9 I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

"Spirit-photograph of Mr John Jones, & a spirit supposed to be a deceased daughter" (caption by Edward Tylor)
Source: Edward Tylor's diary
PRM2009.148.4
Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

4.

An 1872 journal written by a founder of cultural anthropology contains two of the most interesting descriptions of precisely this kind of "spirit attack." However, even the existence of the text is itself something of a sensation: it is as if Lévi-Strauss, at the high point of his work, had reentered psychoanalytic treatment in order to reveal its charlatanry. (In fact, Lévi-Strauss would have no need of this—by the time he had decried psychoanalysis as a modern form of magic, he was already an intimate friend of Jacques Lacan.)[10] To extend the comparison: Edward Tylor had at this point already published his main theoretical book, *Primitive Culture* (1871), the founding document of cultural anthropology. Contemporary spiritualism was at the very center of this book, sometimes implicitly, sometimes acknowledged explicitly. However, at the same time, Tylor's text excluded spiritualism from the contemporary world, characterizing it as both a contemporary "animism" and an untimely "survival."[11] In fact, had the spiritualist movement not existed, "spiritualism" is probably the term Tylor would have used to refer to "animism" as a more precise expression for the spirit-inhabited religious world of primitive peoples. As George Stocking observed of Tylor's early writings: "[Tylor] offered a number of examples to show how 'man in his lowest known state of culture is a wonderfully ignorant, consistent, and natural spiritualist,' how the 'effects of his early spiritualism may be traced through the development of more cultured races,' and how his early 'all-pervading spiritualism' forms 'a basis upon which higher intellectual stages have been reared.'"[12] From this point of view, contemporary spiritualism was merely the untimely expression of an archaic form of thought and of its ritual practices, a residual "survival" from another time. In 1869, Tylor made this explicit: "Modern spiritualism is a survival and a revival of savage thought, which the general tendency of civilization and science has been to discard."[13]

The impact of Tylor's dismissal of contemporary spiritualism as allochronic—something from another era—and his scholarly rejection of its own loudly proclaimed claims to modernity and progressivism can be felt even in the present day, probably more influential than all the scandals and the skeptics' campaigns of revelation. There is probably no more difficult fate than that of a modernizing movement that has the legitimacy of its modernity denied. And it was explicitly as a modernizing movement that transatlantic spiritualism made its appearance, and, as shown above with regard to its beliefs in the afterlife, it was undoubtedly correct in this self-description. Spiritualism is one of the few genuinely modern movements to have experienced a thoroughgoing delegitimation, to be banished from the history of modernity and of modernization. Tylor's visits to London séances can thus be read as a journey made in order to encounter the phenomena underlying his two great terminological coinages: first, "animism" in a non-authentic or at least questionable form, namely as "spiritualism," and second, the "survival" of older and still potent customs. He would meet there, so to speak, the dis-simultaneity of the simultaneous, the asynchronicity of the synchronous. His journal begins with just such an intention: "In November 1872, I went up to London to look into the alleged manifestations. My previous connexion with the subject had been mostly by

10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and His Magic," [1949] in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Curing,* ed. George Middleton, (New York: Natural History Press, 1967), 23–41.

11 Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture,* (New York: J.P. Putnam's Sons, 1871).

12 George Stocking, "Animism in Theory and Practice. E.B. Tylor's unpublished 'Notes on Spiritualism,'" in *Man* (n.s.), no. 6 (1971): 90.

