

PLATO'S GHOST

SPIRITUALISM IN THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

CATHY GUTIERREZ



Plato's Ghost

This page intentionally left blank

Plato's Ghost

Spiritualism in the American Renaissance

CATHY GUTIERREZ

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2009

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2009 Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Plato's ghost : spiritualism in the American Renaissance / Cathy Gutierrez
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-19-538835-0

1. Spiritualism—United States. 2. United States—Religion—History. I. Title
BX9798.S7G88 2009

133.90973'09034—dc22 2008055806

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

For Eric Casey, who keeps me afloat

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

Writing a first book has really been a process of learning how to trust one's voice. Several people have been instrumental in that process and I would like to thank them. Ted Vial, the editor for joint Oxford and American Academy of Religion's Cultural Criticism series, Cynthia Read, Oxford's Religion editor, and Jim Wetzel, the former editor for this series, have all been perspicacious and kind throughout. I thank them for their keen eyes and for their encouragement. Everyone I have worked with at Oxford University Press has made this a significantly improved book and has been generous with their time and knowledge.

I would also like to thank Sweet Briar College for helping to fund much of the research for this book and its inaugural runs in many conference presentations. My congenial department and my many good friends at the college have shaped my life so that these sorts of endeavors are even possible. I am indebted to two of those good friends in particular: Paige Critcher, whose beautiful photograph graces this cover, and Julie Kane, for her offer to help index. I would also like to thank my students at Sweet Briar, many of whom have been as interested in and helpful with my work as any colleague could be. I thank all of the participants in my research seminars on Spiritualism and especially the departmental assistants who have done a lot of the bibliographic work and much hard labor for this manuscript. Anne Oakes, Courtney Cunningham, Nell Champoux, and Christa Shusko have contributed their time and

considerable talents to the final product. Nell and Christa have both quickly become my colleagues as well as my friends, and I could not be more proud of them. The academy is better for their being a part of it.

I have for many years been working at the juncture of two disciplines in religious studies, millennialism and esotericism. Both sets of current scholars have been very supportive of my work and have ineluctably shaped my thinking. In the former, especially notable are Brenda Brasher, Hillel Schwartz, Richard Landes, Stephen O'Leary, and Michael Barkun, whose continual kindness has been a model for me. In the latter, Wouter Hanegraaff, Arthur Versluis, Antoine Faivre, Allison Coudert, Jeff Kripal, and Hugh Urban have all been very influential on my thought and supportive of my work. My mentors from Syracuse University, foremost David and Patricia Cox Miller, Phil Arnold, and Charlie Winquist, will always be a part of me.

I would also like to thank my family, without whose quirky interests I may never have come across this topic, particularly my mother, Irene. My friend and favorite epistemologist, Heather Battaly, has kept me sane for more years than I can count. I would especially like to thank the people who have taken the time to read parts of this manuscript and to send their careful comments and copy editing. My father-in-law, the philosopher Edward S. Casey, has helped with the micro- and the macrocosm of this work; I have benefited enormously from his experience. Geoffrey McVey, Alicia Dibernardo, and Josh Slocum have all labored over parts of this, and I am grateful for their time and insights. Joshua has a perfect editing hand, and I will probably always regret not taking Alicia's suggestion of "armamentarium" as superior phrasing. And finally, I thank Eric Casey for his proofreading skills, for knowing the languages that classical ghosts speak, and for being very, very quiet for a long time while I wrote this.

Contents

1. Introduction, 3

2. Memory, 11

3. Machines, 45

4. Marriage, 77

5. Medicine, 111

6. Minds, 143

7. Conclusion, 173

Notes, 179

Source Materials, 201

Bibliography, 205

Index, 213

This page intentionally left blank

Plato's Ghost

This page intentionally left blank

I

Introduction

The Spiritualist movement that brought hundreds of thousands of Americans to séance tables and trance lectures has alternately been ridiculed as the worst breach of decorum and championed as a feminist movement that drove the final nail into Calvinism's coffin. Its tricks have been exposed, its charlatans soundly upbraided, and most of its heroes' names have been lost to the common run of American history. However, in its day, Spiritualism served as everything from a diversion from the terrors of war to a prescription for medical advice that was heard from New York to Sonoma County. At that time, its leaders were household names, and the movement warranted a congressional investigation by politicians worried about garnering "the Spiritualist vote." It was mocked and upheld as the national salvation, but almost no one could afford to ignore it completely.

I would like to put Spiritualism in the context of the "American Renaissance," a term usually reserved for the sudden blossoming of American letters and the birth of authorship as a viable profession in the country during the nineteenth century. However, I would return the Renaissance to its original meaning, a cultural imagination enraptured with the past and with the classics in particular, accompanied by a cultural blossoming, an endless horizon of possibilities. I will argue that Spiritualism was the religious articulation of the American Renaissance, and that the ramifications of looking backward for advice about the present were far-reaching and still echo today.

The American Renaissance shared with its European predecessor a certain intangible ethos, a sense of cultural headiness. The sociological distinctions between the two were enormous, of course, but each represented a watershed moment that preceded a revolution of paradigms. The original Renaissance was a moment where science and religion seemed mutually reinforcing. The cultural pain and excruciating doubt brought on by the “discovery” of the Americas or by the seemingly infinite number of stellar objects seen through the telescope were for some still held in abeyance; God continued to create, and knowledge did not have to come at the expense of enchantment. Certainly not all experienced the moment with joy, to which Montaigne’s essay in the early sixteenth century testifies when he writes that he is afraid to go to sleep at night lest another continent be discovered by the time he wakes up. But the secular had not yet been fully separated from the sacred.

That uneasy experience was mirrored in American Spiritualism, a frontier spirit brought to bear on the afterlife, when science and religion could still coexist. As Wouter Hanegraaff has so elegantly pointed out, all new religious movements are protests against existing ones. Discovering the points of contention, where the tendons of society have ripped, is the first clue to the mystery of the past. I will argue that Spiritualism was a renaissance of the Renaissance, a culture in love with history as much as it trumpeted progress and futurity, a predominantly white, middle-class expression of what constituted religious hope among burgeoning technology and colonialism.

In its most basic form, Spiritualism protested Christianity’s exclusive claims to salvation. Although Spiritualists engaged in every form of casual mental colonialism conceivable, they also stood up for the sinner and the “primitive,” decrying mainstream Protestantism’s condemnation of the vast majority of humankind. Spiritualism destroyed hell, put the heathens in heaven, announced that sinners were the victims of poverty and a lack of education, and quietly ignored those parts of Christianity that predicted a violent end of time. Without an apocalyptic worldview based on duality and damnation, the gates of heaven were opened to all. As the late-coming child of the Second Great Awakening, Spiritualism took the awakening’s main tenet—salvation is universally possible—to its logical extreme: salvation is universally guaranteed.

In rejecting the hegemony of Christian salvation, Spiritualism also rejected the hegemony of how religious knowledge was transmitted. In a republican atmosphere of egalitarianism, Spiritualism dispensed with credentials for its leaders and even divinity for its gods. Predicated on vague notions about electricity, Spiritualism proposed that ties of sympathy existed between the worlds of the living and the dead. These ties were understood to be positively and negatively charged, like electricity, or else based on similarly fuzzy notions of

magnetism. Ironically, in co-opting metaphors for cutting-edge technology, the Spiritualists ensured that almost no one really understood these matters, and expertise gave way to amateur empiricism. A common test of a medium's veracity consisted simply of a judgment whether she seemed to be able to come up with these messages in her own right; if the answer was no, then surely this was the work of the spirit realm. In creating this paradox of proof, Spiritualists *de facto* elevated the least qualified (frequently young women) to positions of great power. Not priestcraft but guilelessness would be the hallmark of religious authority.

At the same time, Spiritualists' central ritual was contact with the dead and believers' understanding of the workings of heaven functioned as the primary model to strive for on earth. However, in Spiritualist heaven the dead were not instantly perfected but rather could retain the faults and flaws that they had had on earth. Progress, rather than static perfection, marked the tiers of heaven, and universal salvation meant that heaven contained the worst criminals and the lowliest of heathens. Foibles and frailty continued into the land of the dead, and communications with spirits could not ensure that the spirit in question had progressed enough to know the truth or was kindly disposed enough to tell it. Universal salvation also meant that exclusive religious truth claims were untrue, and the founders of such movements were generally stripped of any special religious knowledge and demoted to the status of extremely wise men. Jesus was on par with Confucius and Buddha, and in Spiritualist heaven all of them had changes of heart about the exclusive rightness of their own religions.

The notion of progress, however, was hardly straightforward: looking backward to its cultural heroes for advice, Spiritualism proposed that the great men and women of the past also improved in the afterlife and could change their minds as they, too, grew wiser over time. One of the most spectacular examples of the dead's ability to learn in heaven is enshrined in a book of poems published by the Boston medium Miss Lizzie Doten, in which Shakespeare posthumously revises Hamlet's soliloquy: "To be, or not to be, is not the question."¹ In scholarship on nineteenth-century American religions, Spiritualism is generally categorized as a form of postmillennialism, or the belief that the world would gradually be improved by human hands to the extent that it would become indistinguishable from heaven.

Although in its strictest definition millennialism refers to the future reign of Jesus on a transformed earth for a thousand years, in practice and in theory "millennialism" can refer to a wide variety of beliefs in a perfected future. These can range from violent visions of apocalyptic end times to utopian dreams of social harmony. Since Spiritualists were generally deeply invested

in the idea of universal salvation, apocalyptic dichotomies of the saved and the damned were not the harbingers of their expected future perfection. A steady unfolding of human development would instead usher in a world free from social and physical ills. That future, however, relied upon the knowledge of the dead, and time twisted backward as it went forward.²

The tension between an untrammelled belief in progress—social, technological, and scientific—and the wholesale embrace of the wisdom of the past created a distinctively American renaissance, one in which ideas of improvement mapped more neatly onto the history of hermeticism than onto a straightforward teleology of time. Renaissance, rather than Enlightenment, models of progress were pursued. This entailed a revivification of ancient epistemologies: Platonic and Neoplatonic ladders of ascent proliferated in middle-class American thought, and humanity was shot through with the divine rather than seen as helpless and inexorably corrupt sinners in the hands of a transcendent, angry God. Declassified from sin to crime, bad behavior was moved into the realm of the culturally operable, where education and opportunity could repair the grievances of all society.

This backward-looking view of progress was indebted, I will argue, to implicit and explicit strains of esoteric thinking, especially those involving Plato and Neoplatonism that flourished in America alongside the great revivals of Charles Finney and the utopian experiments of the burned-over district. As Herbert Leventhal has shown, Renaissance cosmology and its functionaries, astrology and alchemy, came to the New World intact, blurring the boundaries among science, religion, and the occult.³ Spiritualism retained the *Weltanschauung* of its forebears, firmly denying any antagonism between the scientific and the spiritual.

The radical democracy of the early Republic conspired with an upsurge of religious innovation, producing enormous cultural creativity and not a little confusion. Credentials were dismissed as being redolent with aristocratic airs, and experimentation reigned supreme. The democratization of literacy as well led to new classes, genders, and races choosing voices to follow and sometimes finding their own. Spiritualism's ability to cut across classes made it an effective if not the most intellectually robust form of disseminating esoteric ideas. The movement popularized the thinking of past greats and promoted the incorporation of its own beliefs into preexistent modes of thought. In denying the exclusivity of truth in any one expression, Spiritualism could coexist alongside many.

The scholar of American esotericism Arthur Versluis has argued that Spiritualism was the exoteric branch of the esoteric tradition.⁴ Versluis maintains that the very public nature of Spiritualism disqualifies it from the category

of the esoteric despite Spiritualists' sharing many intellectual interests and religious dispositions with committed occultists. Occasionally the two camps had crossovers and defectors, and I have included their stories here. In the main, Spiritualists did not approach the workings of the cosmos as if they had been purposefully obfuscated and required special knowledge or initiation to comprehend. But although the workings of heaven were not secret, they were also not obvious: the imperfections of the dead meant that everything learned from them was subject to revision, and the continual ethos of progress meant that no knowledge was ever fully secure. Far from believing in the literal truth of anything, Spiritualists were perennially seeking more information and further education about heaven as well as earth: in this proclivity they had more in common with esotericists than with mainstream Protestants of their day. Truth was not obvious and certain, and some of it at least would always be just out of reach.⁵

The two figures to whom Spiritualism owed the most direct intellectual debt were Emanuel Swedenborg, eighteenth-century mystic, and Franz Anton Mesmer, Austrian doctor and erroneously eponymous founder of Mesmerism. I shall have more to say about both men later, but suffice to say here that the content and form of Spiritualism were predicated on the writings of Swedenborg and the techniques of Mesmer. The former, while still ensnared in a salvific dualism that Spiritualists would dispense with, provided the scaffolding of Spiritualist heaven: the afterlife was alive with motion, a classroom in progress. From the latter, Spiritualists took the trance state as a necessary injunction for mediums who would enter an alternate consciousness and communicate with the dead from this intermediary state. Both Swedenborgianism and Mesmerism thrived in nineteenth-century America, each on its own terms and in conjunction with Spiritualism and other nascent religious expressions. In *The Covert Enlightenment*, Alfred Gabay argues that both thinkers offered a tertiary state between Renaissance enchantment and scientific empiricism: each man experienced a great deal of discomfort being caught between two paradigms and this effectively reflected a great deal of American experience as well.⁶

And finally, there was the influence of Plato himself. I will argue that the attenuation of time as witnessed in the Spiritualist movement was influenced by Platonic and Neoplatonic writings. Sometimes this influence was direct and overt, whereas at others it was more general, a well-worn form of thinking rather than a specific philosophic or literary ripple effect. I will argue, to use Max Weber's phrase, that there was an "elective affinity" between Spiritualist thought and Platonic assertions about the nature of the soul, the cosmos, and education.⁷ This affinity of thought will not always be the most subtle, and I do

not wish to imply that many Spiritualists were deeply concerned with Platonic ethics, argumentation, or irony. They inherited Platonic structures of thought and made them coalesce with their own world of steam engines and telegraphs and the inexplicable force of electricity as best they could.

Plato himself was a hot commodity in nineteenth-century America. As Paul Anderson has shown, Plato societies and reading groups proliferated from Concord to Dubuque, Iowa, often reading Plato in Greek, including the fairer sex in these clubs, and occasionally challenging their archrivals, Hegel societies, to debates.⁸ The new translation of many Platonic works into English in Bohn's Library (begun in 1848, the same year as the Fox girls' "mysterious rappings" that were the watershed event for Spiritualism as a cohesive religious identity) made Plato available to the middle classes in inexpensive editions. In addition to the *Republic*, Americans increasingly had access to the *Apology*, the *Crito*, *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedo*. In 1850, Ralph Waldo Emerson trumpeted that "poetry had never soared higher than in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*."⁹

Although many contemporary philosophers would take umbrage with the characterization, most nineteenth-century Americans appear to have taken as self-evident that Plato was a theologian rather than a purveyor of rationality. The composition of utopia, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of true love seem to have commanded much more interest than aporetic dialogues and the unity of the virtues. If Socrates was intent on dismantling certainty as the origin of false knowledge, Americans were equally adamant that one of the greatest minds of all time must have articulated unequivocal information about ultimate questions like the construction of the universe and the place of the individual soul in it. Much of the more attractive information came from Plato the storyteller rather than Socrates the pithy interlocutor. Focusing on the *Timaeus*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*, these readings took the myths of Atlantis and the race of spherical beings not as ancillary to the process of argumentation but rather as the point themselves: stories of the human and the divine thoroughly trumped the finer points of rhetoric in the imaginations of Americans.¹⁰

Reports of Plato clubs were serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly*, magazines wrote multivolume accounts titled "Plato in History" and the Yale Review kept readers current on new translations.¹¹ In 1869, the *New Englander* sported a densely packed, thirty-two-page "defense" of Plato as a proto-monotheist, and in the same year a pamphlet titled "The Eclectic Philosophy" was circulated with "An Outline of the Interior Doctrines of the Alchemists of the Middle Ages." The former endeavors to explain the entire history of Neoplatonism, beginning, oddly, several centuries before Plato and laying claim to a single, unified truth known to the ancients and covered loosely under the umbrella of

Neoplatonism. The central tenet of such secret knowledge is that all wisdom has latent as well as manifest meaning that is available to the persistent and the learned: "Under the noble designation of Wisdom, the ancient teachers, the sages of India, the magicians of Persia and Babylon, the seers and prophets of Israel, the hierophants of Egypt and Arabia, and the philosophers of Greece and the West, included all knowledge which they considered essentially as divine; classifying a part as esoteric and the remainder as exterior."¹² From vaunted literary minds to the conspiracy theorists of their day, Americans were awash in Platonic and Neoplatonic writings and thought.

I will approach this study thematically rather than chronologically because the Spiritualist movement resisted centralized authority and intellectual coercion of any sort, making their writing ideologically inconsistent on certain points and obscuring longer term trends. This book is a history of ideas, but it is a religious history, one in which the organization of time governs the organization of the cosmos and values, and even when inchoate it points toward the ultimate. Despite its excesses and occasional outright chicanery, Spiritualism undoubtedly did a lot of good in its day, both in its embrace of political reform and in its ability to soothe individual souls.¹³ It appears to have been enormously effective as a predecessor of psychotherapy, and its clear if amateur relation to grief counseling was a much needed balm during and after the Civil War. I will not, in the main, look at Spiritualism's sociological impact so much as at its intellectual heritage and transformations: I am drawn to this movement for its utter failure to embrace many practices of thinking often upheld as ideals. Hell was banished, exclusive claims to salvation were overturned, women were the equals of men, and nonwhite people were (or at least could become) equals of whites. In maintaining a Renaissance worldview, in which the past collided with progress, Spiritualism expressed the hopes of middle America to have both an enchanted and a scientific universe.

I begin, in "Memory," with the living's commemoration of the dead and the dead's communications to the living. I examine constructions of time as they flow backward and forward simultaneously in the landscapes of heaven and earth. Swedenborg's memory of the angels is discussed as the basis for how justice was dispensed in the afterlife after the Spiritualists dismantled hell. The third chapter, "Machines," explores the Spiritualists' efforts to objectively prove their claims by building instruments designed to measure truths about heaven and earth. I analyze two kinds of Spiritualist machines—those created for proving the veracity of their heavenly communications and those given by the dead to improve the conditions of the living. I conclude with a discussion of the then-new realm of photography and its influence on the Spiritualists' quest for objective evidence of the dead among us. In all cases, I argue that

Spiritualist machines were preeminently time machines as they all sought to capture the past and bring it into the present.

Chapter 4, "Marriage," surveys the wide range of thinking about love and sex at the interstices of time and eternity. Against the background of Victorian America's growing emphasis on romantic love, the Spiritualists posited that love was so vital that it could hardly be entrusted to the living at all. Concerned simultaneously with the rights of women and children and with the status of love as potentially eternal, the Spiritualists looked to Plato, particularly in Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, and found hope for all in the far reaches of heaven. The fifth chapter, "Medicine," explores the place of the body and its discontents, caught between a Renaissance cosmology and modernizing medicine. In an epoch when credentials were distrusted as antidemocratic, physical illness was often cast among a bewildering array of amateurs and charlatans hawking health; the Spiritualists largely followed single-cause theories such as animal magnetism and espoused the belief that the health of the body was predicated on the health of the spirit. I will pursue primarily Andrew Jackson Davis, arguably Spiritualism's primary theologian, and particularly his writings on health against the backdrop of contemporaneous pseudo-science. The last chapter, "Minds," follows the legacy of Spiritualism into psychotherapy and the secular, privatized world devoid of religious content. I demonstrate that Spiritualism understood itself as a contender in the battle of interpretation about multiple consciousnesses and even multiple voices. Arguing for a theological reading of these phenomena, Spiritualists fought against nascent psychoanalysis until science finally severed the fragile ties between religion and progress, leaving the spirits of the dead to be modernity's ghosts.

Many years ago, as a graduate student I delivered a conference paper whence this book was born and bearing the same name. The keynote speaker, the eminent Mesoamerican historian David Carrasco, read my title and hissed loudly, "Plato's ghost is everywhere." Indeed he is. Let us go ghost hunting.

2

Memory

Immediately before the First World War, the author Harry Blount mused about the process of embalming and the detrimental effects it can have for the memory of the dead. This may seem unremarkable until one realizes that Harry is, at the time of writing, himself dead, and the embalming he is discussing is his own. Harry communicates from beyond the grave that he is grateful that he wasn't embalmed, writing, "The embalmed bodies last so long that frequently their souls are tied [to earth],"¹ asserting that the memory of being embodied delays progression in heaven. He advocates cremation, arguing that while it is jolting to be separated from the body so quickly, that this is far preferable to the soul's lingering attachment to the body. He assures his sister, Mary Blount White, the woman who is physically writing these things down, that the family handled both his and their deceased sister's funerals well, creating conditions that eased their transition to the afterlife.

This work, *Letters from the Other Side*, is one of many written between 1850 and 1914 in which the problem of Spiritualist memory is played out on the stage of the dead. Although progress was the hallmark of heaven, and it was incumbent on spirits to climb the seven-tiered ladder of the heavens, memory frequently disrupted that process, and these disruptions, I will argue, serve as questions about the idea of progress itself. On the most basic level, Spiritualism proposed that one's deceased friends and family remembered the living so acutely that they wished to remain in nearly constant

contact with them. However, as Harry Blount so vividly describes, memories of being alive can hold the soul back from its intended state of perfection in the future.

In this chapter, I will address the problem of memory as it disrupts the postmillennial notion of progress. The mainstream of Protestant believers, Spiritualist and not, were awash in ideologies of improvement, relying on recent technological advances and the introduction of the Hegelian *telos* to the middle classes to buttress claims that humanity was steadily marching toward perfection. Much ink has been spilled over the generalized ethos of the gradual progress that many thought would lead to the Second Coming.² A unidirectional construction of time is both implicit and explicit in these writings; the white middle class clung happily to notions of colonialist improvement, seeing itself as having socially advanced past the “primitive tribes and races” as well as its own historical precursors. In its most benign form, progressivism led to myriad social reform movements, ranging in importance from abolition and women’s suffrage to the call for phonetic spelling.³ In its most virulent articulation, progress justified poverty and racism as social Darwinism and the lure of Manifest Destiny seduced many into believing their own superiority over others to be both “natural” and biological.

The progressive ethos characterizing mainstream Protestantism in the nineteenth century is usually referred to as “postmillennialism.” Postmillennialism is the belief that society is slowly and incrementally achieving perfection and that human hands will improve the world sufficiently to warrant the return of Jesus. In contradistinction, premillennialism denotes a worldview in which believers tend to be small in number and view the world as so unalterably corrupt that only God’s agency can intervene and usher in the apocalypse. Spiritualists have overwhelmingly been written about in scholarship as at the forefront of postmillennial ideas about time, even if the believers themselves had a tenuous relationship to Christianity. Their belief in progress as the ultimate form of salvation, and its ties specifically to science, are irrefutable. However, I will argue that the understanding of time is more complex than the simple transcending of history, and that the Spiritualists represent a pervasive conflict in nineteenth-century American concepts of time. The movement crossed class, denominational, and gender lines, and to some extent racial ones. Homegrown and homespun, Spiritualism is perhaps the most exemplary cross sample of the century’s religious turnings.

Millennialism is a love affair with history, although the love is frequently an unhappy one. Believers seek to make sense of the world by plugging contemporary events into God’s ultimate plan; whether that plan is understood as gradual progress or cataclysmic destruction matters less than the outline

of history. In all cases, time itself is rendered meaningful and trustworthy, having a clear beginning, middle, and end, and God's hand in history is active and assured.⁴ In the larger schema of postmillennialism, this focus on the importance of history, I will argue, led to the downfall of notions of progress. Moreover, this phenomenon can be observed in microcosm with the problem of individual memory.

By calling upon the dead to give advice and solace to mortals, Spiritualists fused a paradox into the heart of their progressive agenda: the wisdom required to advance was to be found in the past. As a Neoplatonic project, Spiritualist writing on memory and the dead came increasingly to resemble Plato's favorite theory of recollection, in which the soul's progress consists of remembering that which it had known before it was incarnated. Caught in these two opposing concepts of time, in which humanity advanced toward perfection only with the aid of the past, Spiritualists articulated this snarl of epistemology in discussions of the memories of the dead.

Redefining the Damned

Americans in the Victorian era are infamous for their maudlin depictions of death. The death of a loved one, particularly that of a child, occasioned an outpouring of grief that manifested itself in mementos. The production of memory was ubiquitous and, from some perspectives, sickly sentimental: the deceased's hair was cut and painstakingly fashioned into lace that was worn as brooches or displayed in the home in shadowboxes. The concept of the "beautiful death" took hold by midcentury, wherein an elaborate deathbed scene, perfectly orchestrated so that all friends and family were present, became the ideal. When photography became widely financially available to the middle classes in the 1860s, commemoration of the corpse became part of the domestic shrine. Photographers were charged with making the body look as lifelike as possible, echoing the Gothic strain in European and American letters, apparently bringing the dead back to life.⁵ Novels proliferated describing the protracted and romanticized death so sought after, and consolation letters became a public, rather than private, forum for grief.⁶

This turn to the public expression of grief and the relentless drive toward commemoration is the culmination of varied social forces. Religiously, the nineteenth century saw the downfall of Calvinist theology and its ramifications for the dead. The strong Puritan influence still stamped on New England Protestantism began to wane in the years following the Revolution. Although there were clearly more subtle readings of Calvin available to Americans, the

popular understanding was that Calvinism dictated that souls are predestined for either heaven or hell.⁷ For Spiritualists and other liberal Protestants, the idea of any hell—much less one containing the majority of humankind—was anathema. Cora Hatch, the most prominent medium of her day, perfectly articulated Spiritualist critique of the American strain of Calvinism when she said in trance:

The idea of the total depravity of any of God's children could have originated only in the most perverted and depraved mind. . . . The more degraded and cruel is any nation, the more tyrannical and revengeful is their imaginary deity. John Calvin, who could rejoice at seeing Sir Michael Servetus burnt to death by a slow fire made of green withes, could easily conceive of total depravity, and a most unprincipled and revengeful God. It may be said, with much propriety, that a man's religious opinions are a measure of his own soul.⁸

Logic dictated that many of the souls destined for hell were those of children. The Second Great Awakening represented a crossroads for the very existence of hell. Although allowing for the possibility of universal salvation (versus a predetermined elect), the revival era simultaneously insisted on a conversion experience as a prerequisite for that salvation. In some senses worse than its Puritan predecessors, American Protestantism now posited that the damned were so because of their own failure to convert.

Many factors had to coalesce to overthrow the ingrained disposition toward exclusive claims of salvation. The new Republic, with its at least theoretical claims to universal opportunity and replacing an aristocracy with a meritocracy, was a logical enemy of Calvinist election. The first decades of the nineteenth century increasingly witnessed a shift to individual responsibility in matters of salvation, as itinerant, interdenominational preaching came to the fore and the country was swept with religious revivals called the Second Great Awakening. An increase in the emotional content of sermons, the active participation of women in attempting to induce conversion experiences in their kin and fellow townspeople, and a more intimate, loving portrayal of God and Jesus all contributed to what many have called the democratization of American Protestantism.⁹

As Mary Ryan has argued, the shift in the beginning half of the century from a primarily agrarian economy to one that saw the creation of a white-collar class had a profound influence on all aspects of American life. For my purposes here, I will focus on its effects on women, many of whom summarily found themselves without employment or other socially acceptable tasks

to keep themselves busy. They turned to two occupations—religious activity and child rearing. As women became more active on the public stage of religion, myriad volunteer associations sprung up which would be the tidal impetus for such essential political causes as abolition and the women's suffrage movement. They also had newfound time to spend with their children, and familial bonds became, by necessity, less about economic ties and more about intimacy. Ryan traces the language used to describe parenting in religious and popular literature along the Erie Canal. She finds a nearly wholesale switch from around 1810 to 1830 in which the mother replaced the father in instilling all moral and social impulses in her children.¹⁰ Since boys were much more likely to move out of the home for school or work, mothers had less time to impress good character traits on their sons, and this condensed frame led to more intense personal relations.

It was this occurrence, more than any other, that paved the way for the final collapse of Calvinism and any lingering policies of infant damnation. As Ann Braude has argued, Spiritualism may be understood as American women's final blow to Calvinist or indeed any orthodox theology, as they embraced the movement that they believed empirically demonstrated that their children were thriving in heaven, surrounded by wise angels and loving relatives.¹¹ Science, they believed, trumped theological speculation and provided not only a forum for speaking to their deceased children but also a visceral reply to the clergy and other authority figures who insisted on the realities of hell. Women, as we shall see slightly later, became outspoken critics of Christianity, at least in its forms of exclusivity, and heaven was opened to all.

The Living Remember the Dead

This new cultural territory created by the bonds of affection and the effects of women's leisure time became a watershed for an unprecedented attention to memory. Creating memories of the dead was now not only religiously sanctioned, it became a national pastime and boom industry. Death moved out of the home and into a commercialized space that brought with it new methods of commemoration and new needs for them. As death became recast as the beginning of a glorious journey rather than the end of all reasonable hope for salvation, devices and triggers to aid memory—now a happy prospect—proliferated.

The visual reminder of the death of a loved one came into prominence with the Victorian prescriptions for mourning. Puritan funerals had necessitated a black outfit for the day itself, and the materials required for a formal

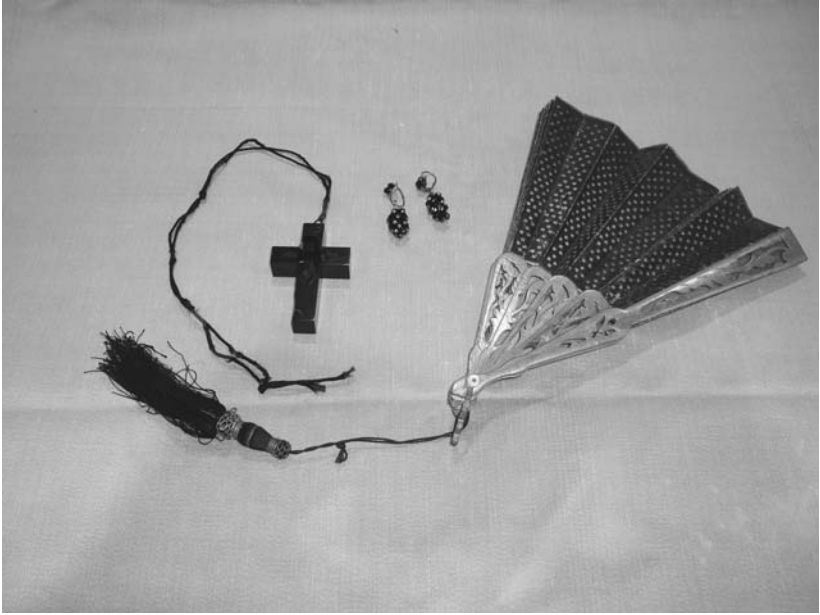


FIGURE 2.1 Victorian-era American mourning fan, cross, and earrings. Courtesy of Sweet Briar Museum, Sweet Briar College, Virginia.

period of mourning were more easily purchased throughout the eighteenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century that American mourning became institutionalized and elaborate. Etiquette manuals described in detail who was expected to remain in mourning and for how long. Women were the focus of most of the restrictions, with a widow having the longest period of mourning, two years, followed by those who had experienced the loss of a parent or child, which required one year. Clothing was the most visible form of mourning, and decency dictated the materials allowed for dresses, what kinds of furs were acceptable in winter, bonnets rather than hats, and the length of the veil worn. (See figures 2.1 and 2.2.)

Time progressed from deep mourning, up to the first year in the case of widows, to lesser degrees of restrictions, such as the addition of black lace to one's dresses or the eventual wearing of gray or violet. Women in mourning were not invited to festive events, and of course a "decent," lengthy period of time had to pass before remarriage could even be considered. Mourning jewelry was common among both men and women, and included lockets portraying either the image of the deceased or locks of hair, frequently intricately braided into a design.¹² Children were not exempt from the outward display of grief, and wore white in the summers and gray in the winters as mourning garb.

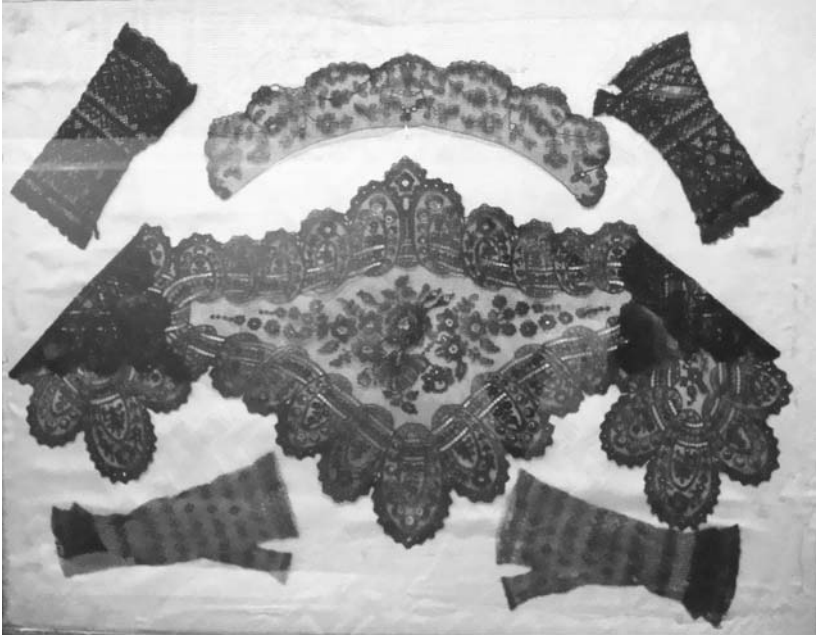


FIGURE 2.2 Women's mourning lace. Courtesy of Sweet Briar Museum, Sweet Briar College, Virginia.

The production of memory instigated by mourning was a public function; activity and appearance were both severely circumscribed, creating a visual guarantee that the memory of the deceased was being honored. Since mourning rituals had no way of dictating a person's actual emotional stance toward the dead, they did provide a way to perform one's identity as properly remembering the dead. Memory was also tied to class, a theme I will return to in a Spiritualist context: those with a certain social standing were expected to remember in a decorous manner, and mourning was a costly affair that demonstrated economic standing as well as emotional pain. The ability to purchase the material required for mourning dress, the Parisian fashion that the dresses were based on, and the price of the accoutrements such as brooches and the like all indicated that more memory was expected of those in the middle and upper classes. The poor undoubtedly grieved, but they did not perform it by conspicuous consumption.

The corpse itself began to be implicated in economic matters, with the first funeral homes opening up around 1830. Prior to the commercialization of the dead, bodies were tended to and waked in the home, with women having the primary responsibility for the care of the dead. By 1850, women were

largely excluded from the orbit of death. Gary Laderman writes, "Despite their intimacy with the corpse in the early part of the century, in the public sphere women were often segregated from the dead....[T]he services of the undertaker and the attendant emerging funeral industries located the corpse in a network of commercial activity that was just beginning to operate in a heretofore untapped market. The dead were inserted into an arena where consumerism, class differentiation, and mass-produced goods and services ensured that their treatment depended on a slowly developing economic regime."¹³ As the distance between the bereaved and the care of the dead widened, the processes of memorialization increased, bridging the gulf between the physical death and the living spirit.

Invocations of memory were raised to a grander scale in the graveyard as well; the increased mobility of the younger generations led logically to the downfall of the family cemetery and the rise of the community cemetery.¹⁴ Both the "garden" cemetery of village life and the new "rural" cemetery, situated outside city limits and akin to the suburbs in both its geography and purpose, were loci of commemoration and its interstices with commercialization. The dead as well as the living wished to be removed from the hazards of urban life, which, in the case of the dead, included the possibility of exhumation for the purpose of dissection by a cadre ironically termed "resurrectionists." The solidity of domestic ties was instead emphasized, and monuments grew in size and in space accorded to sentiments engraved on the stones, which often expressed the idea that the dead would be reunited with family members in heaven.¹⁵

These emergent forms of memory centered on the domestic, tranquil space away from urban squalor and strongly suggested that memory kept the living and the dead bound to each other across the space of physical departure. Ann Douglas comments, "It was absolutely essential to this process that the deceased do not truly die. The planned and picturesque new 'rural cemeteries'...were dedicated to the idea that the living, and the dead, still 'cared.' Paths with pastoral names, gentle rills, green slopes and newly popular graveside flowers were all meant to flatter the guaranteed but enduring docility of the deceased."¹⁶ The living were not only to remember the dead, the dead were conversely supposed to remember the living and appreciate the continued reproduction of their own memory.

Mnemonic devices designed to remind the living of the dead and their continued domestic relationship across the threshold of the grave multiplied exponentially over the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Although memory and reminding seem to have clear-cut implications for time—the past is brought into the present—the direction that time takes in the

production of memory is complex. As the philosopher Edward Casey has described in *Remembering*, triggers to memory are clear signs that we are afraid of being engulfed in a forgetfulness that overwhelms and threatens us.¹⁷ Fear that the past will be lost governs our daily activities designed to help us remember. To this I would add that the past is not only brought into the present through memory; it is preserved *as* the past by the process of remembering.

By enshrining memory as not only personally desirable but as culturally required, the worth and value of the past is given a legitimacy that counter-vaits notions of progress. The necessity of keeping the past alive in memory suggests that history needs preserving rather than transcending. In her work *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia, an emotion only a shade removed from the sentimentality I have been outlining here, disrupts concepts of time: it relies on a linear, progressive idea of time but romanticizes a prior state in the flow of time. She writes, "The romantic nostalgic insisted on the otherness of his object of nostalgia from his present life and kept it at a safe distance. The object of romantic nostalgia must be beyond the present space of experience, somewhere in the twilight of the past or on the island of utopia where time has happily stopped, as on an antique clock."¹⁸ Time marches on, but memory is borne on its shoulders.

Middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century found themselves caught between two opposing visions of time; science, education, missionary successes, and myriad social reform movements all cried out in the strongest of terms that time was coterminous with progress. For many, in fact, progress was so tangible that they believed the millennium, the Second Coming itself, was inevitable or even immediately at hand. At the same time, the production of memory came to national prominence, particularly in the case of the dead, and it was morally incumbent upon one to participate in the glorification of the past.

In many ways, Spiritualism provided an antidote to the conflicting cultural messages about time. While maintaining that social improvement was utterly obligatory and laudable, Spiritualists raised the memorialization of the dead to new heights. Progress was projected into heaven, which itself was subject to time and improvement. In contrast to more classical depictions of heaven such as Dante's, where the ground is so solid it bruises one's feet, or Huck Finn's, where angels on clouds play harps (which strikes Huck as enormously dull), Spiritualist heaven was a whirlwind of motion. The dead grew up, went to school, advanced through the spheres, even got married. Progress continued into the infinite future, and although there was usually peace for the dead, there was no rest.

Moreover, by staying in contact with the dead, memory of loved ones grew and increased posthumously. Memory itself became fluid and ongoing, unstuck from the constraints of the past. Relatives changed in the afterlife, and the famous dead changed their minds about important issues—Plato became an abolitionist, and Shakespeare rewrote his soliloquies.¹⁹ Although a progressive memory straddles both modes of time prevalent in the culture, it also points to a certain anxiety about the value of the past. This cultural ambivalence about progress became further convoluted when the spirits were consulted and counseled about their own memories, to which I will turn after a brief excursion into the writings of Spiritualism's primary predecessor, Emanuel Swedenborg, and his memory of heaven.

Swedenborg and Angelic Memory

The mystic Emanuel Swedenborg provided the theological backbone to Andrew Jackson Davis and all subsequent Spiritualist writings of heaven. Born in Stockholm in 1688, Swedenborg spent the first half of his adult life writing treatises on the natural sciences. These works reflect the new impetus in science toward inductive reasoning and empirical data gathering. His many books on chemistry, the animal kingdom, and the nature of the physical world show a man generally at the vanguard of his era, and his theories on the divisible properties of matter resemble contemporary accounts of atoms and molecules. In 1744, Swedenborg published the *Journal of Dreams*, which would be the turning point in his career from scientist to metaphysician; wracked by guilt concerning his ambition and pride, he experienced a series of dreams and visions that transformed him and his work. He abandoned his writing on the natural sciences and spent the rest of his life devoted to theology and the mystical exploration of heaven.

Swedenborg's writings about heaven read like ancient ethnographies but of the afterlife. A Herodotus of the heavens, Swedenborg recounts mystical journeys and conversations with numerous angelic beings that are presented as mere fact; his rhetoric is devoid both of a strong sense of the narrator and of a sense of awe. Swedenborg's descriptions of the afterlife are saturated in the Renaissance language of correspondences, wherein bonds of affection tie an individual to God, epistemic beliefs, and one another. Man is the microcosm of heaven, and within each person lies a secret cartography of the universe.

However, as Wouter Hanegraaff and others have shown, Swedenborg was a man perched between two visions of the universe, and his system of correspondences reflects this awkward historical moment. The classical esoteric

view of the cosmos posited that the known planets (which included the sun and moon) had representatives on earth that were infused with the particular powers assigned to each of the stars. For example, the magisterial powers of the sun could be harnessed by manipulating the things on earth that were understood to be its kindred, such as peacock feathers, gold, and lions. These relationships between the astrological influences and their earthly mirrors were thought to be immanent—the world was literally alive with the divine, with the order of God’s mind reflected everywhere in nature. The microcosm of the universe was the larger, but not necessarily superior, view of the divine; the world, including humankind, was shot through with the same metaphysical material.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century would change all that, and Swedenborg was precipitously placed between two paradigms of what to value. René Descartes serves for many as the historical moment when the material world was devalued; his elevation of the mental and spiritual over the bodily and the material tolled the death knell for the Renaissance world-view. By reintroducing not only a duality but a hierarchy between the spiritual and the material, Cartesian dualism effectively denied the living spirit of the world. This gap between a cosmos in divine reflection of the world and an elevated spiritual cosmos presiding over mere matter is the one that Swedenborg, the mathematician mystic, straddles. Hanegraaff summarizes this position, writing, “From this perspective, Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondences emerges as an impoverished version of the esoteric original, in the sense that it retains only the ‘vertical’ dimension of heavenly archetype versus natural reflection, and, as a result, reintroduces an element of dualism which posits the superiority of spirit over matter. . . . It should be noted that Cartesian dualism is combined in Swedenborg’s mind with a traditional Christian emphasis on renouncing the things of this world for the sake of heaven.”²⁰

Swedenborg’s heaven is thus a hybrid creature, glorifying God and the angels while being presented as empirical, scientific fact. His are minutely detailed descriptions of heaven and the place of the dead within it: there are three distinct tiers of heaven, each with its own language, governance, societies of angels, and qualities of the spirits of the dead. Mapped over the tripartite separation of the heavens is a binary distinction between the interior and the exterior, a division that is carried throughout his discussions of the afterlife to denote degrees of purity of love. The uppermost heaven is called the “celestial” one, and it is peopled with angels and spirits who love God interiorly; that is, their truest selves are turned ineluctably toward God in an attitude of love. The second tier of heaven is the “spiritual” one, in which its population loves in an exterior manner, creating a descending ladder of religious good between the

love of God and the charitable and selfless love of others. Since God and God alone is the ultimate truth, knowledge and wisdom are integral to one's experience of the divine, and the third and lowest rung of heaven is reserved for those who led a moral life but have no interest in improving their knowledge.

Swedenborg takes as his starting point that God is self-same with the Word or *Logos*, and discussions of speech and translation are given a pride of place in his writings about heaven. In *Heaven and Hell*, the reader is informed that all speech is perfect in heaven, given and received in utter clarity of meaning. The angelic language perfectly reflects its speaker's affection and knowledge, and, given the superior love and wisdom of angels to man, we are told that apparent ineffability is merely our inability to comprehend thoughts so pure. The language of heaven is unlike any human language—in fact, angels are incapable of uttering words in worldly languages—but inasmuch as it resembles any known language, that language is Hebrew. Upon death, the spirit discovers that it has known this language in its soul all along.

However, accommodations must be made for converse among angels with mystics, prophets, and Swedenborg himself, and memory is the instrument of translation. Although Swedenborg is less than perfectly clear or consistent on this point, the focus of the interaction is the cleaving of the angel to the entire knowledge of the human being. The two become conjoined in such depth and subtlety that the angel has access to all of the human's memories, including a full knowledge of his speech. Being unable to utter imperfect language, however, the angels do not speak in human terms but rather in the language of the divine: this language appeals to man's higher or spiritual nature but is immediately translated in his mind to his lower or "natural" state where it is imprinted on his memory as if in his own language.²¹

Memory resides at the nexus of the angelic and the human, allowing the human to understand the words of the divine realms and conversely to give those in the afterlife their knowledge of the world. The mystic's earthly experiences become sheer and transparent to the angelic forms, and this conjunction of the human and the divine is precisely the prophetic stance of biblical days that has been lost to the current generation, which Swedenborg deems overly indulgent in self-love. He writes, "They who converse with the angels of heaven, see also the objects which exist in heaven, because they see by the light of heaven in which their interiors are. The angels also see through them the things which are on earth; for with them, heaven is conjoined to the world and the world to heaven. For . . . when angels turn themselves to man, they conjoin themselves to him in such a manner that they know no other than that the things which belong to man are their own—not only those which belong to his speech, but also those which belong to his sight and hearing."²² Memory,

then, is the membrane between the divine and the mortal, allowing passage between the realms and serving as the translator between perfect and fallen speech. Humans who are given a glimpse of the afterlife serve as the eyes of the divine, who sees into earthly existence by an instantaneous knowledge of mortal memory.

Although Swedenborg is significantly more overtly Christian than most Spiritualists, he contributed three notions about the afterlife that were essential to Spiritualist belief. First, heaven is not static but rather alive with motion, with the dead joining societies, remaining married, and forming governments. Second, the individual is not instantly made perfect upon dying, but rather enters heaven with all of the flaws that he or she had while alive. And third, memory serves as the instrument of judgment upon death. For Swedenborg, unlike the majority of Spiritualists (or at least the more famous ones), hell existed, and God was its master; the individual, however, threw himself into hell as a result of self-condemnation upon reviewing his memories. Spiritualists dispensed with the idea of hell, and salvation was the necessary destiny for all. This forgiving and progressive view of humanity's inherent goodness begged the question of what to do with those who had led sinful lives on earth. Swedenborg's idea of memory provided the answer.

In his numerous mystical visits to heaven Swedenborg is allowed to witness the process of judgment of recently dead individuals. These stories read like court cases, with angels acting as the jury. He makes much of the idea of secrecy and emphasizes how a bad person can conceal his misdeeds on earth but there are no secrets in heaven. This ideal state is made possible by memory: every person carries within herself an "external" memory, the one possessed in life, which is subject to gaps and mistakes, and an "internal" memory, which the living person is not aware of having. The internal memory is the spiritual one, and it is perfect. At death, the internal memory is literally peeled off of the person and is watched much like a movie by the angels and the owner.²³ This perfect memory is reminiscent of Platonic recollection, or the soul's prior knowledge of metaphysical absolutes, wherein the individual recalls what he has forgotten he knows. The subject of this recollection, however, is the individual herself, rather than metaphysical principles. Recollection becomes interior and individual, and it is the handmaiden of justice.

The exterior memory, however, or the one known while living, must be suppressed and muted in the afterlife. Heavenly beings, both angels and the dead, are prohibited from thinking or speaking anything out of line with the heavenly principles of spirituality and rationality (which are at times conflated), and thus their memories of sensual things are blocked. Swedenborg betrays his wholesale embrace of Cartesian dualism in a passage that is almost comically

illogical while maintaining the necessity of being rational—a newly deceased spirit is “indignant” because he somehow recalls that there are memories he no longer has access to. Swedenborg writes, “But he was told he had lost nothing at all; that he still knew everything which he ever knew, but in the world he now inhabits, no one is allowed to recall such things; that it was sufficient that he could think and speak much better and more perfectly than before, without immersing his rational faculty as he used to do, in gross, obscure, material, and corporeal things, which are of no use in this kingdom which he had just entered.”²⁴

Forgetting, then, is a necessary attribute of the dead, and this current of thought carried over into Spiritualist circles. The Spiritualists, however, were less critical of bodily pleasures and less convinced by Cartesian dualism and its place in the afterlife. As an amorphous group, influenced by numerous thinkers, Spiritualists on the whole favored a more distinctly Renaissance view of the cosmos, allied with contemporaneous Transcendentalism and the legacy of American deism, all of which posited that nature revealed divine order. Still, they relied heavily on Swedenborg for the scaffolding of their concept of heaven and proceeded to adorn it with multiple and often quirky improvements to the basic idea. Memory and forgetting are central to many Spiritualist tracts, but rather than functioning to reify the place of the rational, they betray a discomfort with ideas of time. (See figures 2.3 and 2.4.)

The Dead Remembering

Since one's placement on a particular rung of the heavenly spheres is not determined by God, one's own past is responsible for that decision. In a discussion of what happens to criminals and suicides in the afterlife, Andrew Jackson Davis asserts, “The accusing angel, is Memory. . . . The interior Principle of Justice, whether you know it or not, is the ever-present ‘bar of God’ at which you are arraigned and tried, and deathless Memory is ‘the accusing angel.’ It gives you the document setting forth your exculpation; or else it explains to you, beyond controversy, the all-sufficient grounds for your condemnation.”²⁵ Like Swedenborg, Spiritualists believed that the dead retained all of their earthly faults and were not made perfect at their ascension to heaven. Spiritualism posited a much more individual and arduous process than did its predecessor Swedenborg; memories were not blocked in heaven and the spirit had the sole responsibility for increasing in spiritual knowledge and refinement.

Whereas the spirit of Harry Blount was concerned about the memory of being embodied, many of the dead were concerned about the memory of being



FIGURE 2.3 Emanuel Swedenborg

alive. The enterprise of Spiritualism itself was predicated on the dead's continued need of the living and their desire to talk to their friends and family left on earth. It was not the memories of their relationships that were called into question: those retained their central importance to both the spirits and the movements at large. However, the problem of ethics and the importance of continual improvement meant that some memories of being alive ran counter to advancing through heaven. By making memory the sole form of judgment in the afterlife, the Spiritualists guaranteed that the concept of memory would be a troubled one. Simultaneously wishing to continue their contact with the living and to push beyond the foibles they were subject to while alive, the spirits of the dead bring the central conflict about time into sharp relief. Both progress and the past were highly prized.

John Edmonds was a New York State Supreme Court judge, and one of the most influential Spiritualists in the decade before the Civil War. Edmonds, along with George Dexter, wrote a two-volume magnum opus on Spiritualism in 1853 and 1855, which, in its later editions, would come to include an appendix by Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, a former United States senator and the



FIGURE 2.4 Andrew Jackson Davis

then-governor of Wisconsin. Still later Tallmadge would become the man responsible for getting Abraham Lincoln to look into Spiritualism, which in Lincoln's case proved an unsuccessful attempt at proselytizing, but it appears to have been highly successful with Lincoln's wife. The books are a series of transcriptions of séances, written down verbatim from the medium and the other participants' conversations. Many of these conversations alight upon the problem of memory and progression.

Judge Edmonds reports receiving lengthy messages from the lower spheres by a woman who had been a queen during life. Upon entering the spirit land, the queen egotistically laments that she is not a queen of heaven: "But here I sat all alone and deserted by the wayside! yes, as lone and wretched as the veriest beggar that had ever prayed for bread at the gates of my palace! And now I was filled with anxious reflections. I seemed to look back on my

past life and compare it with my present existence, so new to me, and to ask myself... what am I? Am I not more than the common herd? Am I not still a queen above my subjects?"²⁶ This is a moral tale, one told on the eve of the Civil War and reported by men who were in positions of real and tangible power; unrepentant aristocracy and undemocratic high-handedness would have been anathema to them, and these qualities are situated as memory. Progress must conquer the past.

The queen's memories prevent her from rising above the "land of shadows," as she refers to her current surroundings where no one came rushing to serve her. She is pulled backward in time by her life on earth, thus preventing her from progressing through the spheres. The quality of the memories is not at stake in this case: the queen is held back by remembering her good deeds as well as her bad ones. She communicates, "I now felt that every good deed, every gentle feeling of love, or charity, or mercy which I had been led to perform or indulge, cast a heavenly calm upon me, and took away the fierceness and the anguish of my bitter grief. The remembrance of these was clothed in a soft, silvery light, O how beautiful!"²⁷ The queen, however, is not yet destined to be a sympathetic character, and it is the basking in her positive memories that brings her spirit guide to chide her. The guide reveals that she had been the queen's guardian spirit in life, and that she knows every aspect of the queen's former existence. The guide recounts the queen's misdeeds, and prescribes the remedy that will allow her to move forward—she must forget her memories. The queen says, "At times I repelled her by my own evil conduct, and had allowed spirits who only loved darkness, and to deceive men's souls by their arts, to approach me with their counsel and advice.... And she moreover said that I must forget that I had been once a queen on earth, for none but the humble in spirit might hope to become even as a little child in this land of love."²⁸

The séance concludes with the queen learning to live humbly and to shed her former egotism and blindness. The expectation of the movement itself is predicated on another backward-reaching temporal device: the queen must begin anew as a spiritual child. Here Edmonds and Dexter are participating in a complicated nineteenth-century understanding of time that posited that individuals and societies progressed from the "primitive" to the complex in an analogous manner. In its extreme, this theory proposed that embryos reenacted every stage of evolution, beginning by resembling single-cell organisms and progressing through stages that resembled fish, amphibians, reptiles, and so forth until at last they emerged as fully human. Although the Spiritualists were by no means consistent on this point, in general the lower rungs of heaven were reserved for children (who quickly ascended the spiritual ladder with the aid of the many schools in heaven), criminals, and the "unprogressed and lower tribes

of mankind."²⁹ By being assigned to a low realm of heaven, the queen is lumped in with children by association until she herself becomes one.

The Spiritualists are almost always written about as unrelentingly progressive. Although there is great merit in that characterization, I would argue that their concerns about memory show a thicker and more ambiguous relationship to ideas of time. As Matt Matsuda has argued in *The Memory of the Modern*, nineteenth-century constructs of memory implicate the entire species, wherein the individual serves as a microcosm and a mirror for the progress of society as a whole. The body carried within itself the memories of all stages of the past, and time accumulated in a single person. In his discussion of Henri Bergson, Matsuda writes, "As Bergson would appreciate, memory was a *presence*. A child pronouncing Latin grammar manifested the living soul of the ancients by stirring up the power of their language. An atavistic criminal was a living prehistoric relic, imprinted in his body with the savage traits of his ancestors. A fashionable dance was both glittering entertainment and a pagan rite to the passions of the body in some dim dawn."³⁰ When the queen regresses to childhood, she is symbolically starting at the beginning of human progress, cast backward in time for the sake of going forward. The fact that the queen has made contact with a group of strangers is perhaps no coincidence—neither the sitters nor the spirit need to affirm shared memories and the desirability of creating new ones. The past, a monarchy personified as selfish and egotistical, must give way to progress.