13 Edward Tylor, "Notes on 'Spiritualism,'" in George Stocking, 92–100.

way of tracing its ethnology, & I had commented somewhat severely on the absurdities shown by examining the published evidence."[14]

For Tylor, the spirits he would encounter would represent a non-authentic form of "animism," and their agents would be a kind of "living dead," untimely members of a modern era that had left animism long behind. We might expect that these central motifs of *Primitive Culture* would be reflected in Tylor's protocol. However, his participant observation of "animism" and of "survivals" quickly reached its limits. While Tylor did leave the journal in publishable form, giving it the unmistakeable title "Notes on 'Spiritualism'" and providing it with a literary ending unarguably clear and memorable, the text remained unpublished for a hundred years. Since George Stocking's publication of the journal, however, the text has prompted the revision both of the history of ethnology and the history of spiritualism.[15] As I will show, the journal amounts to a highly revealing ethnographic investigation, a pioneering work of "domestic ethnology," which also amply documents the interplay between a researcher's anxiety and his research methodology.[16]

The séances attended by Tylor featured two "oldtimers or believers" for every one "newcomer or sceptic."[17] Among these skeptics and novices were a strikingly high number of anthropologically-minded academic observers, including the co-founder of evolution theory, Alfred Wallace,[18] the museum founder Pitt Rivers (whose museum would later be led by Tylor), members of the Howitt family, early ethnographers of Australia, as well as several physicians. On September 4, 1872, Tylor visited his first séance, which featured Mrs. Jennie Holmes, "a stout pasty-faced half-educated American with a black bush of curls."[19] Pasted into Tylor's journal for this date is a clipping of a newspaper advertisement that explicitly invites skeptical researchers—like Edward Tylor—to the séance: "*Mrs Jennie Holmes* (late of New Orleans, La., U.S.A.) SEANCES, for Musical, Physical, Trance, Inspirational, and Materialisation Manifestations, will be held every MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, and THURSDAY Evenings, at her reception rooms, No. 16, Old Quebec Street (two doors from Oxford Street), Marble Arch, W., at Eight o'clock; fee, 5 s. Private Sittings, for Business and Medical Consultations, from One to Four o'clock p.m. same days; fee, One Guinea. Strangers, investigators, and non-believers especially, are invited to attend, to 'prove all things and hold fast to that which is good'. – Her powers as a Medium have been the subject of wonder and comment throughout the United States, Canada, and Central America. Her endorsements are from some of the most prominent gentlemen of the States."[20]

One prominent feature of Jennie Holmes's repertoire was a summoning of the spirits of the Indian dead, not an unusual phenomenon in 1870s America. "The medium was then possessed by a little Indian girl-spirit named Rosie, who talked a kind of negro jargon, speaking of Mrs. Holmes as my squaw, my medy (short for medium), etc. A favourite joke was to say 'you stand under me' for you understand, etc."[21] In his journal, Tylor noted with satisfaction his reaction to the dead girl's mixture of impertinence and strangeness, and her blurring of the social boundaries of North America. (Supposedly an Indian, she performed black folklore ["nigger melodies"] and a variety of other songs.) He thumbed his nose at the medium in the dark, noting how Jenny Hol-

14 Tylor (1971), 91.

15 Peter Pels, "Spirits of Modernity: Alfred Wallace, Edward Tylor and the Visual Politics of Facts," in Magic and Modernity. Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, (Amsterdam: 2000), 302–340.

16 Georges Devereux, From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences, (The Hague: Mouton, 1967)

17 Tylor (1971), 92.

18 Malcolm Jay Kotter, "Alfred Russell Wallace, the Origin of Man, and Spiritualism," *Isis*, no. 65 (1974): 145–192.

19 Tylor (1971), 93.

20 Edward Tylor, "Notes on 'Spiritualism,'" [1872], Manuscript copy, Pitt-Rivers Museum, Manuscript Collections, Oxford.

21 Tylor (1971), 93.

mes "reproved me for keeping one leg crossed over the other, which she declared she saw in the dark […] She did not, however, appear to see the free hand which I occupied in making the long nose for a good time in her direction."[22] Even today, thanks to Tylor's protocol, the comedy of this scene remains informative. The spirits appear, but they do so in an impossible, childish, ridiculous way; the expert defends himself with a mocking gesture, just as childish, directed at the medium. Only towards the end of the journal entry do we find anything amounting to a scientific assessment of the spirit claims. Here, too, the encounter begins with an attack, but a "spirit attack" in which the dead Indian girl "Rosie" declares Tylor to be a suitable medium: "Rosie declared that she saw light about my face and that I was highly mediumistic. She did not mind my being what she called a skepatic, because this does not interfere with truth. Rosie talked what she called Ojibwy Indian and I call gibberish. I asked her the word for stone, which was nothing like the real word."[23]

In this way, Tylor's account of his meeting with "Rosie" is organized as a series of attacks and counter-attacks. At the beginning of the séance, he is warned not to cross his legs, probably because this would break the circle with a point of "resistance." And in fact, he reinforces his resistance—if only in retrospect in his protocol—by means of his aggressive gesture. Ascribed with mediumistic gifts, including the visibility of a medium's light around the face, he counters with a professional counter-attack, attempting to show Rosie's revelations to be self-contradictory. This is a Tribunal of Reference: the spirit claims to be an Ojibway Indian, but doesn't even know the word for "stone." The logic of the encounter is obvious. Tylor understands the exchange as a zero-sum game, and plays it in this manner. His opponent, however, does not. Instead, she emphasizes the possibility of changing sides and the existence of shared values: "She did not mind my being what she called a skepatic, because this does not interfere with truth."[24] Tylor chalks up the encounter as a victory. Together with an artist and a lawyer, he makes his way home. All are agreed on the results of the investigation, marking it down as a successful tribunal: "Our verdict was simply imposture. I should say the most shameful and shameless I ever came across."[25]

22 Tylor (1971), 93.

23 Tylor (1971), 94.

24 Tylor (1971), 94.

25 Tylor (1971), 94.

John Beattie
T*hree series of chronophotographs,* 1872
Source: Alexander N. Aksákow,
Animismus und Spiritismus.[26]

26 These photographs were apparently shown to Edward Tylor by Stainton Moses on November 24, 1872. Tylor reports: "The next morning we spent about the grounds & I had a long smoke & talk with Moses in the afternoon, on the question of the spirit photographs, of which on the whole his talk though professing scepticism tended to confirm the reality of in certain instances. He showed us photos, taken with blurs of white, behind, which he suggested however might have been made by waving a white handkerchief."

5.

Visits to four further séances, including an appearance by Kate Fox, one of modern spiritualism's most prominent mediums, presented no particular challenge to Tylor. Only the last of the séance series turned into an unexpected test. This encounter amounted to a kind of summit meeting between British cultural anthropology and British scholarly spiritualism, represented respectively by Tylor and by Stainton Moses (whose pseudonym in global spiritualist publications was "M.A. Oxon.") The particular significance of the meeting for Tylor may also have lain, first, in the fact that this was a European meeting, entirely without reference to non-European customs, groups, or religions, and, second, because, here, the mediumistic trance appears in a very English context, amidst the best social circles.[27] A clergyman and private tutor, who only converted to spiritualism in 1872, William Stainton Moses was in later years the only widely-known British medium not to be subjected to a campaign of unmasking. This may have been due to his astute deployment of both his clerical expertise and his biographical background: "At our first talk he jumped at the idea of experimental tests […] On Nov. 15 I saw him again at the school & he told me about his life, how he was a sickly boy & sleepwalker, did an essay in his sleep which had weighed on his mind when awake, & got prize for it. He would have got honours at Oxford, for he was always at head of class, but broke down with brain fever just before examinations. He described himself as sensitive in the extreme, only sleeps 4 hours, has mysterious senses of future things."[28]