The necessity of forgetting in heaven, then, is not simply the requirement to overcome the past. It is also the evocation of the past, where history—and individual history—is an interpretive battleground. Whether it should be transcended or revered was what was at stake for the Spiritualists, who routinely consulted figures from the past about the best way to progress into the future. This ambivalence is reflected in the queen's return to the state of childhood, which she recounts as being a joyous return, a recollection of past knowledge of heaven: "Then the long-forgotten dreams of childhood stole softly across my memory. Ah! then I felt it was true.... The connection between that glorious land had been more close in my childhood's hours than when I had mingled with the world and partaken of its character."³¹ The world corrupts with false and unsatisfying memories, but true memory is a return.³²

The Ethics of the Dead

Cora Hatch, the most celebrated medium of her day, reinforced Spiritualism's central departure from mainstream Protestantism when she declared that

there was no hell. In an era in which Calvinism's bifurcation of souls into the saved and the damned still had some cultural capital, such messages literally started a riot at least once. In 1858, spirits communicated via Cora, "Evil is a word that should be cast out of every vocabulary; for it does not follow that because the finite can not equal the infinite, it is evil. In our opinion, *the finite comprehension of good is all the evil that exists*, and as men's understanding enlarges, so will their ideas of goodness increase."³³ Ignorance, rather than depravity, is the root of the world's ills, and as such is curable through a progressive program of education and the elimination of poverty.

Spiritualist mediums did not relegate their critique of Christianity to the present, however, and railed against its exclusivity of salvation in regard to both other religions and other times. In an 1860 transcription, Emma Hardinge sarcastically mused in a trance lecture to her Chicago audience how, according to Christian logic, Plato and Cicero must be in hell. She writes, "The God who fashioned them, doubtless brought the heathens into existence for the purpose of teaching the Christians art and science, but when this was accomplished, they cast them into that same destroying lake of brimstone to which they devote their non-elect."³⁴ Like Cora before her, Emma specifically takes aim at John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards for perpetrating the highest religious crime—making people fear God.

Memory serves as the sluice for the comings and goings of time, with the living accumulating more memories of the dead and the dead needing to deal adequately with their memories of being alive. Whereas spirits like the queen in Judge Edmonds's story were apparently limited to mistaking pride and glory for the ultimate good, actual criminals were imprisoned, perhaps permanently, by their memories. The absence of a hell in Spiritualism begged the question of what happened to people who were evil in life, and the Spiritualist answer was perfectly Sartrean: one creates one's own hell. The list of crimes reported by those in the afterlife includes adultery, wife-beating, prostitution, murder (particularly of a child), drunkenness, and a general propensity for cruelty. Some descriptions of the lowest spheres of heaven are so gruesome in their detailed accounts of random brutality and the enjoyment that even passers-by take in watching it that at times this sphere seems indistinguishable from hell in the sheer enormity of suffering. All that the lowest sphere lacks from a standard Christian version of hell is a formalized system of punishment overseen by a devil figure. Instead, brutish people are left to run amok with no desire to advance, and often no knowledge of how to do so.

The problems created by an all-inclusive heaven crop up even in Spiritualist writings with a decided bent toward traditional religion. *The Spirit World*, by Florence Marryat, is a modest publication intended to convince a

large audience of the benefits of séances, but it consists of primarily domestic communications, and the text is riddled with painful intimacies. Like many Spiritualists, Mrs. Marryat is a firm defender of the Christian faith and sees Spiritualism as fully compatible with it. Her writing is liberally sprinkled with biblical quotations, and she argues that in the earliest days of the Israelites communication with the spirit world was commonplace. Furthermore, God himself has approved of this interaction between the living and the dead; she marshals evidence for this in passages from books such as Ezekiel, quoting, "They have seen vanity and lying divination . . . and the Lord hath not sent them; and they have made others *to hope* that they would confirm the word."³⁵

Mrs. Marryat's controls—the spirits who speak through her—are numerous, and so distinct in character that they frequently contradict the medium's own firmly held religious beliefs. Aimee, who appears to be a French spirit and who on occasion fumbles for English words, tells the sitters outright that organized religion is folly. Aimee communicates, "God looks down and laughs at your creeds. He would rather see a man, who never goes to church, share his crust with someone who wanted it worse than himself, than hear all the prayers of all the churches."³⁶ The spirits themselves are disruptions from the parade of time, both in their manifestations and in the content of their communications.

Another control, Dewdrop, is a Native American who, the reader is informed, lives in a heavenly wigwam with her mate, The West Wind. Like Aimee, Dewdrop holds some unconventional ideas for the 1890s, and is given to mocking the human institution of marriage.³⁷ It is Dewdrop who is Marryat's primary confidante in the years after the death of her eldest daughter, Eve. Spiritualists believed that God would not—could not—create creatures flawed enough to be damned, but some of those creatures were deeply flawed nonetheless.

Eve Marryat is one such example, and one learns that her death has occasioned a heavenly reprimand. Her punishment centers on her memories of life. Dewdrop recounts that, like a child who had misbehaved, "God has put her in the corner, to make her remember."³⁸ The spirit then asks Mrs. Marryat what she would have done if her daughter had been sloppy with her sewing lessons. The medium responds that she would make her "unpick" the work and start all over again. Dewdrop seems pleased with this answer, writing, "That is how God deals with us. He makes us *unpick our lives*, and do them all over again."³⁹ Like Penelope's weaving, the memory of a life must be unraveled and begun again in heaven.

In an even more poignant example, Mrs. Marryat's young relative Annie had had a few children when she found herself pregnant again. The family

lacked the economic wherewithal to support more children, and Annie took the drastic step of attempting to induce an abortion. In the process, both she and the baby died, and for the taking of these lives, she must pay the penalty in heaven. Dewdrop matter-of-factly tells Mrs. Marryat that Annie has been forced to carry the dead baby in her arms for six years. Dewdrop reports, "She has never been allowed to put it down for a single moment. That was her penance; to look at the face of the baby she destroyed, every moment of her existence."⁴⁰ Annie is eventually rescued in the afterlife by preventing a future crime. She appears at a séance and tells a friend of hers, also considering an abortion, not to do as she had done.⁴¹ Her punishment is lifted; she is free to progress through unending heaven, and free to return to earth via mediums. Purged of her need to remember, she can go forward.

These are obviously cautionary tales told to the living via the dead in hopes of forestalling antisocial behavior on the reader's part. The writings on memory are remarkably consistent over the period undertaken in this study. The list of crimes committed is virtually the same across time, as are the gendered implications of them; women are prone to vanity, promiscuity, prostitution, and the destruction of children. Men are guilty of drunkenness, debauchery, physical violence, torture, and murder. The memories of these events do not fade in heaven but in fact become more real, and time must be reordered in heaven for it to continue.

Judge Edmonds and his circle encountered the case of a murderer who, upon dying, had not been sent to hell as he had expected, but rather was placed on the first sphere in the company of the spirits of his victims. The unnamed murderer was tortured by the memories of his crime in life, only to discover that memories were in fact more tangible in heaven: "It would seem that he had been the cause of their death from some evil motive or other, and that they thus haunted him, and when on earth thus tormented him with their presence.... And that suffering had been so great, and had endured so long, that when death approached, he welcomed it as a relief from their presence. But the first sensation he had on waking to consciousness in the spirit-world, was their presence more palpable, more near than ever before."⁴²

The spirits of the victims quite literally haunt the spirit of the murderer, causing a constant state of agonizing memories. He attempts to flee their presence on multiple occasions, by methods as various as dashing headlong into crowds or running to the remotest corners of heaven and trying to hide. The spirits of the victims, however, leave him no rest, and persistently open the darkness he is trying to immerse himself in. This passage is unusual in that most of the morality tales of heaven have happy endings; here, the Spiritualists betray how they have been caught in their own double-bind of ethics. Edmonds

reports, "Thus, then, he lived, with no companions but the victims of his evil passions, and no employment for his mind, which on earth had been very active, and was now even moreso, but the recollection of his crimes; for one crime with him had led to another, so that when he turned his thoughts from one offense they found refuge only in the recollection of another."⁴³ The reader is not given any indication of how the situation could be resolved, and the ends with the guilty man wishing that he had landed in hell, which he assesses as far preferable to living with his memories.

Memory is a necessary instrument of ethics in Spiritualist heaven, but it is the punishment as well as the judge. In their constant insistence on the essential goodness of human nature, however, the Spiritualists declared repeatedly that no crime could be beyond the forgiveness of God. In some cases, forgiveness required forgetting an evil disposition, inflicted on an innocent by poor circumstances and ignorant families. In 1853, Judge Edmonds's group spent a couple of harrowing weeks almost exclusively in contact with those on the lowest level. The visions of that landscape are given in grotesque detail, with beatings, maiming of animals, failed attempts at carnality, torture, and executions all described vividly. Since the dead can experience pain but, obviously, cannot die, the attempts to murder others in heaven results in a prolonged reenactment of the final moments of life. The spirits who come through during this period are often unrepentant and even threatening to the judge and his friends, taking over the medium's body and making hostile and violent gestures toward the sitters. At times the judge finds himself in the curious position of having to ask an executed criminal if he himself had sent the man to the gallows!

Beyond the brutality of this series of séances, the reader discovers the underlying hope of the Spiritualists pervading even this macabre deathscape. Although only a small minority of the spirits contacted have any interest in progressing out of this evil realm, a few do make advances, and do so at the judge's bidding. Some are sympathetic characters who had made dire mistakes on earth but who were not intrinsically inclined toward harm. A woman who had left her husband and children for another man is one such case, and she in turn rescues a small child whose only flaw appears to be having been born into ignorance and poverty. Two others are murderers, one of her own child. Presumably, if there's hope for her in heaven, there is hope for all. Despite often being tangibly afraid of these spirits, Judge Edmonds counsels them to look inward and find the good; once this is accomplished, a light will appear, guiding them physically out of this area and leading them over a mountain to a higher realm. Those who would repent are once again tortured by the memories of their crimes, and the judge advises them to replace those memories

by helping their fellow criminals: "Bury there [in the heart] the memory of past sin in the consciousness of present good. Blot out the memory of former wrongs by doing good now."⁴⁴ The "dark spirits" of this misshapen and cruel place called heaven begin; literally, to see the light, and later editions of the volume are annotated with footnotes that certain spirits had subsequently returned to the group and reported on their painstakingly slow but still optimistic progress.

The anxiety surrounding memory was not specific to the Spiritualists, but they do seem to be the precursors of a more general trend in the nineteenth century. In *Lost Time*, David Gross argues that memory became increasingly suspect during the 1870s. Rather than hoping to cultivate a prodigious memory that indicated intelligence and scholarly accomplishment, the elite of the late nineteenth century began to associate memory with pathology. Memory kept one in the past and blocked the possibilities of benefiting from the flourishing of science and knowledge. He writes, "The rememberer was a person who had gotten locked into habitual patterns of behavior and was therefore dull and routinized; had become haunted by the losses of the past and consequently tended to be morbidly melancholic; or had become obsessed by certain alleged hurts or injustices suffered in the past and hence was rancorous and vengeful about what had wrongly befallen him."⁴⁵ Although this description accurately captures the situation of many of the spirits on the lowly steps of heaven, it is not the learned, but rather the criminal class, who are struggling with their memories in Spiritualism.

The twentieth century affected a sea change in ideas of memory, and it has indeed become a shady character. Freudian constructs of memory as hidden in the unconscious and requiring resurrecting have infiltrated nearly all aspects of contemporary thinking about memory, with repressed memories, traumatic memories, false memories, and a host of others. I will return to this theme in the last chapter, but it bears a quick caveat at this juncture. Perhaps the greatest challenge to a historian of the nineteenth century is to remember that there simply is no unconscious at this time. Although America was awash in ideas of alternative consciousness—Spiritualism itself is predicated on the idea of the trance state—those states were to be cultivated, not feared. Memory in life consisted of what parts of the past could be brought to hand. And the value assigned to memory depended not on its qualities as traumatic or not, but rather on the socioeconomic status of its bearer.

Sander Gilman has demonstrated that nineteenth-century medicine posulated that the criminal body could be read externally as inferior to the "normal" body and that it was thought to share characteristics of the bodies of Africans, Jews, and other persecuted minorities.⁴⁶ I wish to propose that a

similar cultural operation is being performed on the memories of the lower classes. Criminals, by definition, had atavistic memories; they were throwbacks to a more primitive, unenlightened time and therefore had to be transcended. Progress required forgetting, and in the context of class disparity the living could find themselves superior to the dead in terms of knowledge, even in matters about the constitution of heaven. Time functions differently for different classes, and as the wealthy accumulate more memory as they would consumer goods, the poor must forget their memories in the name of progress. Unlike the majority of Spiritualist communications with beloved relatives or the famous dead, the discussions about the need to forget generally took place with strangers. Exploring the consequences of a completely inclusive heaven, the Spiritualists used séances to think about ethics but most often at a remove from their own personal ties. As a counterpart to their progressive politics among the living, certain Spiritualists understood themselves as helping the disadvantaged souls in heaven move past their pasts. Time traveled simultaneously backward and forward, ferrying memory forward into heaven and casting it back to previous eras of ignorance and injustice.

Reincarnation

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, some Spiritualists began to espouse the concept of reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls across several lifetimes. I do not wish to suggest that the majority of Spiritualists subscribed to this metaphysical theory, but there is enough evidence that a significant number of them did to pause and put the question of how reincarnation affects ideas of memory. By the Gilded Age, ideas of reincarnation had entered American culture through a variety of passageways. Eastern religions had infiltrated American thought in translations of classical religious works (via the British domination of India) and in the published reworkings of those texts in the United States. Ralph Waldo Emerson was enamored with the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, and his poetic articulations of the over-soul are indebted to Hindu writings. H. P. Blavatsky had popularized Buddhist and Hindu precepts in her Theosophical works, and the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 had a spectacular reaction to Swami Vivekananda, who achieved instant celebrity across the country.

Another inroad for the concept of reincarnation was the influence of Allan Kardec, the nom de plume of Leon Rivail, the man centrally responsible for the popularization for Spiritualism in France. Kardec referred to his own brand of the movement as "spiritism" and its primary departure

from mainstream American Spiritualism was its overt embrace of reincarnation. Kardec's most famous work, *The Spirits' Book*, was not translated into English until 1875, but Catherine Albanese argues that his ideas found fertile ground among those west of the Mississippi, particularly among the Mexican-American population in Texas and California.⁴⁷ Kardec himself was so convinced of the reality of reincarnation that he was given to denouncing messages from the spirit world that did not affirm its reality. His own pseudonym reflects names he had in previous lives. Although Kardec had a profound influence on Spiritualist belief in America as well as abroad, his theological innovation of including reincarnation in the ascent of progress drew upon earlier thinking.

For many Spiritualists, reincarnation had another source: Plato. The transmigration of souls is mentioned in five Platonic dialogues, with the descriptions in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus* being the most extensive. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates argues with Cebes about the preexistence of the soul and its quality as immutable, as opposed to the mutable body it is housed in. The souls of inferior men, those who had overly indulged in sensual pleasures, wander around Hades until their longing for the ways of the body bring them to be reincarnated. Particular character flaws will result in being reborn as different animals, ranging from donkeys for drunkards and humans for those who were gentle and moderate but unheeding of philosophy. A similar caste division by character is found in the *Phaedrus*, linked explicitly to the idea of memory; I shall say more about this passage later. The *Timaeus* elaborates a similar idea, but with the added catch that a bad man will be reborn as a woman before he is consigned to the ranks of animal life.⁴⁸

In 1900, Hudson Tuttle, arch-defender of Spiritualism, cites Plato as the source of many people's erroneous belief in reincarnation. Tuttle opposes the idea of reincarnation, upholding Plato as the greatest man of antiquity, but one for whom modern science was not yet available and hence his lapse in judgment on this count. Tuttle writes, "This [reincarnation] is a very old idea, and is received at present in almost its original form, as advocated by the Pythagorean and Platonic schools, by many Spiritualists. There are those who think they can distinctly recollect passages in their previous existence; who honestly believe they remember when they animated various animals."⁴⁹ He compares these memories to dreams and misrepresents Platonic thought by eliding reincarnation and recollection. Recollection is the process of a soul remembering the metaphysical perfection it had witnessed before becoming embodied; philosophy, not memory itself, is the key to bringing about a return to this happy state, and the recollection of heaven will stop the cycle of reincarnation. Tuttle conflates the two and suggests that Plato thought that a person could recollect

his or her past lives. I have no way of ascertaining if this misreading was a common one among Spiritualists, but it seems likely.

As Tuttle would have it, reincarnation runs counter to standard Spiritualist dogma because heaven, not earth, is the glorious destination, and continued returning to earth would seem to disrupt the tiers of progression. However, some Spiritualists managed to weave the basic precepts of improvement into the structure of reincarnation, with the soul accumulating memories of each life even if the consciousness was not aware of it. This formula allowed believers to maintain the notion of progress while making it double-edged—a soul progressed in heaven, was cast back onto earth where it learned new things, and was reinserted into heaven at a higher state as a result of earthly improvements.

The Drama of Love and Death by Edward Carpenter is a significantly more learned tract than most Spiritualist writings. Carpenter has read Bergson and was acquainted with the work of Sir Oliver Lodge and other contemporary scientists; his footnotes also indicate fluency in German. In fact, although Carpenter spends a great deal of his book musing about séances and their implications for the preservation of the individual after death, he steps back from full allegiance to Spiritualism and claims to be content waiting for more investigation of the matter. His discussion of reincarnation and its implications for memory serve as an unusually eloquent justification for transmigration and the accumulation of memory: "Memory would not normally pass from one embodiment or incarnation to another, but each stream would flow into the central self and there be stored. . . . Indeed there are not a few facts with regard to the recovery of memory which make the matter probable. Though any given earth-life in a given form could not be repeated, the *memory* of such an earth-life, fresh and clear, may survive an indefinite time in the crystal mirror of the deeper consciousness."⁵⁰ For Carpenter, the divine is nothing short of a warehouse of all memories, and "race memory" (by which he clearly means species) accounts for the possibility that one can remember parts of a life one never lived. Heredity memory, passing through generations, can surface in "shreds and streaks," presumably accounting for a percentage of uncanny memory experiences and claims to recall past lives.

Memory, then, while it might be "real," is not necessarily reliable, but it is elevated nonetheless to be nearly coterminous with divinity. Memory across individual lifetimes is stored in the soul, and the entire run of humankind has access to some amount of collective memory. This accounts for innate ideas (he gives the example of a bird building its first nest, not quite sure of its function) as well as mistakes of memory. Carpenter's understanding of memory can be mapped quite well onto Swedenborg's bifurcation of mortal and heavenly

memories, with the addition of several lives; human memory is fallible, but the soul has perfect memory, and that is expanded across time.

Some Spiritualist articulations of reincarnation are more decidedly practical and, perhaps accidentally, more pointedly Platonic. The prolific medium Mrs. Mary T. Longley transcribed a series of messages from the spirit Astrea to her earthly soul mate. The unnamed man has a wife and a family on earth, but he is obviously unhappy with his present arrangement, and the spirit world provides both consolation and the promise of a brighter romantic future. He and Astrea are cosmically joined (I will say more on Spiritualist ideas about eternal romantic love in the third chapter), but unfortunately have not been born at the same time in this particular incarnation. She watches him from heaven and consoles him with tales about their prior lives together and their future happiness.

Astrea tells the anonymous petitioner that in sleep, his capacity to recollect their love is greater: "Thou must gradually ascend to that vibration as sleep grows more profound with the body; thou art then in another world; on returning to earth thou doth descend to a lower rate of vibration, thus the soul fails to register its experiences upon the physical brain. There is a memory of the mortal and a memory of the Spirit. The latter—higher—can review, contain all essential elements of the lower, the mortal memory cannot sustain (or contain) that of the Spirit."⁵¹ To this nearly perfect restatement of Swedenborg's idea of two memories, Astrea adds the possibility that in dreams one may access heavenly memory. The second consciousness of the trance state required for mediumship was likened frequently to the situation of sleepwalking; in both, the subject does and says things not governed by the conscious self. This analogy was deployed often in Spiritualist writing and may be the impetus for Astrea's suggestion that her earthly love may recall her in his dreams.

The memory of the spirit—the one that recollects what it knew before—exists but is simply not accessible to the beloved's conscious thought. Among the things that he has forgotten on the earthly plane is his prior happiness with Astrea. She communicates, "Yea, thy Astrea declareth that thou hast had a conscious existence for ages—thou didst not find first expression on this planet, nor did thy Soul Mate; we were companions ere we came to Earth. Is this re-embodiment, Dear Soul? Then thou art re-embodied, for we are products of the Eternal Ages, and have lived and loved in other worlds. Soul hath existed since time began—thy soul hath had its immortal heritage through the ages."⁵² She regales him with stories of their prior lives together and thereby begins correcting his faulty memory. The spirit world functions the same way philosophy does for Plato. Through the aid of Astrea's teachings, the unnamed love is learning what his soul had forgotten.

The Rebirth of the Renaissance

At the juncture where the living were compelled to produce ever more memories of the dead, many of the dead were ambivalent about their memories of life. This mirroring process between heaven and earth is sent somewhat askew by the class considerations for both parties, but it is nonetheless striking that Spiritualism articulates heaven as an inverse of life on the point of memory. This feature of Spiritualist writing, I have argued, is centered on the problem of ethics: it is not the memory of one's loving relatives that the dead wished to forget. However, memory functioned as the sole instrument of condemnation in the afterlife, and those memories were more difficult to address. I have argued in the introduction that American popular culture was infiltrated by Neoplatonism and Renaissance hermeticism. One of the great legacies of the Renaissance was an extraordinary attention given to the process of memory and the proliferation of instruction on how to develop a nearly superhuman memory. As the Renaissance itself had sprung from the reintroduction of the classics to Western thought, so too did the rebirth of memory have its roots in antiquity. This *ars memoriae* centered on storing information in spatial relations in the imagination, and memory theaters were the apex of mnemonic devices.

As Cicero recounts it, the art of memory began at a banquet. A poet by the name of Simonides had been hired to entertain the guests, and during his recitation he praised Castor and Pollux in addition to his host. His employer, Scopas, was apparently displeased that the poem honored anyone other than him, and he announced that Simonides would only receive half his salary and that he could get the rest due to him from the gods he had mentioned. Two callers then requested to see Simonides, and as soon as the poet had left the house to greet these strangers, the roof serendipitously collapsed on the banquet guests and host. All were killed and the bodies destroyed beyond recognition. Simonides was able to reconstruct which body belonged to each family by recalling the placement of the guests around the table. Thus began the art of memory and its emphasis on spatial relations to aid in remembering.

The original source for instruction on how to cultivate an artificial memory (that is, a memory structure in addition to the "natural" one) is the anonymous *Ad Herennium*, which, according to Frances Yates in her classic work *The Art of Memory*, was itself probably based on earlier Greek works from antiquity that have not survived.⁵³ Cicero and Quintilian reproduced much of the first-century BCE *Ad Herennium*, and it is obvious from their writings that techniques derived from it were already commonly being taught. Artificial

memory involves the mental creation of a vast space—a great hall or sculpture garden, for example—in which the rememberer places vivid images that stand for names or objects he wishes to recall.

These images are complicated ones, and the more spectacular and unusual they are, the easier it will be to recall them and their attendant referents. For example, in a room in a memory theater, one could place all of the appropriate furniture, each piece of which would have a memory attached, and then place on top of the armoire a bowl of dead fish and draped over the chair a bloodied cloak. To these, additional images invoking new memories would be added. Each memory image should be related to its neighbors; so, for instance, all the members of one family should appear in one cluster of images, and those should be spatially next to another cluster of images that holds the memories of a different family.⁵⁴ Prefabricated memory theaters might include the Zodiac or a beloved book of images, often in medieval times a bestiary.

Renaissance luminaries excelled at the art of memory, with perhaps the most famous example being Giordano Bruno, whose memory was so prodigious that royalty and officials of the Inquisition both inquired whether it had been received through a questionable alliance with magic.⁵⁵ As a master of memory, Bruno wrote several works on the topic and gained employment teaching the wealthy the tricks of his trade. Bruno had been a Dominican friar and early scientist as well as something of a magician. His iconoclastic views and his staunch support of Copernicus's heliocentric universe eventually got him burned at the stake in 1600.⁵⁶

Cicero and Bruno may seem to be rather lofty company for most of the Spiritualists to keep, but their notion of memory theaters, which generally died out in Christian writing in the sixteenth century, appears to have been revived by Andrew Jackson Davis.⁵⁷ I have no accurate way of gauging exactly what Davis read, and Davis himself adds no illumination on that topic because he insisted he never read anything, a claim common among mystics, including Swedenborg (and, in his case, a claim soundly trounced by later scholars).⁵⁸ However, Cicero's *De oratore*, which contains the memory instruction, was standard fare for American common schools in the nineteenth century,⁵⁹ and Bruno is mentioned in numerous Spiritualist tracts, including many by Davis. Bruno, however, seems to be lionized in Spiritualism not for his works on memory but for his stubborn insistence on the primacy of science and, perhaps, for his implicit critique of Catholicism. Nonetheless, it is likely that the notion of memory theaters was culturally present in Davis's circles, whether that material was received first-, second-, or thirdhand. Many of Davis's diagrams of the afterlife bear a striking resemblance to Renaissance depictions of memory theaters, as do contemporaneous depictions of the cosmos in Masonic books.

Whether Davis is the sole author of the thought or whether this reappearance is indeed an indication of an American Renaissance, Davis employs the imagery of the memory theater but again inverts its meaning. Whereas for Renaissance thinkers the theaters were an instrument of mastery, the Spiritualist temples were sites of punishment. Davis communicates with a James Victor Wilson, who has been dead for around ten years and seems to be someone Davis knew in life. Brother Wilson is a recurring spirit in Davis' writing, and in one section he has just returned from a lengthy visit to various stars. He describes one of these locales in great detail; it is an island populated by a brotherhood of famous Greeks.

The entire chapter is a bizarre meditation on the value of the past. The Greeks are in charge of the "temple of antiquities," and they instruct the needy in how to forget. The historical figures include, in this order, Prodicus (famous Sophist and Socrates' reputed teacher), Euripides, Socrates, Hermogenes (this could be either an architect or a rhetorician, both of whom are relatively obscure), Plato, Xenophon (Greek historian and chronicler of Socrates), Moschus (author of "Europa"), Anaxagoras (philosopher of mind whose theories were commented on by both Plato and Aristotle), and Crito (most likely the devoted friend of Socrates). An unnamed Greek serves as Wilson's guide to the island, and the tour is preceded by a somewhat confused explanation of Platonic Forms and copies. To complicate matters, Brother Wilson uses neologisms constantly, and Davis even notes that Wilson returns to him to correct his spelling of the heavenly words.⁶⁰

In Platonic thought, Forms are the perfect metaphysical instantiation of all things and concepts. The Form of a table and the Form of justice are both represented in the heavenly panoply that the gods have the privilege of viewing. Their material replications on earth are but copies, corrupt representations of the perfect concept, subject to time and decay. Plato's famous dislike of art stems in part from this corruption of the Forms: if a table is already a bastardized version of the idea, a painting of a table is even further removed, a copy of a copy, or a "simulacrum." Physical reality is thus an imitation of the Forms, and imitation itself is indicted in the creation of art.