27 Stocking, 102.

28 Tylor (1971), 99.

Moses's "spirit attack" on Tylor—in Tylor's account—parallels "Rosie's" friendly attack, but with a different outcome. The medium's higher credibility, his social proximity and his particular sensibility to illness seem to have played a key role here. The long "warm-up" to the séance may also have had an impact. This consisted of a close inspection of spirit photographs "with blurs of white," which had a strong effect on Tylor. Tylor's protocol of the evening of November 23, 1872 thus records the paradoxical capacity of the medium and his circle to bring the séance to a tipping point, which reinterprets the skeptical observer's resistance as mediumistic sensitivity. To counter this accusation of his own sensitivity (albeit not during the séance itself), Tylor turned to modern topoi of demystification, seeking in this way to subsume the spiritualist "proofs" into his own discourse: "One characteristic of the evening was that it came to be gradually opined that my presence was injurious, & when I absented myself for a while I was informed on returning that more moving & noise had happened than the whole time of my presence. In fact the manifestations had been violent. Moses expressed strong belief that as similar followed on his early sittings with Herne and Williams whose manifesting force he almost neutralised, so I, being a powerful but undeveloped medium, was absorbing all the force. In the course of the evening Moses 'became entranced,' yawning gasping & twitching & falling into a comatose state. Then his hand twitched violently, & a pencil and paper being put into it he wrote rapidly in large letters, 'We cannot manifest through the medium' or something of the kind. I think it was genuine, & afterwards, I myself became drowsy & seemed to the others about to go off likewise. To myself I seemed partly under a drowsy influence, and partly consciously sham-

ming, a curious state of mind which I have felt before & which is very likely the incipient stage of hysterical simulation. It was a kind of tendency to affect more than I actually felt."[29]

29 Tylor (1971), 100.

John Beattie
Three series of chronophoto-graphs (the second), 1872
Source: Alexander N. Aksákow,
Animismus und Spiritismus.

30 Tylor (1971), 100.

These lines form the paradoxical climax of Tylor's séances: not long after, he broke off the visits, concluding his observations with a labored expression of disbelief, cast in biblical style: "Blessed are they that have seen, and *yet* have believed."[30] The protocol clearly shows how the resistance of the skeptical observer could, in the context of the séance, be given new significance, altering the situation and creating a new psychic and psychosomatic disposition. The form of a logical paradox explicitly appears here, with its manifestation the precise tipping point: the spirits cannot manifest themselves through the medium, but their non-appearance itself becomes a kind of appearance. The spirits communicate that "we will not communicate," or, as in the protocol, "we cannot manifest through the medium." The written message directed at Tylor indicates that he is absorbing all energies, be it through his own mediumistic capacity or by virtue of his resistance. Moses then alludes to a similar experience he had had as a novice, at the joint appearance of two well-known British mediums. By means of this kind of story, the observer himself is put in the position of a novice, made to feel—through the latent public opinion in the room—that a change of roles has already taken place: "It was gradually opined that my presence was injurious." We can assume that this emphasis at the very least made Tylor (and any skeptical observer) aware of his own obstruction, while additionally making him the centre of attention. It was now he who was under scrutiny. A reversal of the initial situation—now obvious to all—had taken place, without Tylor being able to do much about it; even a temporary absence on his part counted against him. From this point on, rather than simply observing the medium, he himself was under observation for his potential mediumistic capacity. Opinion in the room already had him down as a potential novice medium.

Indeed, it is striking how it is precisely at the most explicit and intensified moment of his resistance—his paradoxical objectification into a communication from the spirits—at which Tylor's resistance begins to break. He reacts to the mediumistic trance, and its paradoxical messages, by beginning himself to drift off into a kind of trance—the first and only time this would occur: "I myself became drowsy and seemed to the others to go off likewise." The observer-observed situation is reversed. The power of attribution too seems to shift—for the other participants, it seems reasonable to interpret Tylor's behavior as the behavior of a spiritualist medium, and to begin to inquire as to the messages he might be communicating. Bearing in mind the nature of the participant audience, this reversal—which could even amount to a possible conversion—arose spontaneously and empirically from the situation and from Tyler's own reactions.

John Beattie
Three series of chronophotographs (the third), 1872
Source: Alexander N. Aksákow, *Animismus und Spiritismus.*

6.