In the hands of the Spiritualists, however, Platonic Forms and copies become a bit more confused and directly related to the individual spirit. Brother Wilson explains, "Images and likenesses are but forms of ideas within the great mind of this [heavenly?] existence. The realm of objects and forms is the educt [*sic*] of the world of ideas. The sensational sphere they regard as the sphere of effects; the causes being inherent to mind, or *Vasciel*, which is what you term spirit."⁶¹ Because of their duties at the temple of antiquities, the members of the brotherhood are prevented from leaving the island but instead

view the universe in images created at will, a power bestowed on them by their extreme erudition and spiritual advance.

The memory theater is a full-blown and outrageously large museum that houses the memories of the island's inhabitants. Its dimensions are given in painstaking, nearly biblical exactitude, and the reader is told that it would take a person more than ten years to walk through it in its entirety. Brother Wilson communicates:

As he [an Italian youth] spoke thus, a new light dawned upon my yet more teachable and reflective reason. The Aggamede, then, is a Temple of Antiquities, a palace where *past deeds* or things are made to be *present*, until the right comes down upon earth and until justice is fulfilled by the evil-doer. "Yes!" interposed the youth, "such is the temple. It is memory's crystal palace. Every artificial *toleka* [an instance or artifact of memory] is an image of some thing, or of some particular deed, accomplished or sought by the individual before death."⁶²

In an inversion of memory theaters, the temple of antiquities is designed to be emptied rather than filled. Brother Wilson discovers that the temple of memory is a teaching tool, wherein new spirits who remain attached to deeds on earth are given the opportunity to return to earth as spirits to right their wrongs. The spirits inhabiting the island on which the temple of memory is located are referred to as "patients," and their struggles to come to terms with their pasts are construed along the lines of a medical therapy.

The youth's teacher carries his *toleka*, in this case a leather purse filled with gold and gems.⁶³ The reader discovers that the youth had been a thief in life, and the *toleka* is a metonymic reminder of his misdeeds. The use and function of the *tolekae* are similar to what was seen in the case of the proud queen: the patients are trapped by their memories, but here those memories have been given concrete images that stand for a constellation of memories. The grammar of memory in the temple is thus synecdochic and a condensation of memory into images, precisely the relationship of memories to images in the Renaissance but with the opposite effect. Like the murderer who was haunted by his victims, memory is more concrete in heaven than on earth, and shedding it requires years, decades, or centuries depending on how dearly it is held.

Brother Wilson assures the reader, however, that some patients are indeed cured of the past. Of the island run by ancient philosophers, he says, apparently without irony, "Good thus accomplished has made many *Paralorella*, or half-cured patients, who in due time will leave their love for 'by-gones,' and will

then press forward to the things which grow about them in divine beauty. The devotees of antiquities, either of evil or good import, are the most unteachable spirits in this existence."⁶⁴ When the memory of the past is finally let go of, the tolekæ become demonstrably artificial and begin to fade.

The tolekæ themselves are the subject of much discussion, and their nature is expounded upon in detail. Brother Wilson and the youth take a journey to earth to see the site of the latter's wrongdoings. On this excursion, Brother Wilson suggests that his teacher simply drop the purse to earth and return it to its rightful owner, thereby allowing the boy release from his present conundrum. The youth replies, "Ah! my darling Apozea [teacher], that leather purse in the spirit land is nothing to me but an artificial image, bearing admonition and education. It is substantial and significant *there*, but here, on earth, it is the same value as an imitation, without weight and without value."⁶⁵ The artifacts of memory are artifice and imitations, mental images of the past that are copies of the object in reality. The bag of jewels is real in heaven but fabricated in reality.

The Platonic imagery of memories as imitations continues throughout the chapter. The artificiality of the tolekæ is continually reinforced, suggesting that participation in memory is a false knowledge of reality, but one into which a soul is easily seduced. Echoes of Plato are felt everywhere in these sections, as is a touch of nineteenth-century primitivism. Brother Wilson recounts:

About two years ago, as I was walking in another wing of this wonderous [*sic*] Palace of Antiquities, my Apozea illustrated a lesson by some (artificial) stone hammers and flint knives which he said had been long cherished as sacred relics by the Shoshonees, a tribe of earthly Indians. The imitations were fading away like mountain mist in the morning, and I inquired if such would be the fate of everything within the temple. He answered, "The useful is eternal. But things are temporary." To my further inquiry, he said: "Memory is frequently loaded with love for many things which do not exalt the spirit. Those things or images remain until the spirit hath outgrown the temple of the Antiquities. When morning dawns, the night and its shadows depart; so the evil is no longer evil to the good."⁶⁶

Brother Wilson must himself come to terms with his own vanity and ambition, an event that will completely alter the way he views the island of memories. He is in no way a criminal or even an unkind man, but because he suffers from a bloated ego he must spend two years working with the patients on the island, the "mighty-minded of the earth . . . authors of self-aggrandizing books, [and] adherents to antiquated forms of thoughts."⁶⁷ At the end of this

period, his vanity is gone, and his perceptions of the island have completely reversed themselves. Moreover, the change is entirely in his perception—his misapprehension of reality vanishes with his self-importance.

Thus Brother Wilson learns the ultimate lesson that even his obstacles are imaginary inasmuch as they are products of his perception and may become differently valued through moral improvement. Like his toleka, the island itself is artificial, at least in how it is perceived: what was once the land of shadows and of the sorrow of memories is now radiant and sacred as a result of his having achieved the wisdom to be able to see it that way. He even tells Davis that he now is regarded to be as spiritually advanced as Solon, the legendary lawgiver to the Athenians and Greek counterpart to Solomon. The two briefly discuss Galen, second-century physician, and the account concludes with Brother Wilson making predictions about the future for various foreign countries.

The double helix of time twists throughout this vignette. On the one hand, the island is the pet project of a litany of famous ancient thinkers. They are obviously to be regarded as vastly superior to the common run of humankind, and we are even told that Goethe and Schiller number among the patients tended to by the renowned Greeks. On the other hand, the temple of antiquities is devoted to teaching the art of forgetting. But what the patients must forget are their memories of being alive, whether that process is punitive or not. I submit that this depiction of time as being pulled in both directions at once is implicit in both the reversals of expectations for memory on heaven and earth and the reversal of the purpose of memory theaters. It is not all memory that is being critiqued here; it is only the memory of copies.

This interplay of forward motion and memory recalls Plato's recollection, the theory we are repeatedly told is his favorite. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato gives an allegory for the soul's progress to perfection. Preexistent and winged, souls ride each night with the gods on their rounds of observing the Forms. As the souls vie for the privilege of seeing the Forms, their wings become chipped and maimed, causing them to eventually fall to earth and take on the mortal coil. Through the love of wisdom, souls may begin to recollect the perfection they had seen before they were incarnate, and thus they begin again to grow wings. Plato writes, "This is a recollection of what our soul saw when it was travelling with a god, looking down on the things we now say are and rising up into what really is. For this reason it is proper that only the thinking of a friend of wisdom will make the wings grow, because, through memory, it is always as close as possible to that which by its proximity makes a god divine. When a man deals correctly with remembrances of this sort, he is always initiated perfectly into the mysteries, and he alone really becomes perfect."⁶⁸

Platonic recollection comes the closest to explaining the jumble of temporal modes in Spiritualist writing. Acts on earth must be forgotten for the soul to proceed in heaven, but what replaces those memories is a truer version of memory itself, the recollection of the Forms. Many scholars have noted that in Spiritualism, heaven is a replication of earth, abounding with schools and societies and even different churches, all sanitized of carnality, disease, and urban unrest. However, I argue that the case is actually the opposite, at least in the mind of the Spiritualists. Although Davis's version of Platonic thought is a bit mangled, he is clearly advocating a metaphysical duality in which earth is the poor copy of heaven. Forgetting is the purview of those with corrupt memories, whether those consist of crimes or poor personality traits. True memory is the memory of heaven, and Spiritualists stood at the crossroads of valorizing history and progress, where the answers for the future just might lie in the past.

3

Machines

Prior to the standardization of American time in 1884, traveling the seventy miles between New Bedford and Lynn, Massachusetts, would have brought with it a time difference of nearly six minutes. The measuring of high noon was available and accurate to every American town, but the time held true for only a radius of twelve miles. In 1853, the Reverend John Murray Spear, late of New Bedford, received his first transmission of spirit messages from his namesake and the founder of Universalism, John Murray. He began to construct a new mechanical messiah, perched on a hilltop outside of Lynn, 160 feet in the air and \$2,000 in the making. That same year, Herman Melville, also late of New Bedford, wrote “Bartleby the Scrivener,” a meditation on the changing nature of time. One year later, Thoreau’s *Walden Pond* would be published (a mere two-minute time difference from the town of Lynn), in which the pinch of time seemed to be tightening.

American time was caught between the conflicting drive toward progress and the lure of the past. Increasingly time itself became the object of conjecture and many, including Thoreau, suspected that it might soon become the people’s new master. The railroad, in particular, required a standardization of time that threatened not only the rhythms of nature but also the balance of power among men. In *Time Lord*, Clark Blaise describes this transition to regularized time as the commodification of humans and labor: “Thoreau was alert to frightful new creatures that lurked in the

temporal wilderness of mid-century Western culture. Men without time, men without integrity. Machine men, emasculated men. . . . He was caught between the rapid spread of the railroad, which was refashioning the world in its own image, and society's helplessness before it. The railroad knew no temporal boundaries; men must bow before its demands. Thoreau's anxiety stemmed at least in part from industry's assault on what we'd call the space-time continuum. Time was in the air."¹

In this chapter I will contend that American Spiritualists reflected and responded to the concerns that abounded in higher culture with their own mixed messages about the place and importance of time. Midcentury concerns about time were largely linked to the creation of new machines that required new structures of measuring time; when the capriciousness of high noon in one town was no longer able to account for the time a train would arrive or when a job or contract would end, the idea of measurement of invisible forces became both important and popular. The Spiritualists experimented in their own ways with measuring the invisible—fields of magnetism, electricity, and communication beyond the grave. Time was a logical progression. While time was—and is—a universal concern to dwell on, the Spiritualists represented the conflict in how to value time better than many of their peers: constantly pulling the spirits of the past into the present and working ardently toward the future, the Spiritualists were emblematic of the conflicting drives toward valorizing the past and anticipating a coming utopia.

Machines would both usher in the future and provide evidence of their claims; tied to hopes for empiricism, machinery was also implicated in entertainment. Mechanical displays were common throughout the nineteenth century, and showmanship entered the curious arena of evidence and deception. As R. Lawrence Moore has shown, increasingly theatrical preaching styles infiltrated traditional modes of Protestant communication from the beginning of the century on. The alliance of theatricality and religion, while repugnant to some, was considered a practical necessity by many. This change in tone was abetted by the growing interest in lyceum performances, lectures on ostensibly edifying topics delivered by skilled speakers.² Disseminating educational and moral information in decidedly entertaining formats colluded with increasing consumerism on both fronts and soon the American public came to expect a certain amount of amusement with its knowledge.

The discourses of science, too, moved along this trajectory with "wonder shows," replete with dazzling technological displays and unexpected affinities with religion. Fred Nadis briefly traces the arrival of wonder in America:

Magic lantern phantasmagoria shows that presented "apparitions of the dead and absent" appeared in the very early 1800s along

with displays of mechanical androids or automatons; 1819 brought Mr. Charles, a “ventriloquist and professor of mechanical sciences to his Majesty the King of Prussia,” to Boston with his “mechanical games and philosophic recreations.” Johann Nepomul Maelzel brought the long-renowned chess-playing automaton “The Turk” to America in 1826. In Philadelphia, lectures that included displays of electrical wonders were added to Charles Peale’s Museum in Philadelphia, which included a portrait gallery, natural history displays, and displays related to the industrial arts.³

Nadis rightly points out that in this atmosphere, the lines between displays of objective, scientific materials were entirely eroded at the intersection with the spiritual, persuasive, or outright fraudulent stage shows of the same epoch. (See Figure 3.1.)

This new breed of showmanship played on the middle class’s fears of new technology. Purposeful tricksters and stage magicians made Americans question the status of new knowledge and the extent to which that knowledge was trustworthy. Issues of authenticity and deception became enmeshed with demonstrations of progress and piety. In *The Arts of Deception* James Cook argues that the acquisition of knowledge was presented as a paradox in stage shows: by suggesting or sometimes announcing to the audience that the display was fraudulent, P. T. Barnum and his like-minded colleagues “suggested

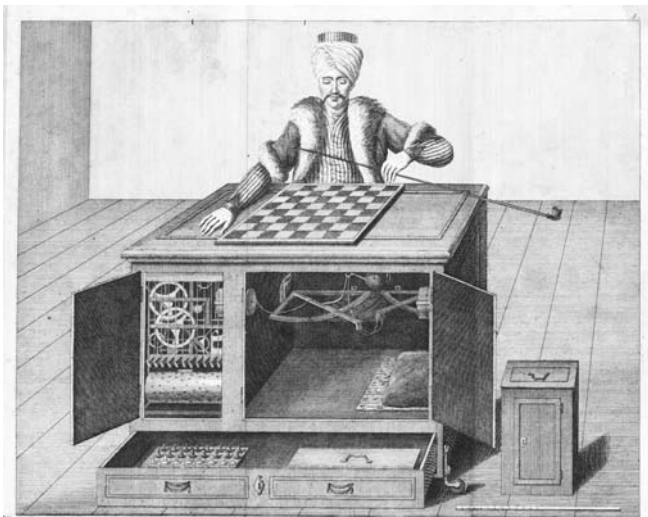


FIGURE 3.1 “Der Schachspieler... / Le Jouer d’Echecs.” The Turk, chess playing automaton. Image courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

in principle (if not always in practice) that the older Enlightenment ideals of reasoned analysis, exposé, and perceptual mastery were still possible; that somewhere—buried beneath all the playful misrepresentations and promotional teases—there was still a truth to be uncovered.⁴ Scientific displays functioned as a *pharmakon* in American culture, creating illusions of knowledge and undermining their certainty. And yet, the intellectual engagement inspired the middle-class imagination to further displays of inquisitiveness and instruction and led many Spiritualists to attempt to compete in the field of demonstrating the intangible.

Invisible Measures

One of the most curious aspects of Spiritualist culture was the creation of multiple machines for the betterment of humankind, but the majority of these were unusual in both their intent and execution. The machines that Spiritualists built fall roughly into two categories—those designed to improve contact with the dead and those given from the spirits of the dead to improve the lives of the living. All of these machines, however, could be characterized as time machines in that they sought to recuperate past time by bringing the dead into the present. This was accomplished either by making the dead manifest or else by pulling the living toward heavenly time by employing its technologies. The paradox of progress is present in both instances: the knowledge of the past is a prerequisite for the perfecting of the future.

Technology is frequently written about in contemporary times as an attempt to transcend history, to obliterate it altogether and rise above time. Progress has a utopian cast that suggests constant improvement toward a better tomorrow. In the Spiritualists' hands, I will argue, machines were created to capture it. Instrumentation served two basic goals: it heightened the appearance of objectivity, and it increased the reach of human capacity for perceiving. Spiritualists were fascinated with both aspects of machines and avidly set to creating, or at least describing, many. Some were curiosities like automata, whereas others were more economically minded improvements on daily life.⁵ Primarily, however, Spiritualists were interested in machines that could legitimize their project. The larger society was endeavoring to hold on to the past as well, and Spiritualists often fed off this movement. Instruments were designed to expand the powers of the senses, primarily sight and hearing, and as the century went on the artifacts of machines that captured the past, such as photographs and phonographs, created ever-new ghosts for the culture to assimilate.

The telegraph revolutionized both communication and the uses of time. As the dominant metaphor for spirit communication from heaven—the movement had begun, after all, with a laborious version of Morse code with the Hydesville “rappings”—the telegraph enjoyed a pride of place in Spiritualist circles. Instantaneous and invisible, this new technology first clicked out the sentence “What hath God wrought?” in 1844, four years before the Fox sisters knocked encoded messages to their ghost. The first practical harnessing of electrical current, the telegraph “annihilated distance. Space, once measured in miles, was now measured in the moments between the time a man in New York pressed a key and another in New Orleans replied.”⁶ If the threshold of space could be so easily traversed, reasoned Spiritualists, why not that of time?

The telegraph eliminated the margin of human error in a very observable and experiential sense: communication no longer would be limited to how far and fast a horse or human could go in a certain parameter of time. The nearly coextensive development of the railroad functioned in a similar and even more dramatic display of overcoming human frailty. Both machines could entirely eliminate the boundaries of physical exhaustion, and both required a complete reconceptualizing of time itself.⁷ Although Thoreau’s qualms about the reclassification of human time as a commodity were clearly prescient, the very real benefits of these technologies must have seemed to many as the embodiment of progress itself. If something as common and humble as steam could bring a railroad to fruition, then hypothesizing that other powers could bridge death seemed for many the logical conclusion of the epoch.

Communication began to be implicated in these new venues for technology. The speed of sound now brought with it an unprecedented amount of news. Papers ran daily columns featuring what they had learned on the “electrical telegraph” that day; the achievement of the first transatlantic cable in 1858 ensured that news from around the globe was transmitted instantly to readers in America. The effects of this knowledge revolutionized both politics and money. G. J. Whitrow writes, “An ultimatum could be sent off in the heat of the moment demanding an immediate reply, public opinion could be rapidly influenced and armies mobilized overnight. Such was the march of progress that sudden panic on the New York Stock Exchange in the afternoon could lead to a businessman in London shooting himself before breakfast the following morning.”⁸ Machines truly seemed to make communication accurate, immediate, and invisible.

In *Body and Soul*, Robert Cox argues that Spiritualists went beyond conscripting the language of telegraphy and claimed that the medium’s body acted as the instrument itself. Just as the machine did for electrical impulses,

the body-as-telegraph demonstrated the existence of invisible forces without making the forces themselves visible:

Hudson Tuttle explained that when “a sympathetic cord is established” between two spirits “in such a manner that thoughts flow on it, from mind to mind, as electric fluid on the telegraphic wire,” minds become united “and their thoughts become in unison.” The extent of this fusion should not be underestimated: as one of the earliest spirit mediums declared, the fusion was so thoroughgoing that “space was nearly annihilated” and time had little meaning.⁹

The possibilities of the instantaneous were truly a new vista for thinking. Telegraphs provided an immediate and accurate transmission of words from one location to another; these machines trumped the experiences of lovers or families in their transparent abilities to communicate. Becoming more like the machine, however, would require more than exploiting electricity—it would require altering the mode of thinking itself. Of the nebulous forces that Spiritualists thought could connect humans to heaven, animal magnetism and electricity took pride of place.¹⁰

After Emanuel Swedenborg, the primary precursor to Spiritualism was undoubtedly the colorful character Franz Anton Mesmer. In the eighteenth century, Mesmer had postulated that the human body contained a magnetic fluid that occasionally got blocked, resulting in sickness. Relying on a Neoplatonic view of the cosmos, in which the human body stood in miniature reflection of the universe, Mesmer posited that the planets had, by reason of universal attraction between objects, an effect on each other, the tides, the earthly atmosphere, and the human body. All parts of the chain of being were subject to the dynamics of a fluid that penetrates the universe and are thus affected in an analogous way to how gravity causes tides in the ocean.¹¹

Mesmer proposed that the attraction between these bodies was properly considered a magnetic one, and that the fluid flowed into the human body from the outside. According to Mesmer, “Thus, just as a weak magnet is revived by a stronger magnet, similarly the elemental matter which dies out in an old man because of the debility of his organs, is revived by elemental matter which is launched by elastic, fresh and hearty vessels and nerves. It is more than likely that all of the bodies and elements of Nature are penetrated by this elemental matter.”¹² The idea of a universal ether was as course as old as speculation about the heavens themselves; Plato writes about it in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*, and Aristotle would later expand on the idea greatly. By introducing the idea of magnetism to this classical hermetic description of the nature of the cosmos, Mesmer was joining the likes of Johannes Kepler,

who had proposed that magnetic attraction accounted for the planets remaining in their orbits. Mesmer's innovation was introducing these formulae into the discourse of medicine—the concept itself had a long-standing history in astrological and astronomical conjecture.¹³

In the human body, according to Mesmer, this fluid can become blocked or misdirected, resulting in disease, since the patient would require an influx of additional fluid from the external world. Being magnetic, however, this fluid can be restored to flowing properly by the use of magnets; moreover, since instruments could be magnetized and other humans were themselves magnetic, the distribution of fluid in an unhealthy body could be manipulated by a magnetizer, restoring the congenial flow and therefore health of the person.¹⁴ The treatment involved inducing a trancelike state, under which the patient would be consulted for his diagnosis of his own disease and its remedy. Animal magnetism was highly popular in Spiritualist circles throughout the century, and although academic recognition for his discovery repeatedly eluded Mesmer, it caught on in the vast netherworld of the popular imagination's love of pseudo-science.

Mesmer's theories and, perhaps more important, those of his former student the marquis de Puységur, were instrumental in the concept of mediumship. Mesmer's initial theories highlighted the centrality of the body and its uses as an instrument of healing. The marquis, however, discovered what would become the eponymous form of proto-hypnosis, mesmerism. In the course of treating a patient, the marquis noticed that the boy slipped into what appeared to be a second state of consciousness, one akin to the experience of sleepwalking. This second state left the patient highly susceptible to what we now call hypnotic suggestion and also revealed aspects of the patient's personality that were often helpful in providing a cure.¹⁵ The ability to induce this altered state and to exploit its qualities to help heal the patient was central to the first generation of mesmerists. In fact, Mesmer himself had to adopt the technique as part of his own panoply of offerings, but he denied this state a pride of place in his writings. Instead he relegated it to the status of an "internal sense" that he attempted to utterly demystify and disentangle from associations with the supernatural.¹⁶

The catchall phrase of animal magnetism embodied a range of pseudo-medical treatments that relied on the combination of an induced trance state accompanied by a physical therapy with the magnetizer attempting to redistribute the flow of fluids in the patient's body. Transplanted onto American soil in the 1830s, the supernatural possibilities of mesmerism were immediately detected, and public demonstrations suggested the presence of a sixth sense under conditions of induced somnambulism. The Spiritualist trance

state was predicated on this mesmeric trance, and although still conceptually tied to ideas of health the state itself was severed from medical discourse and moved firmly into religious discourse. Americans dispensed with a need for a mesmerizer, however, and self-induced trance states became the norm. In this altered consciousness, mediums could act as conduits to the next world, becoming the very telegraphs they so admired.

In this brief survey of measuring invisible forces, the conceptualizing of magnetism should also be read against Plato's *Ion*, a dialogue that was popular with nineteenth-century audiences. Then available in English through a translation by Percy Shelley, the *Ion* is an unusual piece wherein Socrates, rather than attempting to unseat an interlocutor's certainty on a topic, convinces Ion that his skill as a Homeric rhapsode comes from divine inspiration rather than knowledge. In the process of doing so, Socrates delivers an extended disquisition on inspiration as functioning like magnets:

It's a divine power that moves you, as a "Magnetic" stone moves iron rings. . . . This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power in the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does—pull other rings—so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended.¹⁷

Socrates continues to compare versifying to Muse-driven madness, claiming that poetry is not the product of the intellect but rather that of a Bacchic frenzy.

The poet is in fact "possessed" by the gods who use the poet as an instrument of communication. The resonances for Spiritualism are overt here: "That's why the god takes their intellect away from them when he uses them as his servants, as he does prophets and godly diviners, so that we who hear should know that *they* are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value, for their intellect is not in them: the god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them to us."¹⁸ This conjunction of magnetism and entranced possession is a nearly perfect iteration of what the Spiritualists understood to be cutting-edge scientific endeavors.

The ability to measure magnetism, to catch the past pointing toward the future, would require new instruments. Magnetism, like its Siamese-twin force electricity, was poised at the cutting edge of the future but was understood through traditional constructs of the past. A unified universe wherein a single force flowed throughout all of creation allowed Spiritualists and their

related occultists to conceive of these forces as immanent and creating interconnections between people, spirits, and the entire cosmos. In his intriguing article “The Esoteric Uses of Electricity,” Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke traces the history of thinking about magnetism as a mysterious and possibly healing force back to Paracelsus. What Goodrick-Clarke calls a “theology of electricity” came to stand alongside theories of magnetism and was particularly attractive to those with a hermetic cast of mind. He writes, “Electricity I primarily identified as an ensouling, animating force in esoteric cosmology and anthropology. As such, it tends to support emanationist and non-dualist, Hermetic philosophies.”¹⁹ Magnetism and electricity were thus co-opted by supporters of a Renaissance cosmology who saw the universe as an interconnected whole rather than a disjunct and disvalued earth standing in relation to a superior and distant heaven.

The Medium as Machine

A favorite spirit to call upon was Ben Franklin, who exuded the dual attraction of inventor and patriot. Franklin’s spirit was pivotal to many of the machines built or attempted by Spiritualists, and Franklin himself was depicted as continuing his scientific explorations posthumously. Electricity became one of the primary touchstones for measuring the invisible. Although invisible and not well understood, it irrefutably existed and could vastly benefit humankind. Electricity did not replace animal magnetism, which was espoused in Spiritualist circles well into the Civil War. Rather, Spiritualists proposed that electricity functioned similarly to the body’s magnetic flow and that both the dead and the living were electrically “charged.” Moreover, electricity operated according to gender divisions; women’s “naturally” weaker and more excitable nature indicated that they were negatively charged and therefore attractive to the positively charged spirits.²⁰ This electrical division of labor accounted in part for why the majority of Spiritualist mediums were women. Other, less complimentary factors included the youth and lack of erudition that women were perceived as having.

Mediums were themselves instruments of communication, and as I will discuss in detail below, Spiritualist instruments were designed to heighten objectivity and the case of human-as-instrument was no exception. If a young woman was waxing philosophical or commenting on politics in a trance state, it was surely the dead speaking through her as her innate ability precluded this as possible. Perhaps the most celebrated medium of her day, Cora Hatch, was subjected to a typical test of objectivity. Cora was young and very beautiful, with

long, blonde curls that were much commented on in the press. On stage, for thousands to observe her as the passive vehicle for the other world to inhabit, Cora Hatch exemplified the voyeuristic appeal of Spiritualism and the mixed blessing of women's public speaking.

Cora's renown made her the perfect test case for Spiritualism, and she complied with more than one request to be the object of scientific inquiry. Committees composed of well-respected members of the military, government, and scientific community tested her while in a trance state. The questions put to her were specifically designed so that her conscious self would be unable to answer them, or such was the assumption. In the late 1850s, one such committee asked her to respond, on behalf of the spirit world, to the following queries: 1. What are the natural principles governing the gyroscope? 2. What causes seeds of plants to germinate? 3. Did the races of man all spring from one mundane parent? and 4. Was Jesus of Nazareth divine or human? Her answers to these questions, given from the spirits, met with the surprised adulation of Captain Isaiah Rynders, the chair of the committee, who said that he "expected to be humbugged, and [was] agreeably disappointed."²¹

Similar experiments with other mediums did not end so felicitously. In *The Unhappy Medium*, Earl Fornell recounts the exceedingly strange story of Margaret Fox's participation in a test aboard the "commodious" steamship called the *Red Jacket*. After having failed to get Congress to officially investigate Spiritualist claims (despite a petition bearing fifteen thousand signatures from Illinois alone), proponents waited for an opportune moment to demonstrate their claims by attempting to communicate with the dead at a media event. The opportunity arrived with the hanging of a notorious pirate, John Hicks, on an island in New York harbor. Hicks was transported aboard the *Red Jacket* from the Tombs to Bedloe's Island; also on board were a few congressmen, at least two federal marshals, the U.S. commissioner, members of the press, and an array of Spiritualist investigators headed up by Margaret Fox. (See Figure 3.2.)

The hanging of the pirate Hicks warranted a great deal of media coverage, with the *New York Times* estimating that as many as thirteen thousand New Yorkers lined the streets and found places aboard one of several steamships that made the harbor a popular excursion destination for the day. The *Times* complained about the rash of cries yelling "Down in front!" and noted that Hicks's popular *Confession* undoubtedly contributed to the size and composition of the crowd.²² Hicks apparently showed no interest in the Spiritualist contingent that was hoping for some sort of sign, preferably very public, at the moment of the man's hanging that would lend credence to their cause. Margaret Fox and company waited for a message from beyond, one that could



FIGURE 3.2 Currier and Ives lithograph, 1852, Margaret and Catherine Fox and Leah Fox Fish. Image courtesy of Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

incontrovertibly be proven to come from Hicks, verifying in front of an enormous audience and well-placed politicians the truth of Spiritualist claims.

No such signs were forthcoming. Hicks was hanged with great speed and very little ado, leaving the Spiritualists and others nothing to do but enjoy the well-stocked bar and sandwich table. Upon the completion of the grisly chore, “an injudicious congressman called upon the gathering in the saloon bar to express a vocal ‘thank you’ to Federal Marshal Rynders for the efficient manner in which he had dispatched the spirit of the pirate Hicks into the next world, so efficient, indeed, as to escape the watchful eyes of the spectators.”²³

In spite of its ultimate failure, this experiment is worthy of note for the very scope that Spiritualists brought to investigations into objectivity. The hope that the ultimate in invisibility—the spirit passing from the body at the moment of death—would result in extreme visibility speaks to the ethos underlying Spiritualist interest in instrumentation, including using the body as the instrument.

Spirit raps had set the stage for the elision of medium and machine with heaven and earth communicating via a human conduit for electricity. Encoded clickings, however, proved to be too slow and ineffective a form of communication and mediumship quickly developed new forms of communicating with the dead, primarily the trance state, wherein the woman's entire body was inhabited by the spirit of the dead, and related enterprising forms of mediumship like automatic writing. Whereas the initial imprint of the body as a telegraph gradually eroded, the imagination of a sense of unadulterated purity that came with machinery lingered on. Mediums were ultimately flawed as machines, and the Spiritualist desire for objective and empirical verification turned away from testing the medium-as-machine and toward creating external machines to test mediums. I will now turn to the quest for objectivity in machines and what these instruments have to tell us about conceptions of time.

Spiritoscopes and the Quest for Objectivity

November 24, 1855, was a date that must have vexed the editors of the *New York Times*. The *Times* had made quite a sideline of mocking the Spiritualists, attending their conventions and reporting gleefully whenever Spiritualists made any extraordinary claims that were sure to make them look foolish in the eyes of more sober observers. However, on that date the Spiritualists claimed among their number Dr. Robert Hare, M.D., a professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania and a man with such a distinguished reputation that his conversion warranted a respectful, front-page treatment in the paper. The article takes up a full three and a half columns and reproduces verbatim most of Hare's two-and-a-half hour speech given the previous evening at Broadway Tabernacle. The headline trumpets, "A Savan Turned Spiritualist, Remarkable Developments."

Hare's conversion was fortuitous for Spiritualism on several fronts: as the paper recounts, his credentials rebutted charges that Spiritualists found only adherents among the uneducated, and Hare himself stood as a perfect test case for objectivity—he was converted in the process of trying to debunk Spiritualism. His initial skepticism led him to create six instruments designed

to eliminate the possibility of the medium's interference with the communications from the dead, and when the Spiritualists managed to beat the machine, as it were, Hare was forced to concur that these communications were real.

If there was any chicanery involved in Hare's machines, it would have required an impressive conspiracy, luck, and a high degree of gullibility on his part. First, the Spiritoscope was designed like a vertical roulette table with the letters of the alphabet inscribed on a disk. This disk was rigged with wire pulleys attached to a fulcrum and weight on the bottom, so that it could spin and land on a letter, phrase, or musical note. The medium was separated from the disk, which faced away from her, by a screen, and she touched one end of the taut wire to make the disk revolve. In addition to the obstacles provided by the machine to ensure that it could not be manipulated, Hare put some difficult questions to the spirit world, to which it apparently replied with ease. For instance, he asked a spirit to quote Virgil, specifically citing which Latin words were used to describe the beating that Entellus gave his opponent, and he quizzed it on what word was used to describe the sound of horses' hoofs beating on the ground. The replies *pulsatque versatque* and *quadrupedante* were given. Hare was convinced.

In *Instruments and the Imagination*, Thomas Hankins and Robert Silverman persuasively argue that the creation of instruments simultaneously constricts what science can measure and betrays the underlying, predetermined field of questions that scientists ask at any given moment. Instruments can either amplify the abilities of the senses or attempt to duplicate a natural process. They conclude that instruments lend credence to the aim of objectivity but result not in objective truth but rather in "moral certainty," a judgment value. They write, "The effort to make the subject into an object leads us directly into the paradox of scientific 'objectivity.' An 'objective' observation is one that does not make a value judgment, and yet we judge it to be valuable precisely because it does not assign a value. The judgment by which we place value on objectivity is both subjective and moral. It is a decision to accept the objective evidence as adequate for the conclusion being 'demonstrated,' and that decision must ultimately be subjective. It must also be moral in the sense that we are required to reach a judgment without conclusive proof."²⁴ Subjectivity is implicated in both the conclusions reached through instrumentation and in the choice of which instruments to create, which circumscribes the questions that can be asked and the range of answers given.

Instruments designed to talk to the dead fall outside of the scope of most scientific experiments because they do not measure something tangible or even reproduce a natural effect. They must, to some extent, start from the assumption that there is something to measure. In Hare's case, the skepticism

that initiated his delving into Spiritualism began with the question of whether mediums were contriving the messages. His machines sought to eliminate that state as possible; they would result in either gibberish or the proof of communicating spirits. How exacting his standards were directly correlates to the degree of subjectivity involved in determining whether spirits existed and wished to talk to the living. We are told, for example, that it takes the dead a while to get the hang of the Spiritoscope, and these initial mishaps are taken in stride.²⁵ Why indeed would the dead know automatically how to use a spelling machine that was just invented? Rather than reading the first failures as proof of mediums' counterfeiting messages, Hare read them as demonstrating the limitations of spirits; they needed to learn to use the new instrument. (See figures 3.3 and 3.4.)

On a second level, Hare was judging the existence of the spirit realm according to his perception of the human capacity to deceive. The difficult questions he asked of the guiding hand behind the Spiritoscope reveal that he found it unlikely that the medium can match his intellectual prowess and conjure up Latin quotations correctly. And indeed, in line with the general trend of Spiritualist inquiry, all of Hare's plates depict young, female mediums as the operators of his objectivity machines. Once both of these tests had been passed, Hare reached a degree of moral certainty that allowed him to go public with his conclusions.

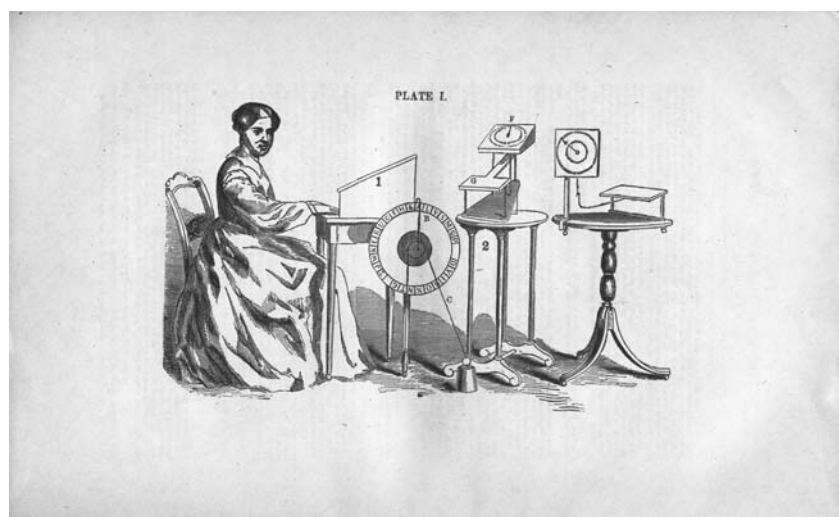


FIGURE 3.3 Plate from Robert Hare's *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations*, 1856.

In his book published a year after the *Times* report, Hare records communications he has received from his father and sister along with an unusually patriotic list of the famous dead. He continues his quest for objectivity, noting explicitly that he dismissed various mediums because their communications were too generic to ascertain the personality of the spirit or because the messages received through them became too enmeshed with their own beliefs to be of use. When he finally finds the right medium to communicate with his father, he makes a point of telling the reader that in life, his father had been among the original delegates who signed the Pennsylvania Constitution, the speaker of the Senate, and a lover of Latin poetry and history. The communication had to be sufficiently erudite and concerned with governance before Hare would accept it as genuine.²⁶

In *The Village Enlightenment*, Craig James Hazen argues that Enlightenment empiricism, as envisioned largely by Francis Bacon, became popularized and even democratized in America in the first half of the nineteenth century. The changing ambience of science was due to practical and observable uses of science like the telegraph and steam engine, which changed the daily lived experience of the nonelite.²⁷ This “democratization of knowledge” placed a cultural premium on observable phenomena as a prerequisite for true perception of the world and for the assessment of truth claims about it. Religion itself came under the scope of empiricism with the result, Hazen argues, that newer religious

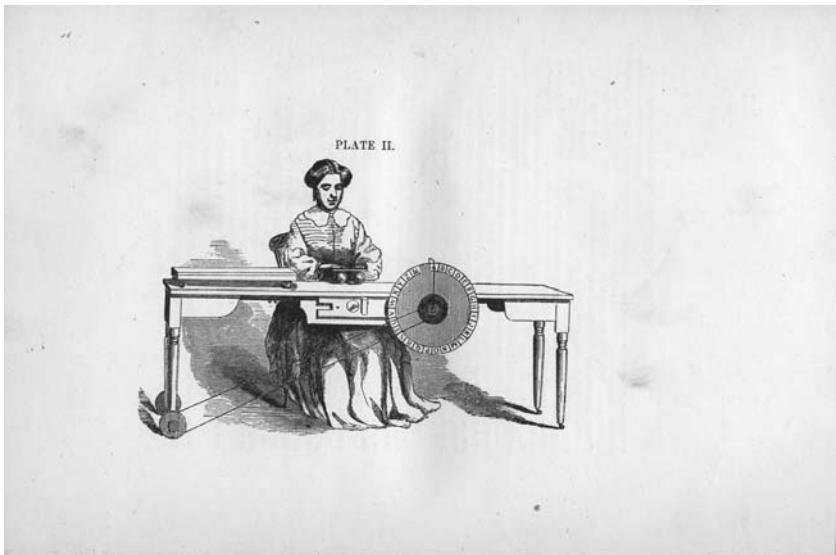


FIGURE 3.4 Plate from Robert Hare, variation on the Spiritoscope.

claims (which were rife in the young Republic) actually garnered more respect than traditional Christian values that relied on faith and ritual.²⁸

Hazen's sustained and nuanced reading of Hare's 1855 *Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations* makes clear that Hare's eleventh-hour conversion to Spiritualism, while appalling to the majority of his colleagues, was the result of his long-held hypotheses about the nature of matter. As the country's foremost expert on the nature of electricity, Hare's religious inclinations seemed to have been shaped by his theory that matter could exist without weight (hence the invisibility of spirit matter) in conjunction with a utopian leaning toward the Spiritualist heaven, which was repeatedly articulated for him as an eternal scientific endeavor. Hazen writes, "The spirit world and spirit beings, as Hare saw them, were inherently much better equipped for scientific work. The material substance of the spheres was more vibrant in color, texture, tone, flavor, and fragrance than the gross matter of earth, and there was a fuller range of animals, vegetables, and minerals to study. In addition, because the material properties were more radiant, the pleasure of contact through science was improved."²⁹ Hare, particularly pleased when the spirit of Ben Franklin agreed with his own theories of electricity, exemplified the paradox of progress: the state of science in heaven was a future refinement on human knowledge, manned and investigated by the greatest minds of the past.

Spiritualism was the last grand attempt at allying science and religion. Science would prove the truth of religious claims, which in turn would provide innovative suggestions for the increase in science. Although the degree of Spiritualists' participation in normative Christianity ranges from claims of compatibility to a general agreement that Jesus was a wise teacher but not divine, the movement reflects a transitory historical moment during which serious questions were being put to faith-based assertions. The nineteenth century saw the first serious textual criticism of the Bible, and this research delivered the shocking conclusion that the Bible is an amalgamation, particularly the Pentateuch, compiled and changed over centuries and not written by the single hand of Moses. Biblical archaeology struggled to find evidence of New Testament stories, and faith took a battering at the hands of empiricism.

Spiritualism was in many ways a modest reconciliation of these world-views. As Stephen Kern has argued in *The Culture of Time and Space*, history began to be valorized in the late nineteenth century as something of a consolation prize for the loss of religious certainty. He writes, "With the decline of the religious conception of man in the late nineteenth century, many drew from these systems [of philosophy] to give meaning to life in a world without God. If man could no longer believe he had a place in eternity, he could perhaps find one in the movement of history."³⁰ Although Spiritualism in general

downplayed the role of God and made few claims to religious exclusivity, it did provide the dead with a continued place in history. The past was brought forward in concrete ways, and the importance of individual lives—many of which would otherwise have no place in history—was continually reasserted and written about. This was not strictly a project of understanding the past through the biographies of a handful of “great men” and great battles, but rather writing of record of those who would otherwise become lost in time. In short, Spiritualism preceded the late twentieth century’s interest in social history, where the daily activities of the dead held fascination.

Hare’s machines functioned as a telegraph across time. Designed to eliminate the margin of human error, they lent credence to Spiritualist claims of scientific status and recovered the presence of the dead. Other machines designed by Spiritualists served more as a demonstration of the presence of spirits in general rather than a means of communication with particular ones. These machines resemble Renaissance attempts at creating automata through natural magic; by harnessing the powers of the divine, the seeker could learn the future and gain esoteric wisdom. Attempts to animate an insensible instrument would prove the existence of the spirit realm and improve the abilities of the living. The spirits of the dead also provided a history of the future, as believers were assured that they, too, had this landscape to look forward to.

The Mechanical Messiah

In 1853 John Murray Spear attempted the most spectacular instance of an animation machine. Spear was a Universalist minister whose extremist political views alienated a series of congregations. Advocating abolition, prison reform, and temperance, he also decried the state of marriage as oppressive to women, capital punishment as inhumane, and traditional religion as stultifying. Although many regarded him as reckless in his personal and political lives—he is often portrayed as mentally unhinged—there can be no doubt that his moral compass pointed firmly toward the future. He gave speeches with Frederick Douglass, ran the Boston Underground Railroad, and got kicked out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, for legally freeing a visiting enslaved woman from the family that owned her.³¹ Despite having a growing family that required economic support, Spear devoted himself full time to crusading for justice on all social fronts, for which he alternately received approbation and severe beatings.³² In 1851, he happened upon the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis and soon became a Spiritualist convert and medium.³³

In July of 1853, Spear joyously announced to the Boston weekly *New Era* that the spirits had formed multiple new associations with the intent of actively altering the world of the living. He lists seven such associations, each colorfully named: Electrizers, Healthfulizers, Educationizers, Agriculturalizers, Elementizers, Governmentizers, and Beneficents. Spear was to be the spokesman for the association of Electrizers, headed up by Benjamin Franklin, and at their behest and on their instruction he built the New Motive Power outside Lynn, Massachusetts. The machine perched 170 feet above the city, outfitted in zinc and copper with each part corresponding to a section of the human body.

The most perspicacious observer of Spiritualism at the time remains Emma Hardinge, who in 1870 stepped back from her own twenty-year career as a medium to become an "impartial historian" of the movement in her exhaustive and detailed *Modern American Spiritualism*. Hardinge notes the superlatives used in the Boston Spiritualist press about the event and captures the core excitement: "The 'great discovery' ...left little room to doubt that a modern Frankenstein had arisen, who, like Mrs. Shelley's famous student, was prepared to show a living organism, created at the hand of its fellow-man, only that the new 'monster' was a being of metal and wood, instead of flesh and blood like its German prototype."³⁴ Hardinge does not overstate the case. The New Motive Power took nine months to create, at which time it required the ministrations of an unnamed woman who was to be the "Mary of a New Dispensation."

Spear built the machine to come alive. The New Motor required human interaction, much of it bizarre and apparently received as possibly salacious. First, groups composed of both genders touched the machine to impart their own magnetic energies to it. Slater Brown notes, "The individuals invited to perform this service were selected with care. They came in groups, the first group composed of 'ordinary or comparatively coarser organizations,' followed by groups progressively 'finer and yet finer mould.' In this simple way the machine was supplied with the intermediate links connecting the gross aspects of the mechanism with the refined."³⁵ Second, and more potentially scandalous, the machine required birthing and, at least symbolically, human conception.

The *New Era* recounted the events of that day:

When there [High Rock, Massachusetts], however ... she [the unnamed woman] began to experience the peculiar and agonizing sensations of parturition, differing somewhat from the ordinary experience, inasmuch as the throes were internal, and of the

spirit, rather than the physical nature, but nevertheless quite uncontrollable, and not less severe than those pertaining to the latter. Its purpose and results were wholly incomprehensible to all but herself; but her own perceptions were clear and distinct that in these agonizing throes the most interior and refined elements of her spiritual being were imparted to, and absorbed by, the appropriate portions of the mechanism: its minerals having been made particularly receptive by previous chemical processes.³⁶

Reports of what preceded this birth are mixed and often suggest a more lewd motive than probably existed. According to John Patrick Deveney, Spear had a generalized sense that the universe itself was sexually charged in the manner of binary attraction between polarized forces and that human sexuality was a mere reflection of this more ubiquitous state.³⁷ As he observes, the symbolism appears purposefully to suggest an immaculate conception, with the comparison being made explicit in the *New Era*: "The history of its [the machine's] inception, its various stages of progress, and its completion, will show the world a most beautiful and significant analogy to the advent of Jesus as the spiritual savior of the race.... The child is born. Not long hence he will go alone."³⁸

A salvific machine, germinated at the intersection of the human and the material, was to be the spirit world's gift to humankind, but its benefits were lost on humanity in general and many Spiritualists in particular. Andrew Jackson Davis attempted to give the machine and its inventor an even-handed review that ultimately described it as a failure but acknowledged Spear's upstanding intentions; Emma Hardinge did much the same in her history of the movement. The machine itself was destined for destruction allegedly at the hands of angry Spiritualists. Some, however, intimated that the violent ending of the ultimately failed project was just a little suspicious.³⁹ Spear, however, reported the savage destruction of the machine-child as a tragedy, a modern martyrdom of humanity's greatest hope.

The limitations of machines from the spirit world were masked by the easily digestible answer that the living were simply not ready for this technology or its functions. The machines designed to measure the objective truth of mediums and their messages may have failed to win over the scientific community, but these intellectual gifts from heaven as frequently as not provided a measurement of the hopes and aspirations of Spiritualists. Perpetual motion machines, machines designed to regulate rainfall, and weaponry meant to end all war by virtue of being undefeatable ranked among the many machines Spiritualists made or at least proposed. The utopian outlines of the future

seemed to loom with enormous instruments that would improve humankind's grasp of time, progress, and possibilities for endless improvement. Spear himself settled into a much more humble hawk of progress; following the failure of the associations of spirits to make tangible improvements in the material world, Spear spent several years selling a "magical" sewing machine in America and in England. The Spiritualist fetishization of machinery has unfortunately obscured Spear's true gifts to society; his moral code, rather than his machines, was the harbinger of a brighter future.

Objective Obscura: Spirit Photography and the Future of Ghosts

In 1851, a British photographer living in America had a visitor. An attractive young woman entered his studio, carrying a covered basket. As the photographer went about readying his equipment to take her portrait, he had a grisly surprise waiting for him—the subject of the photograph was not the woman but the contents of the basket, the corpse of her stillborn infant. Although this episode was shocking to him, this new form of commemorating the dead soon became one of the mainstays of his livelihood. Of his time in America and the many corpses he photographed, he wrote, "Like a ghoul, I had to convert a receiving vault in a cemetery into a workroom, and, surrounded by ghastly companions, picture and endeavor to make imperishable the spectacle of that which was so fast passing away."⁴⁰

Photographers of the dead were universally charged with making the subject as lifelike as possible. As Nancy West has pointed out in her excellent article "Camera Fiends," postmortem photography came into full bloom at the precise historical moment of Gothic novels and the profession of undertaking, creating Dr. Frankenstein figures specifically hired to "bring the dead back to life."⁴¹ Early-nineteenth-century photographs of dead children are visions of peacefulness, with the depiction of the body erasing the line between sleep and death. Contemporaneous accounts called photographs "mirrors with a memory," and these mirrors reflected undisturbed comfort and rest, presumably creating a memory of a contented passage into permanent sleep.

The threshold of death was blurred by these revivifying photos that seemed to take on religious significance and portray a preview of the Resurrection. With the capacity to concretize the past and make the passing imperishable, the technology of photography was often enlisted for specifically religious purposes. Photography was charged with curing the woes of industrialization by bringing those separated by distance together. The photographer Marcus Root argued for a triumvirate of technology encompassing the steam engine,

telegraphy, and photography that would be both the means and the end of the eschaton.⁴² In the highly mobile world of antebellum America, the ability to eradicate space was quickly paired with the ability to eradicate time, as photographs accumulated the past at an increasingly rapid rate while at the same time holding the past at bay by keeping a moment perennially present. The shift from relying on the sense of sound to that of sight created new opportunities for Spiritualist machines as well as new dilemmas.

Photography entered the Spiritualist arena with the force of a modern-day miracle: at last, a new technology would eliminate the margin of error that all-too-human mediums still retained. Just as the medium was understood to be more gifted at inhabiting the space between life and death, so too photography was thought to merely be able to capture realities that were slightly beyond the scope of the human eye. The dead were corporeally present one step further on the light spectrum than humans could see. Photography itself had already been charged with two cultural productions that fit smoothly into the Spiritualist agenda: first, it was already the rage to photograph the recently dead, particularly children. In a related current, these mirrors merely reflected what was present: photographs were an objective account of reality, an untampered-with document of phenomena.

These technological innovations were attempts at creating transparent objectivity, wherein human desire could never be accused of tainting the evidence. When the first spirit photographs appeared they did so against the backdrop of a decade of looking for the perfect machine, and the reception not only of the photographs but of photography itself was overwhelming. In 1861, William H. Mumler entered history accidentally by producing the first photograph of a dead spirit. Spiritualists had been revivifying the dead through mediums in trance states, wherein the dead would speak through the instrument of another's living body. This process was understood by believers to be utterly empirical and scientific; the electromagnetic field of a conscious mind merely changed form at the moment of death, and certain individuals were simply more capable of staying in communication after the transformation from the mortal sphere to the spiritual one.

The implications of spirit photography for trance mediums—the majority of whom were women—were complex. On the one hand, photography literally served as an alternative “medium,” one that was controlled by men. By creating static portraits of the dead, women were silenced both in life and in death: the male-dominated commercial field of photography served a similar function to that of the female-dominated field of mediumship, and photographs of both genders did not allow the dead the voice that they had in trance speaking. However, photographs of both corpses and spirits were immensely

popular forms of enshrining memory, and the preservation of memory fell firmly within the domestic sphere during the Victorian period.

Women occasionally communicated about their own spirit photographs from beyond the grave, explaining the scientific process to their relatives. In one example, a wife explains the process to her husband: "Our thoughts produce our garments, the cut and coloring of the same, and the chemists, using their own magnetic power over the etherealised matter mould it so, and give to it an appearance such as we were in earth life."⁴³ Women were thus in the peculiar situation of explaining scientific principles to men. However, spirit photography grew outside of the domestic bounds of home and family, taking on an existence of its own that quickly called into question some of the underlying assumptions about Spiritualism and the place of objectivity machines in its schema.

By Mumler's own admission in his 1875 memoir, the entire enterprise had begun as a joke: he had taken what he believed to be a badly developed photograph and showed it to a Spiritualist customer to rib him. To Mumler's horror, he found himself and the photograph plastered on the front page of Spiritualist newspapers in Boston and New York later that week.⁴⁴ Mumler was subsequently converted to Spiritualism, or at least he recognized the advantages of changing his mind. He specialized in spirit photography for the rest of his career, and "spirit sittings" became a popular and a lucrative trend among the middle classes. Spirit photographs, however, were not guaranteed in either form or content. Unlike most trance mediums, "Mumler presented himself as a medium who was in the service of the spirits, not one who could call them up at will."⁴⁵ Spirits could decline altogether to be photographed or else a stranger may well appear in one's spirit sitting. (See Figure 3.5.)

Mumler was not only the first spirit photographer, but he was also the first to be taken to court on charges of fraud. In 1869, the mayor of New York requested Mumler's arrest for perpetuating fraud with supposed spirit photographs. The prosecution pulled out the big guns for its case, calling in P. T. Barnum, among others, to demonstrate how spirit photographs could be faked with wet-plate photography. The Honorable Justice Dowling was presented with nine different ways a photograph could be manipulated to make a ghostly figure appear, some of them as simple as having an assistant tip-toe behind the sitter for a fraction of the long exposure time. Double exposures and double-plate negatives gave the would-be charlatan his choice of method in ghost photography. After three weeks of trial, Mumler was set free; in his closing argument, Mumler's attorney compared him to Galileo, fighting an uphill battle in the name of science against the blind rigidity of his peers.⁴⁶

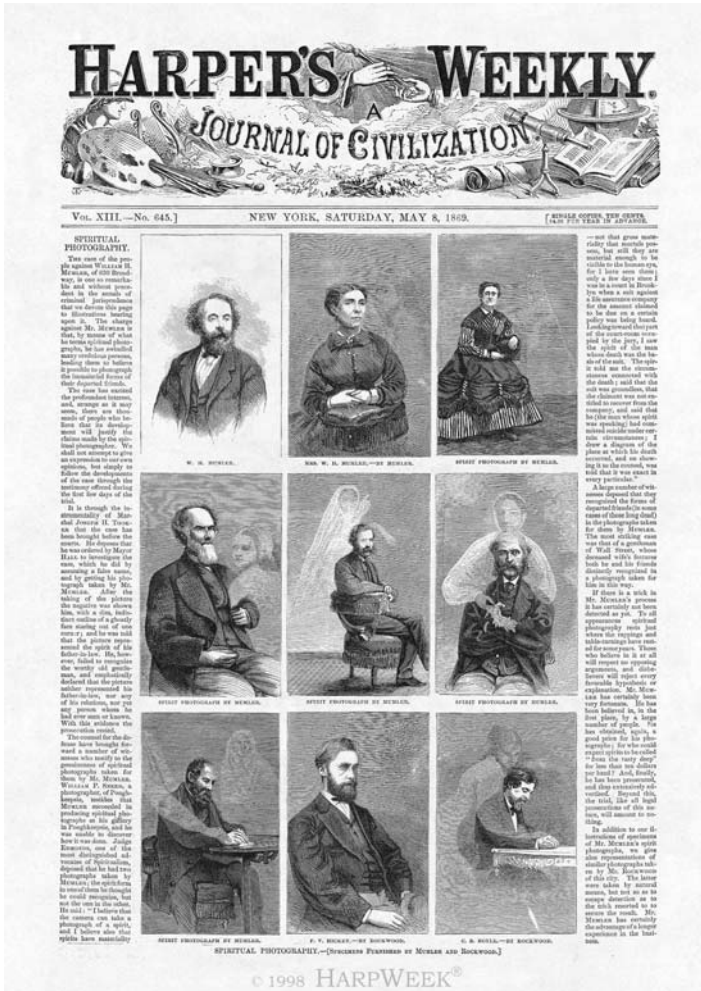


FIGURE 3.5 William Mumler's Ghost Photographs, *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869. Image courtesy of HarpWeek, LLC.