If Tylor did not want to concede defeat to this incipient consensus in the room, he was left to deploy *against himself* various topoi that depicted skeptical unmasking as a kind of deception or self-deception. He had used these familiar topoi before, against ideas of mediumistic sensitivity, and more generally, against magic. In *Primitive Culture*, he says of the magician: "The sorcerer generally learns his time-honoured profession in good faith, and retains his belief in it more or less from first to last; at once dupe and cheat, he combines the energy of a believer with the cunning of a hypocrite."[31] Analogous to this, Tylor here performs a kind of self-exposure, as someone who is "at once dupe and cheat." On the one hand, he suggests that his mood of incipient trance was based on a *suspension* of consciousness, manifested in his "drowsiness." On the other, the trance also functioned by virtue of his "conscious shamming," his decision to "affect more than I actually felt." If the clichés of spiritualist capacity are based on a widespread diffusion of eighteenth-century literary sensibility, then here we see the process

31 Tylor (1871), vol.1, 134.

in reverse, as Tylor recalls the inauthentic aspects of this earlier literary sensibility. He perceives not a true affect, but rather an affectedness: "The incipient stage of hysterical simulation" —that combination of hysteria, theatrical inauthenticity, and affective self-stimulation that, in the eighteenth century, was above all associated with women.[32] While this combination may have opened the way to pathological states, it could be normalized by means of self-observation, as here with Tylor, who calls it "a curious state of mind which I have felt before."

In this way, Tylor retrospectively succeeds in translating (through introspection: "To myself I seemed…") his séance experience into the language of intentionality, in order to conceive of it in terms of a *self-induced* simulation. Reading Tylor's account, the question arises whether we should continue to accept his interpretation. More precisely, we can ask what exactly the simulation here is. Did this experience actually take the form of a (self-) simulation? Or was it rather that Tylor retrospectively gave it the simulated form of a (self-) simulation? Either way, the protocol records an elementary process whereby the trance-experience appears to be transmitted to Tylor, observed by the medium and the others in the room ("I… seemed to the others to be about to go off likewise"). In this moment, in spite of his own intentional, directed opposition, Tylor succumbs.

Tylor's protocol of his own tipping point, momentarily indistinguishable from a spirit apparition, reveals better than any theory the relation of translation and transposition between the séance and its debunking. (Is this a moment of initiation into a medium's world? Is the psychological self-unmasking convincing? Who is fooling whom?) We can see, moreover, the precise ways in which this translatability reveals itself at the center of the séance, in the spirits' address. The demystifiers aimed to reveal the *intentions* of the spiritualists by their actions: actions of trickery and deception to be revealed by a self-induced self-deception. For the spiritualists, by contrast, the séance would make manifest the gap between, on the one hand, the world of human actions, and on the other, the world of mediumistic sensibility and workings of the spirit. This particular (minimal) sensibility could pass over from one participant into others. It could be experienced, for example, within the séance's human circle, whose movements could be startling, and which also served as feedback effects. The sensibility could also be passed on through the interpretation of certain effects (and non-actions) as "signals", and their recoding (not as actions but as further effects). The preparation and intensification of a séance, but also of any other spiritualist medium-practice, served at the very least to intensify this sensibility, allowing the world of human actions and the world of spirit effects and influences to palpably diverge. Tylor's protocol records how during a séance this divergence could be experienced even—or especially—by skeptics, their sensibility paradoxically heightened by their own resistance.

What was experienced here, to use Godfrey Lienhardt's precise terms, was the experience of the difference "between the self as subject of experience, and what is not the self as the object of experience."[33] The séance was an empirical manifestation of the gap between, on the one hand, action and intention, and on the other, the passive experience of effects, whether of a trivial, painful, or simply absent-minded kind. The séance deepened the chasm between the two modes of expe-

32 Ursula Geitner, "Passio Hysterica: Die alltägliche Sorge um das Selbst," in *Frauen, Weiblichkeit, Schrift*, ed. Renate Berger (Berlin: Argument, 1985), 130–144.

33 Godfrey Lienhardt, "Modes of Thought," in *The Institutions of Primitive Society*, ed. E.E. Evans-Pritchard et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 95–107.

rience. Into this gap came the spirits, to whose presence was then ascribed this process of deepening, and its subsequent experiential consequences.