Given that Spiritualism captured the attention of about half the country's population, the living's need for the dead is self-evident. In the context of the highest infant mortality rates of the century and then in its second boom during the Civil War, Spiritualism was clearly an instrument for the grieving and an amateur but effective form of psychotherapy. Thus it is not particularly surprising that Spiritualism latched onto photography as the technology that could mediate the ephemeral threshold of death. If spirit photography were limited to capturing posthumous images of one's loved ones, it would be a

logical extension of the movement's claims to empiricism and the continued existence of the dead. However, what is striking about the writings on early spirit photography is not the comforting continuation of domestic relationships but rather a bizarre deviation from that template.

The quest for objectivity resulted in new consequences. Machines had been constructed specifically to depersonalize the interaction between the sitters and the medium, who previously would display that she had intimate contact with one's deceased relatives. The hunt for objective proof invited less intimate forms of communication, and photography was by far the most popular technological innovation. I do not mean to imply that the normal course of Spiritualist contact with the dead was superseded by changes that photography brought. The domestic bonds between the living and the dead continued to be strengthened in séances, and the dead continued to evince a continual need to be in relation with the living. However, photography created a new mode of communication with the afterlife, one that silenced the dead and invited the living to understand the dead differently than the dialogues of the parlor had. The two modes existed side by side and functioned to reinforce each other.

The movement's very successes invited discord and disbelief into its realm. In *Wonder Shows*, Fred Nadis recounts how nineteenth-century stage magic, the precursor to today's view of magic as entertaining trickery, began specifically to debunk Spiritualists and mesmerists. By reproducing the same techniques and effects as those employed in séances, this new wave of crusaders sought to at least blur the boundary of objective and observable truth. Nadis writes, "Such popularizers frequently relied on the device of debunking superstition or 'correcting error' as a prelude to their own explanations of scientific phenomena. In their rationalist stage performances, the magicians demanded the audience decode their acts and search for the physical explanation. . . . Popular science magazines also recognized the affinity between science and stage magic and also published explanations of the stage illusion of magicians and Spiritualists."⁴⁷

A very similar situation in the realm of photography, however, was less clear about the divisions of the heavenly and the humbug. As Clément Chéroux has noted, "There are many other cases in the history of photography in which the same photographic form signifies both a thing and its opposite, and it is no surprise that superimposition should simultaneously have produced an iconography of belief and another of entertainment."⁴⁸ Like magic, spirit photography suggested two mutually exclusive interpretations of the evidence, that it either proved or disproved Spiritualist claims. Spiritualists not only rallied against this alternative interpretation, they denied its existence altogether.

Six years after Mumler's acquittal for photographic fraud in New York, a similar case was taken against Edouard Buguet of Paris. Buguet had been producing spirit photographs for two years when he came under surveillance in his Montmartre studio. Unlike Mumler, how, Buguet immediately admitted fraud, demonstrated how he manipulated the spirit photos, and not only retracted his claims to mediumship but promptly repositioned himself as an exposé of frauds. However, the artist's own admission of guilt did nothing to dissuade many of the veracity of his former ghosts. Chéroux argues, "For although the evidence for deception had been produced during the hearing, and Buguet had admitted fraud without the slightest equivocation, some of his clients persisted in recognizing the faces of their loved ones in his images. Bending over backwards to maintain their belief, convinced that behind the trial lay a settling of political scores, a new Inquisition or Galileo affair, the spiritualists refused to accept that they had been duped, much less to abandon their faith."⁴⁹

Whereas the intent of the stage magician who flouted deception and secrecy as the currency of mediumship, the intent of photographers meant little to nothing in assessing the final worth of spirit photographs. While American believers enjoyed less cognitive dissonance with Mumler's maintaining his naïve innocence throughout, by the 1870s the public had to be aware of the myriad possibilities of manipulating photographs to produce ghostly images. Buguet in fact continued his photographic career by producing "anti-spirit" photographs, which his calling card referred to as "complete illusion." Although he would continue as a trickster, never again would he be accused of fraud. (See figures 3.6 and 3.7.)

The most famous and most representative Spiritualist photographer and advocate was probably James Coates. Coates wrote in the early 1870s, and his magnum opus, *Photographing the Invisible*, remained in print more than forty years later. In this work, Coates marshals the existence of unidentified ghosts as proof of the objective truth of spirit photography. If you don't know the ghost in your own picture, then you are certainly not manufacturing a false memory to suit your own needs. He writes: "I aver...that many of the so-called, unrecognized spirit photographs have been identified subsequently by persons related to *the departed*, but neither knew the operator-medium; the sitter; nor the occasion when the same was taken; showing in many cases—at least—that the psychic 'extra' was not that of a thought-form within the subconscious of the medium, or the picture of a departed produced by the desire of the sitter, but rather a portrait produced—by Invisible operators—as best they could, either hoping for or actually anticipating recognition ultimately."⁵⁰



FIGURE 3.6 Édouard Buguet, anti-spirit photograph: “Mysterious communications. Complete illusion,” 1875. Image courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.

What is remarkable in Coates’s portrayal of unidentified spirits is how the ghosts are characterized. We are told repeatedly in contemporaneous sources that it takes extraordinary effort for a spirit to materialize for a photograph. (One such report cites this fact as a reason for the exorbitant cost of spirit photographs, claiming that the dead wouldn’t exert that amount of effort for an inexpensive and therefore undervalued picture.)⁵¹ Up until this point, the dead had held an extraordinarily privileged position in Spiritualist thought—they needed to interact with the living as much as the living needed them but this was always characterized as the continuation of affection beyond the grave. The dead had thriving existences in heaven, with busy societies and education and even travel to attend to. They continued to love the living, but they were by no means understood to be lost ghosts, trapped somewhere in time and needing the living to help them.



FIGURE 3.7 Édouard Buguet, anti-spirit photograph: “Spirit of Paganini,” 1875. Image courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.

At just about the same time, a new column started cropping up in Spiritualist newspapers, one that I think of as the “dead personals.” Boston’s long-lived and highly circulated weekly *The Banner of Light* featured messages that its staff mediums had received from unidentified spirits. The coverage for these stray messages was a full five columns of around eighteen inches, and the names of the spirits were indexed alphabetically at the beginning for ease of perusal. The banner of each column issued a standard request: “The communications from the following spirits will be published in regular course. Will those who read one from a spirit they recognize, write us whether true or false?” Here lost souls communicated their full names, where they were born, raised, and lived, frequently how they died, and occasionally the names of friends and relatives they would like to get in touch via a medium.

The problem of recognition is overt in these pleas from the dead. In 1859 a Charlotte Brown communicated from beyond the grave, "I told old Mrs. Cady, the woman who was with me when I died, that I would certainly come back to her. I don't care to come to anyone else . . . I have acquaintances and perhaps some friends living in Lowell, Saco, and some in Boston, but they would hardly care to hear from me, for they think I did not do well. I am sorry, very sorry, that I lived as too many lived and died as too many die. I wish to tell that dear old woman that her kind words are not lost and I shall repay her for them."⁵²

What we see here is a remarkable reversal of prior articulations of the spirit world; between the dead jumping into random photographs hoping one day to be recognized and the communications from pitiable spirits, for the first time the dead are needy. The power dynamic is reversed, and the dead require a continued relationship with the living. I wish to posit that this reversal is largely predicated on the advent of photography. Unlike spirit communications via living mediums, the representation of the dead in photographs provided a static and permanent record of death onto which the living could project their own needs. By silencing the dead, photography made death the perfect palimpsest, so that the past could be rewritten in the image of the living. The mirror with a memory that was held up to Spiritualists, in the last analysis, reflected not the ostensible subject of photographs, spirits, but rather the very alive believers who desperately needed the dead and thus attributed that neediness to the dead themselves. The dual motion of projection displaced grief and anxiety that the living experienced onto the departed, captured, imperishable, in the act of searching for recognition.

The double helix of neediness inhabited the space of death, creating a discourse of dependence that elevated the status of the living world in relation to the status of heaven. Spiritualists' understanding of photography as a medium created a metanarrative about the process of projection. Photographs of the dead simultaneously asserted and erased the living's need for continued relation with the dead, in a single deft motion of articulating the need and attributing it to the dead themselves. I would now like to turn to the Spiritualists' need of technology and argue that a similar motion of articulating and displacing that need occurred in writings about photography.

Ghost photographs, then, are perhaps best understood not as documentation of a prior image but rather as a Rorschach test of subjects in the present. This clawing neediness is attested to in several accounts of the moment of recognition. An assertion of doubt is given and then withdrawn: "My wife obtained a tolerably clear photograph of (it is supposed) my father, and although it is certainly very like, there are one or two discrepancies. . . . I must say, I consider

spirit photography to be the most interesting and most truthful manifestations we have yet been blessed with.”⁵³ Or alternatively, “My wife, several friends, and myself, recognized the photograph. The likeness is unmistakeable; but there is a bloated appearance . . . a bulbiness about the features which my mother never had, nor is it in any photograph portrait taken of her from life.”⁵⁴

Memory itself came to be redrawn. Images of the past had to conform to the photographs of the present, and the need to see the dead erased history. At the precise moment when memory was at its most subjective, it had to undergo the same procedure that the mirror of neediness reflected: it had to be understood as being at its most objective. To accomplish this, believers would concede that their own memories were less reliable than the photographs. The human margin of error conceded disputes about the past to the objective technology of photography.

As Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, and others have noted, photography introduced a new form of alienation into man’s thinking about himself. A photograph moves the subject outside of herself, where her image objectively exists but only at the expense of her consciousness radiating it. The objectification of photography further allows for the image to be reproduced, commodified, and circulated in the market economy. In short, the self-alienation produced by photography makes the subject less real rather than more.⁵⁵

What is curious here is that none of the academic discussions about the objectifying nature of photography apply to spirit photography—the dead are not undergoing objectification but, rather, subjectification.⁵⁶ They come into existence *as dead* through photographs, and if need be, the past will be rewritten to make that fact objectively true. Paradoxically, the notion of progress rested on reinscribing history, in which the past was pulled into the present. History quite literally haunted Spiritualists, suggesting that the era’s telos of time, its very love affair with the idea of history itself, was destined to collapse under its own weight.

The subordination of the subjective to the objective resulted in the fetishization of objectivity itself. In contemporaneous depictions of photographers and their cameras, the human body was frequently portrayed as a spindly tripod with stereoscopic eyes serving as lenses. Thomas Hankins and Robert Silverman describe how the camera literally began taking on a life of its own: “The appearance of a photographer at work encouraged the connection between man and camera and the anthropomorphic description of the photographic instrument. With the artist’s head beneath the camera’s hood, the human and the machine seem fused. Optically, both survey the same scene, sharing the camera’s lens. . . . In this portrayal of the roles of man and

machine, the camera was alive, while the human photographer was reduced to subservience.”⁵⁷ The camera is not the perfect eye, but rather the eye is the imperfect camera. (See Figure 3.8.)

Unlike uncontested unmasking of the Spiritualist agenda by stage magic, Spiritualists would not allow photography to be moved out of the arena of the objective. Claims of science or even pseudo-science could be battled on their own terms, and if stage magicians could reproduce table-tipping that did not eliminate the possibilities that spirits could as well. As the eminent French Spiritualist Allen Kardec once observed, “Fake diamonds take nothing of the value of real diamonds, artificial flowers do not prevent there being natural flowers.”⁵⁸ This epistemological buffer could not be extended into the realm of art: the realm of imagination proved much more threatening than competing

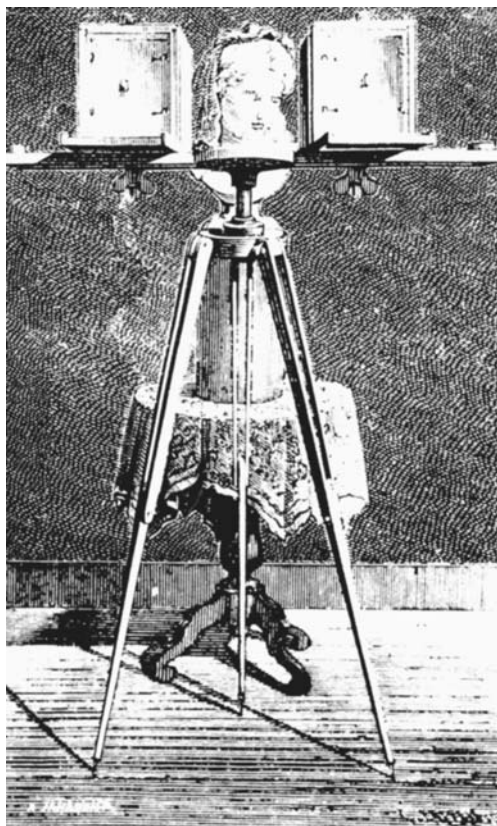


FIGURE 3.8 The camera as perfect sight. From Tissandier, *A History and Handbook of Photography*. Image courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections.

claims of scientific legitimacy, and the Spiritualists galvanized against the suggestion of artifice in photography in a manner they had never approached with the admitted deception of magicians. By fetishizing the observable as necessarily objective, Spiritualists thus protected their own projections against charges of artifice. The image invites an inversion of the normal course of things. By reanimating the dead, spirit photography created a cultural negative, in which the mirror with a memory reflected not the past but the present's desperate need of it.

Spirit photography posited seriously for the first time the prospect that the dead were not residing strictly in an afterlife but were in fact hovering between us. Whereas the presence of spirits of the past had been the central tenet in Spiritualist belief all along, photography and the increasingly popular *séance* genre of materializations altered that plane to be more spatial. Materializing mediums were those who specialized in *séances* at which the spirit world would give physical gifts to the sitters, or even on occasion materialize themselves and be seen by or walk among those present. Up until this point, heaven had existed somewhere "up there," in a place that was more advanced than earth and of which earth could be seen as the bottom rung on a never-ending ascent. Machines created a new mode of conceptualizing the dead, one in which the inhabitants of heaven were not advancing in time but rather were invisibly always among us. Caught between the love of history and the lure of the future, Spiritualists made this conflict concrete with the machines they invented to capture the past. Photographs of the dead severed the simplicity of a straightforward march of time: the dead coexisted with the living on an invisible horizon that was ever-present, where the ghosts of the past commingled with the ghosts of the future.

This page intentionally left blank

4

Marriage

In 1768, at the age of eighty, Emanuel Swedenborg published the somewhat shocking assertion that angels never lose sexual potency. While this claim might be striking in itself, when read through the lens of Swedenborg's radical use of metaphors in all of his interpolations of the scripture, the point, ultimately, is the eternal desire for union. Sexual love—as distinct from procreation—was a topic that Swedenborg addressed directly in many of his mystical works, and marriage receives a pride of place as both a locus of experiential reality and metaphorical possibilities. True marriage for Swedenborg was the alliance of the true with the good, and this happy state was realizable only occasionally on earth but perennially in heaven. Spirits of the dead, eternal angels of the afterlife, were married and continued to have intercourse that replicated simultaneously human union and metaphysical harmony. The dead felt love and had sex in the afterlife.¹

Emanuel Swedenborg's writings on love reflect his position as a man perched precariously between two worlds; in the larger sense of the matter, Swedenborg hung pendulously between the Renaissance and Cartesian worldviews. In the former, the earth was a mirror of the divine mind, with nature everywhere displaying the symmetry and harmony of perfection. This was in relative contrast to his advocacy of a Cartesian understanding of the world as an imperfect playground for imperfect beings who would always be less than the divine that reigned above. In *Love and Marriage*, the longest mystical

tract written on the topic of matrimony, Swedenborg revisited this basic rift in his discussions of erotic love—he believed in the ultimacy of true love but not that of human beings. Love and marriage were reserved for the perfection of heaven, where all would be united in perfect matrimonial harmony someday. The human institution was significantly less reliable, and couples were often paired with contingent, rather than eternal, mates. Even this state of marriage was preferable, however, to being single because, as Swedenborg notes, even middling marriages produce children and placate one's parents on the matter.²

Currently translated as *Love in Marriage*, this work enumerates the absolute centrality of the union of souls on earth if one is lucky and in heaven for eternity. Swedenborg reports on the conditions of heaven from mystical insights and gives straightforward, pragmatic advice for the living with the superior cultures of heaven acting as his ideal model. Completely ignoring the conflicting injunctions to celibacy in the New Testament, Swedenborg's heavenly informants claim that marriage pervades all of creation from angels to worms and that sexual love is the concrete expression of the union of the masculine good and the feminine truth.³ Whereas multiple strains of Christianity advocated either celibacy—such as the Catholic priesthood or smaller communal experiments like the Shakers—suggesting that marriage occupied the lower rung of a two-tiered system, Swedenborg and his heavenly informants had no truck with a “fall” into carnality.

Married sexuality is thus not a necessary affliction but rather a celebrated condition of union. *Love in Marriage* is a minute dissection of marriage and sexuality on an encyclopedic scope, ranging from the proper engagement period to the misdeeds of adulterers, rapists, and lovers of sexual variety. Swedenborg explains that having a concubine is a sin—unless one is separated.⁴ Polygamy is dealt with in detail as a lascivious error, but if practitioners live by the word of God, the “Mohammedans” will be punished for this trespass only by being separated from the Christians in the afterlife. In both its tone and scope, *Love in Marriage* stands as a sweeping, emotional, and extremely hopeful disquisition on relations between the genders and the primary importance of these relationships in religious life.

Caught in the epistemological crosshairs of true love, Swedenborg concludes that true marriage resides in heaven, adultery resides in hell, and both may be mapped directly onto the true and the false in the larger scheme of morality. The Spiritualists would once again inherit the basic dichotomy of Swedenborg's thinking, and they would once again reject the binary assumptions of the categories of the saved and the damned. True love was a heavenly affair, but not all humans could aspire to it in this lifetime, and even the

spirits themselves were fallible enough to need second chances. Romantic love reigned supreme into the far reaches of the heavenly spheres, but false love, whether accidental or duplicitous, took its toll on the living, sometimes even to the extent of being criminal.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, many were perhaps surprised when the institution of marriage found itself casting about in search of a new identity. Mobile youth, unmoored from family and tradition, migrated westward along the Erie Canal and toward the arc of the territories, experimenting with new religious explanations and contending with new economic developments. While few foresaw the long-term ramifications of these changes, the American family was about to be dismantled and restructured at the hands of market forces and a changing ethos concerning women. As the spirit of reform swept through the country, marriage would come under the scrutiny of legal and moral codes that were being criticized broadly, and the Spiritualists would be at the forefront of this debate. By raising marriage and erotic love to the highest heights of heaven, Spiritualists had nearly ensured that mere mortals would almost never get it right, resulting in polite tedium at best and dangerous, dire situations for women and children at worst. Romance and the centrality of the erotic bond took center stage in the country at large and in the Spiritualists movement in particular, as love, like sin and progress, needed new definitions for a new dawning.

Like religion, the institution of marriage was moved into the marketplace of nascent capitalism where it had to compete for what used to be considered the natural state. As the landscape of America changed, so too did the territory of the heart, as the bonds of kinship became increasingly intangible and fragile in the course of westward expansion. Foremost, the creation of a new economic class of white-collar workers ineluctably altered the form of the family. Burgeoning industrialization transformed the home from a site of production into a site of consumption, irrevocably altering the definition of labor and of the genders' relationship to it. As the economy shifted, the form of the family moved from an agrarian model to what Mary Ryan has called a transitory mercantile model. Both agrarian and artisan economic modes involve the participation of the entire household in the production of goods: all hands are required on a farm, and all ages and genders have a place in the production of shoes or bridles. With wives, children, and even extended family needed in the production of food and goods in the house, economic necessity combined with shared experience to cement the familial bond and to ensure its reproduction into the next generation as well as the more or less consistent transmission of values across time.

Working outside of the home became the norm for this new class of Americans, and this revolution on the domestic front brought a host of new

anxieties with it. The concept of the workday and its attendant, tortured relationship to the keeping of time replaced the harvest frenzy and long winter lulls that had characterized the rhythm of farming. Women were largely banned from this new mode of production, creating a rift between the domestic and economic arenas. While scholars have torn down the rigid opposition between men's and women's "spheres" as not merely different but opposed, men generally existed in the capitalist world, whereas women's worlds were more insular; religious and related reform matters were their primary modes of public expression.

Stability was also at stake, as the exigencies of an industrial economy required people to be mobile in order to find work in the new middle class and to maintain that status. In her seminal work on the family in Oneida County, New York, Mary Ryan summarizes the key processes:

The foundation of the corporate family collapsed when Oneida County no longer contained enough unimproved land to sustain a second generation of farmers. The ebullient freedom of the commercial market during the canal era drew children off the farm and also fostered experiments in more volunteeristic family strategies, as indicated by the centrality of kinship to the formation of business partnerships, the supply of capital, and the furnishing of collateral. In the next generation, shifts in the urban economy—the decline of artisan production, the rise of factories, the expansion of white-collar jobs—ordained that many family members scurry about in different directions in search of income and career advancement.⁵

The expansion of goods and services in an industrial economy combined to foster acquisition, mobility, and voluntary participation in institutions such as the family or church.

Untethered from both tradition and production, the institution of marriage was set in search of new moorings. The more, it appears, that the bonds of love became increasingly ethereal, the more society romanticized them. Not economic partnerships but the siren call of true love governed the notion of marriage by midcentury, paradoxically catapulting the importance of marriage beyond its previous state and into nearly impossible realms of idyllic importance.⁶ The Spiritualists, too, would participate in this new romance with love, but not before subjecting the institution to some serious inquiries.

Spiritualism once again reflected the conflicting concerns of its day. Caught in the undertow of changing economic patterns, love was simultaneously the most elusive and the most prized of human emotions. As the bonds of intimacy changed with modes of production, love became almost too

perfect for humans to embrace. As I will discuss later, this emphasis on the centrality of love happened in tandem with concerns about the wrong love—bad marriages had unacceptably bad consequences for women and children, two groups whom liberal progressivists were particularly concerned with. Not just any love but the right love was necessary, and sometimes that required legally ridding oneself of a mistaken love along the way. By seeking perfect love into the infinite future, Spiritualists quietly called attention to its shortfalls on earth. The future could critique the present and sometimes called for a rewriting of the past.

In *Searching the Heart*, Karen Lystra argues that the stereotype of Victorian etiquette pervading all areas of life was simply not true; the ideal of a “true” self known only to one’s spouse was a lauded and integral aspect of romantic love. Forging an intimate bond within the home based on mutual trust and an aura of secrecy made the new romance both palatable and a refuge from the increasingly alienating labor conditions of the mills. She writes, “There was a concentrated effort in middle-class courtship to comprehend the loved one. This most often involved an attempt by both parties to unmask, to abandon all outward forms of propriety, and to shed all normative roles except the romantic self. Courting couples pressured each other to greater self-awareness and self-definition in their efforts to know someone else as they sought to know themselves.”⁷

If love became the cause of soul searching and even actively learning about oneself and the beloved, marital sex came under similar scrutiny. In *Romantic Longings*, Steven Seidman argues that American Victorians, rather than repressing the discourse of sexuality, recognized its extraordinary potential to such an extent that they designed multiple cultural ways of constraining it.⁸ Foremost, sex became sublimated into a spiritual quest for love. The association between love and religion was in fact so strong that Seidman is able to amass a number of contemporaneous love letters that explicitly state that the couple’s love will function *as* a religion. Love would inspire one to become better in all respects, making love morally uplifting.

One of his most compelling examples is the correspondence between abolitionist Angelina Grimke and her intended, Theodore Weld. Grimke was so concerned about the all-consuming nature of her love she worried that it crossed over into idolatry. She was placated only by understanding her love as an enactment of a divine injunction. She writes, “From the moment you were assured that I loved you, we became one—our Father has enjoined us together, he has given us to each other.... I feel that we are two equal halves of our perfect whole, and that our Father in heaven smiles down upon the holy union.”⁹ Here Grimke is of course invoking the language of Genesis, still

quoted extensively in weddings, that a man leaves his father and mother to cleave unto his wife and the two shall become as one flesh (Gen. 2:23). The idea of a spiritual union makes the physical and even emotional attachment acceptable. Her fiancé uses the same language: "How many times have I felt my heart . . . reaching out in every agony and *cleaving* to you, feeling that we are no more twain but one flesh."¹⁰

This rhetoric of union through the process of becoming one found support in the culture not only biblically but also Platonically. Spiritualist writing is rife with exempla of the beloveds becoming one flesh, but the discussions surrounding this exceed a wholesale Christian sanctioning of matrimony or even a tacit approval of married sexual union. They begin instead with the desire to unite and its secret, heavenly origins.

Aristophanes' Triumph: The Reunion of the Spherical Beings

In all of the literature produced by Spiritualists which I have been arguing bears an elective affinity with Neoplatonism and related strains of hermeticism, the direct influence of Plato's *Symposium* on generations of Spiritualists is the single clearest and most defined case. Discoursing on the ways of love to recover from the previous night's bout of drinking, the characters of the *Symposium* pose differing views on the form and function of *Eros*. Aristophanes' speech details the original state of human embodiment, in which there were three types of bodies: "At first, there were three kinds of human beings, not only two as now, male and female, but also a third that was composed of the other two. . . . At one time, then, there actually existed a kind of human being that was androgynous in form and name, being a combination of both male and female, but they no longer exist, although the name is still used as a calumny. Now, the form of all three types of people was completely spherical, with their backs and sides making a complete circle."¹¹

The race of those with spherical bodies became too powerful, and eventually attacked the gods. Zeus, seeking to prevent further such occurrences, sliced each sphere in half. Aristophanes continues, "Now, since the natural form of human beings was cut in two, each half longed for the other. So, out of their desire to grow together, they would throw their arms around each other when they met and become entwined. . . . Love collects the halves of our original nature, and tries to make a single thing out of the two parts so as to restore our natural condition. Thus, each of us is the matching half of a human being, since we have been severed like a flatfish, two coming from one, and each part is always seeking its other half."¹² This image, with its multiple resonances of

biblical agreement and its wholesale endorsement by Swedenborg and other cultural heroes, captured the imagination of American Spiritualists who learned to think about love and to understand physical desire by seeing themselves as halves of Aristophanes' creatures.¹³

Although marriage and its eternal aspects were debated among Spiritualists in terms of both the living's limitations and the social injustices they might engender, the desirability of love and union remain steady across the decades of the second half of the century. In a typical foray into ancient territory to uphold these ideals, the author of a multiple-installment article on the state of marriage invoked this image in an 1862 issue of the *Banner of Light*: "Its [love's] eternal unity and constancy have been praised until it has the appearance of a truism that there can be but one holy, pure, and eternal love. Said the ancients, under the strong impression of those who united in harmonious union: Man and woman are two halves, which wander in the worlds, and when the right halves come together, the result is perfect and unalloyed bliss."¹⁴

The Platonic myth was frequently deployed in conjunction with biblical verification seen in the story of Adam and Eve as the marital prototype, created together in the image of God and later separated into two creatures in the rib episode. Some Spiritualists also intuited a version of the primal androgyne from the Creation story as well.¹⁵ One recounting from a female spirit to a petitioner records, "'Let us make man in our image. Male and female created he them,' or as it should read, 'Male and female they were created. And they twain are one.'"¹⁶ When the petitioner, a woman who is clearly unhappy with the state of her current marriage, responds to the spirit by quoting Matthew, "In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels of God," the spirit voice goes so far as to explain that although angels are not married by a third party like earthly couples, their union is so complete that they appear as one creation in the image of God. This rejoinder—that the petitioner is destined not to be less married but more in the afterlife—meets with a less than joyous response.¹⁷

Most Spiritualists believed that love not only collected the halves of their natures, it reunited the halves of their bodies. The learned Spiritualist Edward Carpenter, in one of the most interesting jeremiads on this topic, traces the cause of erotic desire backward not through historical time but through evolutionary time. He begins with the single-cell reproduction of the protozoa as a primal memory of being severed from one's half. This sensation governs attendant behaviors on higher evolutionary planes and accounts for why the sperm instinctively knows how to physically conjoin with the egg. On a cellular level, he argues, we reenact the search for originary wholeness: "Not 'fertilization' but 'fusion' is the key word of the [conception] process. The mystical

conception, as old as Plato, of the male and female as representing respectively the two halves of a complete being, turns out to be no poetic metaphor. As regards the essential features of reproduction, it is a literal fact."¹⁸ From the microscopic to the transcendent, bodies wish to be united.

The Spiritualists ran the gamut in terms of being willing to openly discuss sexuality. The question of whether there was physical sex in heaven was frequently posed in spirit circles, and the most popular reply was "sort of." The gross materialities of earth did not translate well into the middle spheres of heaven, and any carnal association with love was unthinkable.¹⁹ However, that did not preclude the possibility that true love could and should be expressed sexually, but sexuality was written about as a reunion of the primal androgyny rather than intercourse strictly speaking.

In a missive compiled by the notable Spiritualist George Lawton, a spirit communicates how the desire for perfect union justifies the dissolution of earthly marital bonds. Like Swedenborg before him, Lawton's control suggests an immediate double helix of thinking about marriage: it is so important that it can barely be entrusted to the living at all. This spirit is himself still waiting a heavenly union. The transcription of the message states:

Often I have told you that this world is, almost to completeness, the counterpart of earth and its inhabitants; consequently social and domestic relations are very similar. Wedded bliss is numbered among the numerous joys that abound in the spirit world. But marriages in the spheres are not based upon ceremonial, nor are they for the purposes of procreation or selfish gratification, but rather for social interblendings and the quickening of the spiritual activities. The fervent wish, the glance of the eye, and the soft touch of the hand, give to conjugal souls a divine ecstasy—so they assure me. On earth, I was called a bachelor, and I remain such yet. Still, I consider all things, from the minutest monads up to the most royal soul-angels, to be dual; and I believe men and women to be the two hemispheres of the sphere, and as positives and negatives, corresponding to wisdom and love, they were designed for sacred unions. If they are based in selfishness, they necessarily terminate sooner or later; but if true and well-fitted, the spiritual dominating when on earth, they continue in our world of spirits.²⁰

Answering one of the favorite questions of séance participants, the spirit of a Father Pierpont is asked quite bluntly whether there is sex in heaven. His answer perfectly combines Aristophanes' spherical beings with an American individualism—the two sexes form one whole but each retains his or her personality:

We are told that, ultimately, in the Celestial Spheres, ages on, the reunited Soul Mates appear as one rounded Glorified Sphere of Light, possessing the attributes of Intelligence, Energy, Wisdom, Love, and Power; but that the distinct individual attributes and elements of each, the male and female, are plainly discerned and manifested; there is no swallowing up of either individuality by the other part; and that whenever desirable, they can separate and appear as two distinct individuals, male and female.²¹

Father Pierpont replies to further queries on the state of marriage in heaven with a long disquisition about the primal nature of soul mates as dual in essence and gender and separated into two for the purpose of “human expression.” He states through automatic writing, “Soul mates are always united sometime, it may not be for many, many years, according to their unfoldment and work, or knowledge in the spirit world; sometime and somewhere the union will be, of course, since the law of affiliation and attraction, as well as vibration, in the spirit, all life, or being, must find its own.”²² Once again, union is reunion and the search for wholeness is enacted in a predetermined constraint of there being one perfect fit for each human.

The union of the two halves in heaven takes bodily as well as spiritual form. Pierpont’s answer clearly demonstrates that the fullness of erotic love at some distant point in the future extends beyond the emotional to a concrete and undifferentiated physical unity. He writes:

The organ of generation maintains and is like a seat of life, since it, through the intelligent will and the love element, increases the flow (so to speak) of the magnetic aura toward the counterpart of the individual (soul mate) and causes a blending of the whole harmonious natures, not in sexual intercourse as known on earth, but in the conmingling [*sic*] of the auras as their atoms meet in mutual harmony and love.²³

In such depictions, sexual contact in heaven is distinctly corporeal and tangible, as is heaven itself. For the most part, descriptions of erotic love in the after-life follow Victorian decorum about sexuality, and questions of intercourse are transformed into a spiritual version of the sex act that is reminiscent of earthly intercourse but sanitized of any taint of carnality. It is the joining of two beings into a perfect whole that is emphasized rather than the distinct and different bodies implied by sexuality.

Aristophanes’ story gave Spiritualists and others of the epoch a template to think with—it provided American Victorians with a spiritualized ideal of

sexual love while simultaneously allowing them to discuss physical union in public and polite fora. As an accounting of desire, the spherical race could legitimize the draw of sexual union as a return to wholeness instead of portraying individuals as subject to promiscuous and capricious erotic longings. Sanctioned by the ancients, suggested by the Bible, and verified by Swedenborg, true love was an affair of the body and the soul in which the idea of union trumped its more unsavory competitors as the primary motive and metaphor for coupling.

Like the use of Plato himself, true love must reach backward to find its source. The idea of union is not merely a sanctioning of marriage and sex but rather embodies a prior perfection—souls are reunited. Not only, then, did Spiritualist imagery of erotic love reiterate Platonic thought, it also subscribed to the same assumptions about time—the future state of erotic love relies on its knowledge of the past. The couple's love was preexistent, and in the future they will return to the state of wholeness from whence they came. Spiritualism carved its Neoplatonic chronology onto the bodies of lovers: erotic love was a return to a prior state of knowledge, one that had to be recollected from the slow process of learning. The past held the key to perfect erotic union; one need only discover what one knew all along.

Spiritual Affinity

The idea of spiritual affinity developed at the intersection of the theology of Andrew Jackson Davis, the free love movement, and the middle class's growing emphasis on the importance of marriage as a romantic rather than economic arrangement. By 1850 the middle-class household had idealized marriage as the foundational social unit upon which all other institutions were dependent. The idea of spiritual affinities merely co-opted the current status of romantic love and projected it into the infinite future. As a prototype for what is generally now referred to as soul mates, spiritual affinity simultaneously rocketed love into the farthest reaches of time and made many very aware of what an eternal bond with the wrong person might mean. In *Free Love*, John Spurlock discusses the environment that fostered a widespread belief in spiritual affinity. He writes:

Spiritual affinities . . . appealed to urban middle-class women who had already become thoroughly indoctrinated with the new standards of family life. They accepted the views of marriage idealizers like William Alcott who placed marriage at the center of life. Spiritualists extended

this marriage into the infinite future, giving it a transcendent dimension and at the same time insisting that not everything with the name of marriage in this life was a true marriage.²⁴

Since the individualistic ethos of Spiritualism resisted both organization and canonicity, the idea of spiritual affinities took on many guises over the century, none of which can be considered definitive. Andrew Jackson Davis concluded that since the natural and the supernatural were coextensive, marriage must be eternal. Later Spiritualists would subscribe to the idea of an eternal bond between two people but reject marriage as a political and religious infringement on the rights of the individual. Still others would practice serial monogamy in search of their soul mates. The common thread throughout all constructions of spiritual affinities, however, is the promise held out that in the fullness of time there would be a concomitant fullness of erotic love.

In 1873, Andrew Jackson Davis compiled a series of messages from the spirit world titled *A Sacred Book Containing Old and New Gospels Derived and Translated from the Inspirations of Original Saints*. In a passage from "The Gospel According to Saint Lotta," Davis recounts this description of erotic love in heaven as continuous with earthly love in both emotion and sensuality:

But we have assurance, sweet as immortality itself, that there is no death for the soul's whole attributes, none for the heart's holy affections. . . . Spirits love with a white and beautiful love, and twine their several elements, purely, warmly, into one wreathed gladness of whole heart and mind. This love is a transparent passion, seeking not the vail [*sic*] of a concealment that it cannot need. . . . They walk with fair arms intertwined, under the eye of God. And you would only know by the transfigured beauty of their faces, and by the heightened glow of all their radiant forms, that a more deep and hallowed relation existed between the wedded twain than that which binds all lovely souls to all as lovely.²⁵

Davis outlines numerous series of spheres, ranging from the seven mental states to the inhabitants of different planets in the solar system.²⁶ The imagery of a ladder to perfection is replete throughout Davis's works, and in several expositions Davis undertakes a system of correspondences between the material and the metaphysical to demonstrate how the senses can lead one to the journey to truth.²⁷ In *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* he writes, "In Matter as in Mind, we behold the unutterable harmonies of unerring Ideas, Principles, and Laws. . . . Thus Absolute Spirit is God; in man, the miniature effect of the infinite cause comes out in Existence and Individuality. In the Infinite, Ideas

are the conscious principle of pure Reason; in man, the finite effects ultimated and blossomed out, are Intuition and Intelligence.”²⁸ This passage is accompanied by a chart depicting a ladder to the divine: on the lowest rung is “Ethers, Vapors, Fluids, Solids,” followed by “Essences,” “Laws,” “Principles,” “Ideas” and finally, perched at the top, “God.”

The resonances here with Neoplatonism are myriad, and the elective affinity between Spiritualism and any number of the expressions that entail a ladder of learning—be they Plotinus, Kabbalists, or even Swedenborg—could potentially influence this description. Many Masonic texts depict similar ladders of ascension to truth or wisdom, and they, too, are a possible pathway for transmitting this mode of thinking. However, the ascending order from the material world to the divine also reiterates Plato’s ladder to the forms. In the *Symposium*, Plato explains this ascent in terms of beauty:

In the activities of Love, this is what it is to proceed correctly, or be led by another: Beginning from beautiful things to move ever onwards for the sake of beauty, as though using ascending steps, from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful practical endeavors, from practical endeavors to beautiful understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty itself is.²⁹

Plato’s motion from the material to the ethereal world of ideas and eventually to wisdom directly parallels the Spiritualists’ injunction to perfection: at death, the material world will be replaced by the heavenly realm, and one must advance through the spheres, acquiring both knowledge and spiritual prowess, toward the end point of perfection.

One of the most extensive documents on the nature of love in Spiritualism is *Letters from Astrea*, a series of communications through the medium Mary T. Longley. Published at the turn of the century and apparently covering years of communication, the letters contain dialogues between the spirit Astrea and the questions posed to her by her earthly soul mate, who remains nameless. The reader is aware through the questions asked and the answers received that the unidentified supplicant is married and has a family with his earthly wife. The preface to the text includes the following disclaimer about why the unnamed man has agreed to publish such personal material: “He also wishes it to be known that the principal reason for his consenting to the publication of these, to him, sacred messages is the hope that they may give comfort and encouragement to such as have not experienced the bliss of a congenial

married life, or even any married life; and also the knowledge that sometime and somewhere this blissful fruition will be realized.”³⁰

Astrea answered questions about the state of heaven ranging from whether there was sex in the afterlife to the fashion preferences of angels. The move from the material to the metaphysical required a physical vehicle for the dead to experience motion and chance in, and the souls of the dead became somewhat corporeal in spirit-bodies.³¹ As the embodied souls advanced in learning through the spheres, the bodies themselves became increasingly abstract. The more perfected the being, the more ethereal the spirit-body and its accoutrements. Astrea communicates, “The substance [of clothing], in all but the lower spheres, is gathered from the atmosphere, from flowers, from all forms of animate life, by the will of the Spirit, and magnetically treated until it grows into such shape, beauty, and perfection as the artizan [*sic*] designs. . . . High or advanced Angels, those who have arisen far beyond the conditions of earth and its outlying spheres, are unclothed, save by the golden or sunlight emanations of their own being.”³²

Much like the anonymous man who spends years communicating with her, Astrea also experiences this seemingly endless deferral of love as a painful separation. She indicates that she is higher on the planes of knowledge than the beloved is—hence his mortal coil—and that she is waiting for him and guiding him in the meantime. She writes, via the medium, “Thou wert then a precious boy of tender years in earthly form, but in Spirit a Soul as old as mine. Then, from the high teachers, I learned that we twain were of one Soul Life, Counterparts in the Soul realm, and that I yearned for thee, my other self. It was then that I took up my guardianship of thee, and from boyhood thy Astrea hath spiritually nurtured and cherished thee.”³³ As she waits, she counsels the beloved on the state of heaven, the history of their love, and their heavenly future together. Astrea assures him that, like a guardian angel, she has always looked out for him and that his discontentment in his present life is temporary.

One of the ramifications of Astrea’s unfulfilled communion with her soul mate is that she is denied access to heavenly temples of the highest teachings because these are reserved for coupled souls. Here, as in many such instances, Spiritualists’ fierce political belief in the equality of women is bolstered by the ways of heaven and its inhabitants. Equality is not threatening to true love but is rather a prerequisite. Astrea explains, “In Spiritual Worlds woman has all the privileges and rights vouchsafed to, or inherent in, man. Yet there are studies that neither can pursue separately: there are Temples of Revelation, that no man, no woman, can grace or enter independently; each must be accompanied by his or her Soul Mate—the two making up the *One Being*, Soul

Completeness."³⁴ Here spiritual affinity converges with Aristophanes' spherical perfection, and the two intended become one.

Astrea's anonymous beloved appears to have been bound in a mediocre marriage on earth but was anxiously awaiting his future. As a much smaller sideline to the relieving of grief, Spiritualism also gave hope that romantic love was not a doomed endeavor regardless of one's experiences thus far. The spirit of Franz Petersilea spoke for the majority of believers when he averred that marriage was desirable but contingent while on earth, but that in heaven it was eternal. He communicates:

Soul-mating is not so much for earth as it is for heaven, and people on earth do not, as yet, understand the law. They marry when quite ignorant and youthful—they marry after the flesh and beget children after the flesh, but they pass on and leave their fleshly bodies behind—they are no more of the flesh but of the spirit—and now commences a higher and better education; but, thousands on earth are, through natural attraction, really, although ignorantly, united to their own true other self. These will always remain together as one, for they are one; but thousands more are not, and these will be released on leaving the body, to be properly united to the true counterpart.³⁵

Petersilea's assessment of the situation—that most earthly marriages are of the middling sort—appears to have been largely agreed upon by living believers. Although many Spiritualist tracts discuss the importance of romantic love and express the longed-for hope of finding one's affinity while on earth, the majority that I have found actually express the inverse—the unhappily or tediously married on earth may rest assured that their situation is temporary and that it will be rectified in heaven.

Spiritualists pitted the perfect marriage of heaven against the imperfect ones on earth to sound the call to change divorce law in America. In 1862 the New York-based Spiritualist weekly, *The Herald of Progress*, ran an article written by a Mrs. Jane R. Griffing. Mrs. Griffing's call for marriage reform enumerates two basic tenets of Spiritualist rhetoric on the subject. First, earth is but the poor simulacrum of heaven, and therefore comparisons between the two provide an unassailable example of what is ultimately right and good.³⁶ That is, even if people are not instantly perfected at death, heaven's cultural practices are superior to those of the living and can serve as heavenly chastisement for earthly missteps. Second, it is the responsibility of those alive to usher in as progressive a future as possible, and bad marriages concretely hamper the future by producing bad children. She writes:

Among the many wrongs that exist in society, there are none that are so fraught with evil as those that receive the sanction and protection of our marriage laws—none so efficiently shielded by custom and so difficult to reach with the probing knife of Reform. They are hedged about by all our traditional opinions, by all the passionate selfishness of mankind . . . preferring that [the problem] remain festering in the heart of humanity, poisoning the life springs of childhood and embittering the whole lives of many noble men and women.³⁷

Mrs. Griffing opines that even married people do not recommend the institution to each other and long for the days of being single; she refers to marriage as a “whited sepulchre” and calls for the happy day when marriage might be as it is in heaven. That condition, however, is predicated on easier access to divorce to be able to shed false marriage in search of a true one.

This economy of desire in which a future, perfect union is the promised fulfillment of erotic love enabled Spiritualists to criticize the imperfect unions of earthly marriage by comparison with heavenly soul mates. As Hal Sears writes in *The Sex Radicals*, “The doctrine [of spiritual affinity] claimed that certain individuals had an attraction for one another that was based on complementary spiritual orders and this made them ‘natural mates.’ This affinity superseded the bond of legal marriage, allowing an escape from what some Americans considered the brutality and dullness of marriage and family life. . . . As sages of this world and the next one announced new possibilities for the affections, the spiritualist and free love causes merged their identities in the popular mind.”³⁸ Paradoxically, spiritual affinity, born of the middle class’s idealized attitude toward marriage, became the tool with which they subverted marriage itself.

Free Love

The extent to which the Spiritualist and free love movements were coextensive in the nineteenth century is debated among scholars. The individualistic nature of Spiritualism prevented a codification of beliefs, theological or political, and detractors who accused Spiritualists of advocating free love may well have inflated the estimated number of Spiritualist believers in free love. Furthermore, an account of what percent of Spiritualists advocated free love is hindered by the lack of a strict definition of free love itself: ideologies ranging from complete sexual abstinence to communal libertinism fall under the rubric of free love in both the primary and interpretive literature. And

frequently, "free love" was an outright misnomer, a slander hurled against those who believed in marriage reform by those who did not.

What is certain is that a significant percentage of people who defined themselves as Spiritualists advocated free love, and practically all free lovers were Spiritualists.³⁹ Spiritualists tended to advocate reform movements designed to improve the lot of women, including divorce and marriage law. Although there is no certain way to ascertain the percentage of women involved in the movement, contemporaneous rosters of mediums were heavily tilted toward women, and some historians infer that most of the participants would have been as well. As Ann Braude argues in *Radical Spirits*, "Spiritualists who advocated free love in addition to marriage, rather than as an alternative, recognized the potential victimization of women in the context of sexual freedom. Transient alliances might deprive women of the opportunity to have children or leave them unable to support their offspring. By attacking women's disabilities within marriage while simultaneously elevating the ideal of marriage as a spiritual union, Spiritualists hoped to free women from threats to their autonomy both in marriage and outside it."⁴⁰

Braude is not alone in arguing for the essentially conservative ethos of the free love movement. Sears argues that the Romantic construction of women as religiously virtuous was consistent with the underpinnings of free love. He writes, "Both male and female sex radicals of the free love cause idealized women as a repository of sexual virtue, reflecting western civilization's veneration of women transposed into Victorian terms.... The most conservative free lovers... believed that coition and its delights could be justified only for the purpose of procreation, while the most liberal ones agreed that some worthier motive than pleasure must sanctify intercourse, most likely love."⁴¹ At the same time, criticisms of the institution of marriage could be understood as a form of progress, or as an attempt to rid a sacred bond of the hypocrisy and maltreatment it received in mortal hands.

In Spiritualism, the predominance of individual rights and concerns extended to discussions of eternal coupling. Spurlock portrays the overlap of spiritual affinity and free love as stemming from Spiritualism's fierce advocacy of the individual over legal or clerical authority. He argues:

The view of marriage that had been developed in the harmonial brotherhoods and among spiritualists could be easily adapted to individual sovereignty. If an individual were to enter no combinations without explicitly limiting the extent of his or her obligations then marriage could include no legal or religious restrictions, nor could it be expected to be perpetual. Individual

sovereignty implied that marriage, as it existed in society, was an irrational contract that limited the freedom of the male partner and made the female a virtual slave.⁴²

The shared belief that erotic love was sacred was the linchpin between advocates of desire as existing between two souls and advocates of desire as multiple. The flexible nature of spiritual affinity was the rubric under which eternal coupling and free love met.

The romantic bond so idealized in the concept of spiritual affinity was also the catalyst for the conjunction of the Spiritualist and free love movements. The nature of spiritual affinity is such that it could be used to uphold and sanctify earthly unions or to subvert them in the name of a higher romantic calling. Love itself, whether it be defined as eventually finding one's soul mate or as love for a community or all of humanity without special attachments to individuals, became the ultimate object of desire.

Writing in 1896, Emil Ruedebusch advanced a theory of a future utopia based on spiritual affinity and free love. He reasoned that in a society of free love, when the economic reasons for marriage are moot, individuals would strive to be at their best at all times to secure the favors of the opposite sex. A meritocracy of sexuality would take the place of the apathy that the assurance of sex in marriage leads to, thereby solving social ills such as prostitution and excessive drinking. He argued against marriage as fostering an illusion of true spiritual affinity attributable to unfulfilled sexual urges. In modern parlance, the would-be lover projects qualities onto the object of desire which, once married and sexually satisfied, break down, resulting in an unhappy and nonspiritual alliance. In contrast, a society of free love would guard against the pressures and tedium of marriage, thus nurturing the possibility for spiritual love even in couples who are not suited to live together. In his book, *The Old and the New Ideal*, Ruedebusch writes:

Wherever spiritual love exists between a man and a woman who are both sexually healthy it is very liable to cause a mutual preference for sexual intercourse, or, in other words, sexual love. This is due to the fact that the pleasure of the sex act does not consist in physical lust only, but also in the sympathetic pleasure of giving joy to another. It is self evident, therefore, that the pleasure must be greatly enhanced by spiritual love for the participants, as that adds so much to the intensity of that essential part of the delight, the happiness of giving happiness to others. On the other hand, it may be asserted that sexual passion causes all the qualities of the beloved to appear in such an embellishing radiance that a kind of spiritual

love may result therefrom. If, confiding in this, intimate association of interests shall follow (as in the case of modern marriage) then the situation will become decidedly dangerous; full satisfaction will promptly extinguish the embellishing light, coolly [sic] and critically practical reason will investigate, and the resulting disappointment will terminate in the opposite of spiritual love. If, however, the full satisfaction of the sexual passion brings no servitude, no duty, no responsibility to either, then the memory of that "grand moment, in which the highest exaltation of joy made two hearts beat in perfect unison," may develop a lasting spiritual affection between the two in spite of a thousand unsympathetic qualities, which may exist, but which the lovers are not asked to contend.⁴³

Free love ultimately aims, for Ruedebusch, at a utopian state in which spiritual love abounds, but this end is accomplished by the means of multiple objects of desire.

In one of the most fascinating defenses of free love, Austin Kent explicitly wrote in 1857 that Plato's construction of the one and the many holds the rationale for free love. For Plato, this was a problem of the instantiation of an ideal, or Form, in multiple physical objects: for example, the Form of beauty could inhere in a sunset, an elegant theory, or a man. Kent argued that a quality—in this case, mentality—should be the object of love rather than its particular instantiation in an individual. Kent states, "I am, in the sense in which I am speaking, comparatively a fixed fact in in [sic] always loving or having an affinity for certain attributes of other human beings. I love mentality. Some minds more than others, because their mentality is more in harmony with the particular development of mine—but I can love no one mind exclusively. . . . If I love mind, to love one mind exclusively from another is impossible."⁴⁴

Kent, a Spiritualist and follower of Andrew Jackson Davis's philosophy, felt it incumbent on himself to explain that in the lower spheres of heaven, undoubtedly two souls are united, but as they progress through the spheres, nonexclusive love is implemented. In this manner, Kent graciously explained how Davis and his predecessor Swedenborg could be mistaken when they advocated spiritual affinity for couples only. As one progresses through the higher spheres of spiritual evolution, a heavenly utopia of free love emerges. Kent writes:

How glorious that day! A day so long prayed for by all the pious of earth. In this heaven there will be no exclusive marriage, or giving in marriage. But we shall be as the real and higher angels. We say, let that day come! let it come! though it should

overturn and overturn,—purify and sanctify,—sift and burn, in a preceding judgment, and bury in one common grave of the past, all sectarianism [*sic*] and all exclusive marriage, and land our race in one ocean of love and union! Let all jealousy [*sic*] and hate go to its own place! . . . Then will the “will of God be done upon earth, as it is done in heaven.” We shall be as the angels. We have no doubt that exclusive marriage prevails to some extent, in the lower spheres. But we do not call these angels of heaven.⁴⁵

The Spiritualist fringe was by no means alone in its quest for a reenvisioned relation between the sexes. The Shakers and the Oneida Community both thrived in the same era and drew from the same population of uprooted Yankees that the Spiritualists did. Both of these movements also understood themselves to be answering the vexing question of what it meant to be like the angels of heaven where they were neither married nor given in marriage. The Shakers, founded in the late eighteenth century by Mother Ann Lee and transported to Revolutionary America by her and her first followers, determined that the answer lay in complete celibacy. The utopian replication of heavenly relations meant the elimination of marriage and its attendant sexual expression; moreover, for the Shakers, an apostolic ideal of love for the community as a whole replaced exclusive attachments of any ilk so that special relations between parents and children were just as verboten as marriage.

The Oneida Community, founded in upstate New York by John Humphrey Noyes in 1847, attempted to answer the same question—What does the Bible mean when it says that angels are not married?—and arrived at the cultural obverse of the Shakers. Although promoting the same goal of giving ultimate priority to communal love over any form of exclusive attachment, Noyes determined that sex should be part of the expression of communal love. Separating the procreative aspect of sex from what he called its “amative” function, Noyes promoted a regulated system of communal love wherein heterosexual sex could be had (or refused, at least in theory) by any adult member of the community with any other. Bible communism, as he called it, produced a highly functioning utopian group for thirty years that seems to have been exceptionally stable and financially successful.

Two issues separate the agendas of Spiritualist free love advocates and the utopian communities of the Shakers and the Oneidans. First is the primacy of birth control in the utopian communities. The Shakers’ utter dedication to celibacy, along with providing religious and work-related outlets for redirecting any stray energies, was clearly attractive in the nineteenth century for providing and enforcing total birth control. Many who eventually converted had

similar experiences to that of the founder Ann Lee, who had suffered several dire pregnancies followed by the death of the babies. The psychological and physical strain of unrestricted pregnancies was compounded by the financial bind that many with several children found themselves in. The Shakers provided workable solutions to all three of those concerns.

The Oneida Community practiced what Noyes called "male continence," a birth control method whereby the men were never allowed to ejaculate. This system was astonishingly successful in controlling unwanted births, and Lawrence Foster reports that male continence was statistically more successful than the pill would have been over the life of the community.⁴⁶ In addition to providing religious and financial security to believers, Noyes also tied the successful practice of male continence to a man's status in the community, thus giving him access to more potential sexual partners as well as more power and respect within the commune.