If we accept the above reconstruction, then the encounter between adherents and opponents of spiritualism—the encounter underlying the spiritualist "International Style"—becomes more plausible. We can understand better the difficulties that skeptics had as soon as they tried to thematize this experiential "gap" for a spiritualist audience. We can better comprehend how spiritualist adherents could put their hopes in new technologies and even in techniques of demystification (including the development of laboratory techniques). It becomes clearer, moreover, that every spiritualist medial practice involved both human mediums and technical media, insisted on the inseparability of the two, and was performed in the hope of a successful "spirit attack." Adherents hoped that a spiritualist sphere of medial passivity could be isolated and distilled from a broader zone, including fraud, and of mediums' self-induced utterances, the existence of which was freely acknowledged. There was no reason to exclude fraudulent practices from spiritualism's investigation. However, it was recognized that the required sensitivity could be passed from the medium to other participants: In fact, this possibility formed the core of spiritualist social relations (of mediums and clients). In this way, both sides could share a common interest in the invention of radio,[34] insomuch as this involved testing a new technical sensitivity; in other words, the intensification of both human sensibility and technical sensitivity. But the sides necessarily came into conflict as soon as the sensibility of the human medium was denigrated or disallowed.

It can also be suggested that, in the key area of psychological and psychosomatic statements, the claims of skeptics necessarily remained implausible for spiritualists and other séance participants. The world of action and the world of reception (that is, the world of experienced effects and sensibilities) strongly diverged here in a way that could be empirically experienced and could be further intensified by specific practices. Therefore, opposed skeptics not only had to disprove that this gap was caused by spirits, they had also to close this gap with effective concepts. This meant convincingly identifying the "self as subject of experience" with the "not the self as object of experience." The demystifiers succeeded in doing so in response to certain tricks, but they had more difficulty with the central trance-experience itself. Very few concepts seemed capable of closing, once and for all, the gap experienced by the subject between individual conscious action and effects from outside the self. One such concept was Tylor's idea of mediums' "self-deception" as "at once dupe and cheat." Tylor's account might stigmatize the spiritualist mediums in social terms, but ultimately, the experience-memory of the transmissibility of a "psychic force" could not simply be written off: "So that our talk ended with more reference to simulating hysteria, & the way in which even occasional fraud spoils the evidence of psychic force, tho' in wonder at Moses's spiritual gifts."[35]

34 Peter Rowlands and J. Patrick Wilson, (eds.), *Oliver Lodge and the Invention of Radio* (Liverpool: PD Publications, 1994).

35 Tylor (1971), 100.

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Perhaps the reason Tylor's journal remained unpublished was because its labored ascription of "self-deception" was ultimately an unconvincing exposure of fraudulent practice. The witness who acknowledges his own skillful "self-deception" undermines his own credibility and provokes others to recategorize *him*. The kinds of inauthenticity that Tylor expected to find in spiritualism—the underlying deception and its untimeliness—proved, in the end, to undermine his *own* authenticity, doing so, moreover, by the induction of a kind of male hysteria. For these reasons, however, Tylor's journal is today all the more revealing and authentic as an ethnographic protocol, made during a participant observation of spiritualism. It includes intentionally parodic aspects— as an account of an expedition, part-success and part-failure, to the heart of transatlantic spiritualism. Edward Tylor sought a confrontation with something he, in *Primitive Culture*, had characterized as the relation between "animism" and "spiritualism." He did experience— in his own body as well as through his observation of others—a fundamental aspect of what he called "animism." This was a temporary disturbance in his consciousness, which went beyond everyday mental experience, and which, then and now, posed difficult questions about consciousness and agency. Tylor could not, and would not, attribute this animating experience to the undead ghosts of spiritualism; but his labored self-description remained marked by a contradiction in a failed attempt to prove his own dissembling. Beyond this, however, what survives is a protocol of anxiety and of method: "Blessed are they that have seen, and met their experience with disbelief."

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