Although the Oneida Community's experiment with group marriage was sometimes referred to as "free love" both within and without the community, the practice was quite different from what the majority meant by the phrase in both purpose and lived experience. In contrast to most advocates of free love who wanted romantic attachments to be untampered with by the legal system, Noyes's community was aiming for an apostolic utopia that included the erotic. Like the Shakers, the Oneidans wanted true communal love in which every member (except perhaps for Father Noyes) constituted an equal and vital part of the fabric of their society. Whereas free lovers tended to argue for unrestricted love, the members of the Oneida Community worked exhaustively at not loving any one person more than another. Special attachments were expected to be reported, disbanded, and if need be the couple would be separated—Noyes maintained a few satellite communities—until the emotions had passed. Although the Oneidans were not nearly as strict as the Shakers about discouraging parental ties, a great deal of emotional energy was expended on breaking romantic attachments, a practice which some members found to be the hardest part of communal living.⁴⁷ The wishes of the individual were subordinated to the demands of the community, and the vast majority found the benefits to be worth the sacrifice.

The Oneida Community's inordinate success both at longevity and at birth control meant that Noyes eventually found himself in the happy circumstance of needing a second generation. To this end, he implemented a eugenics program designed to breed for superior spirituality. Noyes's experiments with human breeding were founded on and fostered by his reading of Plato.⁴⁸ In the *Republic* and elsewhere, Plato endorses a rigged lottery that would govern mating, wherein the better sorts would "accidentally" be paired with the similarly

accomplished. Noyes's implementation of this system was a little more pedestrian, as couples applied to a committee, but his intent was the same. He called his system "stirpiculture" and his ultimate goals were nothing short of utterly utopian. In *Without Sin*, Spencer Klaw writes:

Over the years, Noyes's enthusiasm for stirpiculture had been heightened by his reading of Darwin, whose insistence on the plasticity of living forms, Noyes observed, provided a solid scientific basis for the selective breeding of humans that Plato advocated. Buoyed by the mounting evidence that God was smiling on Oneida, Noyes concluded that the time had come for the world's first experiment in scientific human propagation. "Without immodesty," he wrote, "we may ask all those who love God and mankind to pray that we may succeed, for our success will surely be the dawn of a better day to the world."⁴⁹

Spiritualists were certainly aware of Noyes's community and his writings, and many agreed overtly with his attempts to improve the quality of children by improving their parents. A husband's unrestricted sexual access to his wife meant that women saddled with unsatisfactory or even dangerous men would be forced to have their children who would in turn be unproductive members of society. Children who were the product of loving unions rather than coercive custom and law would be a boon to society in all ways, while children born to loveless marriages and forced sexual encounters would constitute a population of the mentally deficient, physically lame, and criminally minded.

However, Spiritualist articulations of free love almost never address the issue of birth control except as a matter of legal reforms that should be addressed. Second, the Spiritualists were unlike the other groups in that they were concerned with the state of posthumous love and sex.⁵⁰ Since the utopian cast of the Spiritualist movement pointed upward to heaven as the model of exemplary existence, albeit not even a perfect one then, the romances of the dead functioned as the embodiment of ideal love. For the mainstream of Spiritualists, this meant a heavenly future of perfectly matched monogamous love; for the radical fringe, this signified a system of free love based more or less loosely on communal or Platonic ideas. In either case, the cultural practices of heaven reflected the hopes of the living as well as their clear disappointments—the anticipation of a future happiness indicates a clear recognition of a certain level of dismay with the current situation. Too individualistic for subordination to communal rule and too scattered theologically to agree on a single vision of religion, the Spiritualists instead looked into the mirror of heaven and saw several different reflections there. Spiritualists

ranged from the conservative to the radical and were of a single voice only on one premise: love continued after death.

That Most Roaring of Radicals: Victoria Woodhull

This conjunction of Spiritualism, radical sexuality, and Christian rhetoric made for some extremely odd bedfellows, including the spectacular case of Victoria Woodhull. A most cursory sketch of Victoria Woodhull's remarkable life would have to include that she was in the first group of women to address the U.S. House Judiciary Committee (which concluded that Elizabeth Cady Stanton's speech was superfluous after Woodhull's); that she and her sister Tennessee Claflin were the first women stock brokers in America; that her newspaper printed the first translation of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and that he was a congenial pen pal; and that she was the first woman to run for president of the United States, claiming no less a figure than Frederick Douglass as her running mate. For two years she served as the president of the National Association of American Spiritualists.⁵¹ She was also the most famous and outspoken advocate for free love in America.⁵²

As I have mentioned, the dead were not instantly perfected but rather progressed in the afterlife, climbing the ladder of heavens as they became more knowledgeable and spiritually refined. The heavens themselves resembled a middle-class American landscape sanitized of commerce and poverty, where the dead enjoyed temples, museums, and schools. The "Summerland," as Davis called it, was as close to true multiculturalism as the epoch ever saw: completely inclusive of all peoples, there were ethnic neighborhoods in heaven and different religions continued to be practiced by their adherents.⁵³ Since Spiritualism dispensed with the idea of hell, sinners were consigned to the lowest realms only until their misdeeds had been righted.

The inclusivity of Spiritualist heaven would have sat well with Woodhull, who repeatedly called for the freedom to practice all religions unmolested. Although she herself was a devout Spiritualist, her usual roster of religions that she mentions in her speeches includes pagans, Universalists, Jews, Muslims, Quakers, Calvinists, Unitarians, and even Catholics, and she frequently compared the right to freedom of religion with the right to freedom of sexuality.⁵⁴ Generally these comparisons were rhetorical devices to stave off charges of promiscuity on her own part: by analogy, just because one believed that others should be free to be Muslims does not mean that one herself is a Muslim, and the same goes for free love.

Unrestricted sexual access to one's wife was generally regarded as both a legal and a moral norm. For free love advocates, and Woodhull in particular, the yoke of marriage, protected by the state and Christianity, was tantamount to the ownership of women and stood as a deplorable crime on par with slavery. The rhetoric of slavery was employed frequently in free love propaganda and no doubt gave many pause in the post-Civil War era. However, in both other Spiritualists' writings and in Woodhull's platforms, the predominant trope equates marriage with legalized prostitution. She writes, "The woman who sells her body promiscuously is no more a prostitute than she is who sells herself in a marriage without love. She is only a different kind of prostitute. Nor are either of them any more prostitutes than are the countless wives who nightly yield their unwilling bodies to lecherous husbands, whose aim is sexual gratification without regard to the effect upon the victim."⁵⁵ (See figures 4.1 and 4.2.)

At the fringes of Spiritualist society, marriage was thought of as a crime. The leftist branch of the already leftist Spiritualists advocated the dissolution of marriage altogether as the economic disparity between financially independent men and dependent women resulted in what they argued was a legally sanctioned but unsavory form of prostitution. Amanda Frisken argues,

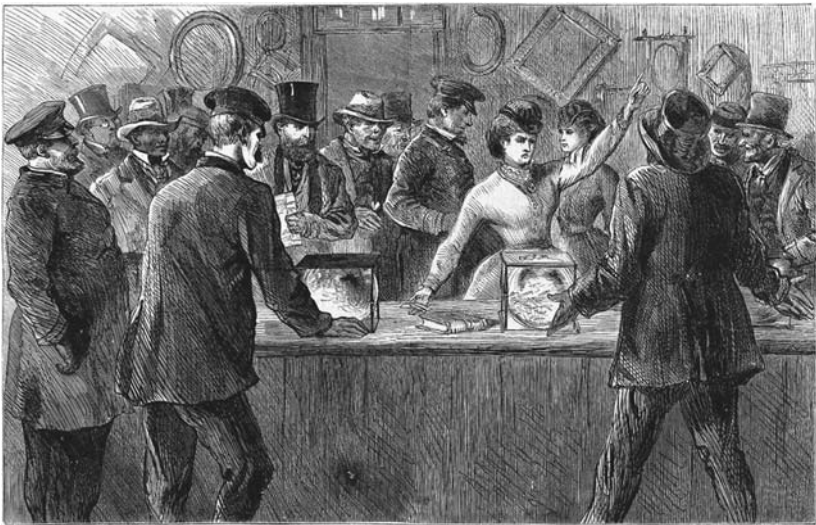


FIGURE 4.1 Cartoon of Victoria Woodhull demanding to vote, *Harper's Weekly*, November 25, 1871. Image courtesy of HarpWeek, LLC.



FIGURE 4.2 Cartoon of Victoria Woodhull as Mrs. Satan, *Harper's Weekly*, February 17, 1872. Image courtesy of HarpWeek, LLC.

In advocating social and economic remedies for prostitution, sex radicals went beyond a demand for the vote. By referring to marriage as legal prostitution, they insisted that both groups of women exchanged sexuality for material benefit, but men held up married women as exemplary, and disparaged the prostitutes they secretly visited.⁵⁶

Thus, even the middling sex of married people is a crime, and women are its victims. Although not all Spiritualists would have agreed with such a radical determination of the essence of earthly marriage, they would almost certainly have been familiar with such rhetoric and at a minimum sympathetic to the plight that marriage could present, particularly for women.

It was not only the legal aspects of marriage that Woodhull criticized. The economic disparity between men and women drove women into loveless marriages, and this fact served as a call for women to become economically

independent. Her newspaper, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, trumpeted "SHE WHO MARRIES FOR SUPPORT, AND NOT LOVE, IS A LAZY PAUPER, COWARD, AND PROSTITUTE."⁵⁷ As Amanda Frisken has noted, "By equating them with prostitutes, this critique threatened the respectability of even faithful married women."⁵⁸ Woodhull even went so far as to prefer prostitution over marriage because at least the prostitute has a greater measure of control over how frequently she has sex.

Woodhull did not shy away from a blatant critique of who was impeding the flow of sexual vitality in women. She wrote, "I need not explain to any woman the effects of unconsummated intercourse though she may attempt to deceive herself about it; but every man needs to have it thundered in his ears until he wakes to the fact that he is not the only party to the act, and that the other party demands a return for all he receives . . . demands that he shall not, either from ignorance or selfish desire, carry her impulse forward on its mission only to cast it backward with the mission unfulfilled."⁵⁹ This rather shocking declaration was supported not only medically through equating sexuality and magnetism but also socially, with the dire threat that if people did not get their sexual acts together, society would encourage homosexuality.

There is no accurate way of gauging the audience's reaction to what must have been her most scandalous assertion of all, that women were sexually desiring creatures who universally wished to be sexually fulfilled. The Spiritualists' association did split into two after this convention and a similar one in Vineland, New Jersey; clearly the half that advocated Woodhull's views were amenable to some or all of her claims. What is certain is that Woodhull inverted two common assumptions with her speech: she made the domestic public, and she made the trance state subordinate to the waking. Woodhull was not speaking as medium but as a woman and a public figure; she was fully conscious, the speech was prepared in advance, and she claimed that the views expressed in it are supported by the spirits but were also her own. Trance states frequently function cross-culturally as a way for marginalized members of society to express their views without fear of public censure.⁶⁰ And Spiritualism had a long track record of women speaking in public, often criticizing society, politics, and even Christianity, but behind the shield of the trance state. Woodhull spoke for herself, even when she did not pen the speech in question. She would often fly off extemporaneously during her lectures, and her writings long after this period remain as feisty and resolute as any during her American heyday.

The elimination of loveless unions—particularly marriage—will eliminate disease, and with it the children born to disease and insanity. Love, immediate and mutual, will conquer the final foe, death itself. The millennium of

love can be attained either voluntarily or it will be imposed on people by the spirit realm at their return. The usually benign spirits were depicted as angry and full of agency, a departure from their usual status as perfectly happy in heaven and interceding in human affairs only when called upon to do so, and then only by giving advice. Woodhull wrote, "I tell you that the spirits are coming back to tear your damned system of sexual slavery into tatters and consign its blackened remnants to the depths of everlasting hell."⁶¹ Spiritualism, which had dispensed with a final judgment, had no real language of the apocalypse, only progress, since its theology lacked a hell, a judging God, and a category of the damned. Woodhull reinfused Spiritualism with the rhetoric of the apocalyptic, but with an inversion of the usual roster of sins—humanity was misusing sexuality, and therefore the spirits were angered.

Despite her casual relationship to Christianity, Woodhull conscripted its traditional forms in the service of a reversal of what constitutes sinning: "Oh, children of the earth, that you had better put your houses in order and await the coming of the bridegroom or the bride. Accept sexual freedom while it can be attained, by degrees, and not wait until it shall tear up your souls at its sudden coming. . . . I have come to you, in time, to warn you to prepare for what is surely coming, aye, even now is at your very doors, liable to break in upon you and find you like the foolish virgins with your lamps untrimmed."⁶²

The return of the spirits is not common in Spiritualist writings; the dead were busily advancing through the spheres of heaven, and heaven was the destination for the living. In making the claim that the spirits wished to return to earth, Woodhull was relying on her audiences' knowledge of and belief in some recent developments in mediumship, foremost the increasing number of "materializations" reported at séances. Concrete proof of the presence of the dead at séances was coming into increasing demand; the spirits delivered presents from the afterlife, usually gloves or flowers, and the use of cabinets in séances was on the rise. Cabinets were structures that served as a portal from the spirit world to earth, and the spirits would manifest themselves so that the sitters could see, but generally not touch, their heavenly visitors. A newspaper account from this period extolled the improvements in mediumship witnessed by the temporary embodiment of the dead. The paper provided the reader with a detailed floor plan of the house where the materializations took place, and included several drawings of the spirits who made appearances, presumably to demonstrate how radically different each one looked, thus warding off claims of deception. After detailing how the author had made a thorough search of the room and had even patted down the medium for traces of trickery, he wrote: "Then, I think, the conviction formed itself that no matter how many 'sceptics' came battering against the granite facts, no matter what array

of 'exposers' might blow their tin horns or penny trumpets, that Jericho would stand...the genuine phenomena of this one séance could not be obliterated from my memory."⁶³

However, Woodhull is unique in presenting the dead as wishing to return to earth permanently. She alone was sounding the clarion call for the millennium, and she used the return of the spirits to shame her audience into abiding by the principles of free love. She asked rhetorically, "Do any imagine that, when the great and good of spirit life, shall return, and in the flesh abide with us, they will pay tribute or respect to the present order of social things? Will they, who thousands of years have been, as the angels in heaven, neither marrying nor given in marriage, conform to our laws which pretend to control sexual intercourse? will they marry their loves on earth legally?"⁶⁴ Like the Oneida Community before her, Woodhull here argued for an interpretation of Jesus' response to the marital state of the dead not as celibacy but as a celestial denial of monogamy. The angelic dead, who have been practicing free love in heaven, will continue to do so when they return to dwell among the living. At this apex of time, where the living and the dead collided in a new utopia, Woodhull displayed her more radical version of Spiritualism that differentiated her from the mainstream of believers; whereas most Spiritualists advocated political reform and scientific progress, millennial perfection remained somewhere on the distant horizon. For Woodhull, however, that day was imminent, and its arrival was firmly the responsibility of the current generation of believers.

Through the proper use of sexuality, humans will throw off disease and conquer death. At the same time, the dead will return to earth, and live among the immortal living. The two will interact in a utopia based on free love, with the centerpiece of this theology based on the perfectibility of the human body: "It will be readily understood that when the final union has occurred, when Spirits become materialized, that the bodies in which both [the dead and the living] shall appear will be of the same etherialized material."⁶⁵ Salvation itself depended on the body, and heaven and earth will unite when human bodies are made perfect and dead bodies are resurrected. She writes, "Then shall we be able to bridge over the gloomy chasm of death, and to build for ourselves a Jacob's ladder, reaching from earth to heaven, on which spirits and mortals will be perpetually engaged ascending and descending in unending harmony and felicity."⁶⁶

Magicians on the Margins

I would like to conclude this survey of Spiritualist thinking about love and sex by considering some individuals who generally are considered outside the

purview of a Spiritualist history, in some cases because they were defectors from the cause and in others because they simply represent thinking that was too far afield to be considered representative of Spiritualist thought. Contemporary scholarly literature generally makes a distinction between the Spiritualists as a relatively mainstream group of reform-minded optimists and the more secretive, hard-core collection of occultists, many of whom began their careers as Spiritualist mediums and went on pursue ritual magic over the comparatively tame séance. Scholars of the epoch frequently repeat this separation; such esteemed thinkers as Arthur Versluis and Joscelyn Godwin go so far as to give some credence to the occultists' claim to having "seeded" Spiritualism in preparation for later developments to have some credence.⁶⁷ Although I have never seen any evidence of that myself, there was clearly an attraction to more esoteric practices for those on the very fringes of the Spiritualist experience.

One of the most prominent Spiritualist figures captured by the allure of esoteric thought was Emma Hardinge Britten. Born in 1823 in London's east end, Britten became a wildly successful Spiritualist medium in America. Between the years of 1856 and 1860, she underwent a transformation from a Christian to a devout believer in religious multiculturalism at the behest of her spirit guides. Her *Six Lectures on Theology and Nature*, transcribed verbatim from a series of trance speeches in Chicago, place Emma at the forefront of women who abolished Christian hell. Upholding nature as the true locus of religion and universal access to salvation, she lambasted Protestant ministers for the highest crime—making people fear God. In a tour de force tour of world religions, Britten reinfuses the world with a Renaissance cosmology in which the material of nature is shot through with the divine. She adjoins her listeners to follow the knowledge of the ancients and treat all of nature, from rocks to people, with justice and love.⁶⁸

Britten's involvement brought a great respectability to Spiritualism, and she never reneged on its principles, although she frequently went beyond the usual parameters of Spiritualist thought. She influenced Spiritualist thought and theology so much that in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Joscelyn Godwin credits her with turning a series of disparate messages from the dead into a coherent religious system: "In Emma's synthesis, spiritualism becomes a complete religion, with a cosmology and an eschatology, a version of world history able to explain all myths and religions, a devotional practice in the form of a sort of unitarian prayer, and a social or socialist program for this world."⁶⁹ In addition to acting as a synthesizer of Spiritualist doctrine, Britten functioned as cultural ballast for the movement: her opinions carried authority and her even-handed approach to the excesses and occasional quackeries in her history

of Spiritualism continue to portray her as a sane and grounded woman whose intellectual gifts were matched by common sense and humor.

After making a name for herself as a speaker and a medium, and following a protracted effort to help the Union's cause and to reelect Lincoln, Emma Hardinge married William Britten and published her history of the movement. In 1876 she and her husband would publish two works, *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic*, by an anonymous author known only by his alias "Louis." Godwin argues, and I concur, that there is no sound reason to believe that Emma herself wrote the material and subsequently hid behind a pseudonym. Most of the more shocking claims about the history of religion and sexuality in the two books had already been published under her own name in the *Six Lectures* and I see no compelling reason to think that she would have perpetuated an authorial hoax. Godwin has gone to great lengths to attempt to trace Louis's biography, and I need not repeat that effort here.⁷⁰

Art Magic, the cover of which bears the comforting message "God Understands," is a dizzying tour of ancient religions accompanied by the claim, palatable to Spiritualists and occultists alike, that God is manifest in all truly religious endeavors throughout time and place. After tracing the problem of whether there is one or many gods from the ancients to the Spiritualists, the author embarks on an attempt to reduce religions to their essence or core beliefs. Astral worship bleeds into his discussion of sex worship, as he maps the former onto the latter by reading the constellations as encoded symbols of sexual congress. The ancients, declares the narrator, universally agreed that sexuality and creation were the building blocks of the universe but that the actual practice of sex worship devolved into a lascivious affair of the hoi polloi. Allusions to sex as a religious ritual then had to be encrypted in symbol and hidden behind mystery religions and other initiatory sects like the Freemasons so that the knowledge could be protected from the frivolously minded.

And knowledge is both the means and the end of that journey. The pursuit of knowledge is the impetus for becoming embodied, as souls exist spiritually and are drawn to earth in order to learn. The "fall" of spirit into the flesh is a desirable one and the creation of embodied matter is the first act that religiously attuned humans would imitate. Louis writes, "As the function of creation is the highest and most wonderful with which the mind can invest Deity, so the imitative law must be the noblest and most sacred function of God's creatures. In the beginning of earthly existence, we believe it was thus esteemed, and in those remote ages when sex worship was incorporated into a religious system, the highest and noblest elements of human thought clustered around the subject of generation, elevating it to the topmost pinnacle

of human worship."⁷¹ This ringing endorsement of the creative act stands as a celebration of the conditions for thinking—only as embodied humans can our souls undergo the trials, errors, and even suffering that is tantamount to education.

Plato and Pythagoras join the list of Egyptians, Chaldeans, Hindus, and Jews who understood the centrality of sex and physical generation in the pursuit of truth. The undifferentiated singularity of the spirit becomes distinct and disadvantaged in the body which one learns is the prerequisite for advancing: "With the descent of Soul into physical life, man becomes dual, male and female, with sex as the dividing line between them. Then, too, ensues the mysterious transformation of the soul's faculties which converts spiritual love into material passion, intuition knowledge into human reason, boundless perception into dim memory and vague prescience, eternal things into temporal."⁷² The fall into matter is both theologically necessary and individually desirable; embodiment is the condition for learning and sex is the necessary path to wisdom.

While *Art Magic* extols the virtues of sex as a religious ritual, it hardly stands as a how-to manual for implementing it in occult practice. The author is more concerned with presenting a wide-ranging sweep of religious truths across time and arguing that Spiritualism should be further explored for its as-yet untapped abilities. As Godwin summarizes, Spiritualism and occultism were separated by both their authorities and their goals, spirits of the dead in the former and adepts, both past and present, in the latter. Spiritualists wished to learn from the dead whereas occultists wished to become adepts themselves.⁷³ One of the primary disagreements between the two camps was precisely the referents of Spiritualist contact: many occultists thought that elementals, or nature spirits that could be controlled through magical practices, were the creatures that responded at séances.

Worse still from a Spiritualist perspective, occultists proposed that "shells" of individual personalities, residual energies of the dead, could continue to exist for a while and that the apparent voices of the dead were merely these quasi-authentic leftovers when the real person had already departed. Emma Hardinge Britten was an example of a believer who could, as Catholic practitioners of voodoo say, serve with both hands. She never disavowed the Spiritualists and most likely agreed with the invisible Louis that both such creatures can be contacted by the living. Emma certainly participated with more hard-line occult explorations and societies, bringing her into the same circles as a kindred spirit with a very different life trajectory, Paschal Beverly Randolph.

Randolph was born of a Virginia gentleman and an African slave in New York City in 1825. Randolph's excellent biographer, John Patrick Deveney,

believes his claim to have taught himself to read and write when orphaned and homeless as a teen. Despite untold economic and racist setbacks, Randolph managed to become an author, a Spiritualist medium, and a world traveler in an epoch when black men rarely moved about any world unmolested. The 1850s found him in upstate New York among Spiritualists and free love advocates. Randolph soon became a “clairvoyant physician” and shortly thereafter a proponent of the school of spiritual affinities that “opted for a theory of the change of affinities based on the development and progress of the individuals.”⁷⁴

In 1855 Randolph first went abroad, touring England, France, and Germany and meeting many of Europe’s Spiritualist illuminati. He returned to the continent in 1857 and apparently made a trip to Egypt but, as Deveney points out, it became “impossible now to disentangle any details of this trip from a later one he made in 1861 and 1862 after he began increasingly to clothe his teachings in Oriental garb.”⁷⁵ During some of his travels in the Middle East, Randolph was initiated into the occult arts by a shadowy group of “dervishes and fakirs” about whom little is known. Deveney hypothesizes that Randolph was consorting with the Nusa’iri, a splinter and persecuted sect of Islam that retains elements of Gnostic teachings, particularly pertaining to sex and mysticism.⁷⁶ Whether this was the group Randolph mentions in a memorable description of an encounter with a “dusky maiden,” the event certainly seems to have been a pivotal moment when Randolph moved from a general interest in sex to a specific interest in the magical uses of it.

Much like Louis had in *Art Magic*, Randolph turned to the semi-speculative history of religions to find a shared core. According to Deveney:

Much of this phallic conviction in the nineteenth century was of the simple antiquarian variety—a fascination with chronicling the odd details of sexual worship among the ancients—but there was also a perception that in the preserved fragments of antique sexual lore (especially in the heresiologists’ description of the Gnostics) there lay a forgotten key to spiritual progress, a practical method of developing the hidden powers in man.⁷⁷

Randolph, unlike Louis or at least Emma Hardinge Britten, moved from a universal, historical approach to sex magic and toward an applied theory; in so doing, he parted ways with the Spiritualists and returned to a quirky version of Christianity. Denouncing Andrew Jackson Davis with the vigor of a former convert, Randolph objected most vehemently to Davis’s and other Spiritualists’ claims of the nonexistence of evil.

Following his break with Spiritualism and his return to an idiosyncratic version of Christianity, Randolph began publishing letters, pamphlets, and

other tracts on sex in small circulation under quiet circumstances. His watershed moment in producing instructions for sex magic, however, would wait until the 1870s with the publication of *The Ansairctic Mystery* and later *Eulis! The History of Love*. Both works broach the formation of the Brotherhood of Eulis, Randolph's final attempt to form an occult society to propagate his teachings.

In his important new work, *Magia Sexualis*, Hugh Urban argues that Randolph represents a new dawning for Victorian sexuality, moving away from the "spiritualization of love" to a new kind of 'sexualization of love': that is, there was a marked shift from the Victorian emphasis on the importance of love within marital bounds . . . to a post-Victorian emphasis on sex as a vital component to any male-female relationship."⁷⁸ Although remaining what Urban claims is still fundamentally conservative—sex magic was designed only to be between two loving and married people—Randolph intuitively a social liberation based on sexual equality between the genders. Paired with fervent abolitionism, Randolph's visions of the future were both progressive and prophetic.

The equality of women in both public and private matters was central to Randolph's theories. His "white magic" centers on mutual orgasm (preferably simultaneous) as harnessing the most potent form of spiritual energy. Fully in line with Mesmer's views on animal magnetism and echoing classical views of an ether filling the universe—Randolph had certainly read the *Timaeus*—he argued that there was "an all-pervading universal fluid (metaphorically love and physically Aether) that unites all levels of the universes to God."⁷⁹ The moment of orgasm, curiously reminiscent of the French idea of the "little death," opens the soul to all the powers of the universe. Should both participants will something to happen at that moment, the energy available in that ecstasy would almost certainly bring the desire to fruition, hence its magical properties. Beyond magic, however, lay the possibility of mysticism, and sexual orgasm could open a vista to apprehending the ineffable.

The importance of healthy and mutual sex for Randolph extended beyond the bedroom and past ritual space into the broadest context of society. Much as Woodhull had argued, Randolph targets the misuse and repression of sexuality as causing a host of social ills resulting in "unnatural" sexual outlets and the breakdown of society. He asks rhetorically, "How, in God's Holy Name, can you expect home, happiness or heaven in a family where the wife never . . . realizes the slightest marriage joy, or anything else than utter and profound disgust? How can a man be constant, faithful, good or great who is . . . compelled to run after harlots because his wife is concentrated ice?"⁸⁰ The social order is predicated on the happiness of the primary unit of the couple.

From eternal marriage to mystical orgasm, Spiritualists spanned the possible range for the nineteenth century's ability to contemplate love and sex. Both continued after this life and both contributed to the quality of the current world and the next one. Marriage was a political issue, possibly endangering women and children with outmoded laws and forcing women to settle for financial security over true love. But it was also an emotional one, and the promise of completely fulfilled erotic happiness was a central component to the vision of heaven.

With the intangible forces of romance brought increasingly to bear on love, the unit of the couple became simultaneously more culturally vaunted and more difficult to attain. Spiritualism negotiated the breach between the expectations for love and its realities; if not here, then surely in heaven all love would find its best expression. Both infinite monogamy and the sex radicalism of free love found Plato to be their touchstone, as Aristophanes' creatures skittered throughout the century, giving middle-class Americans a vocabulary of desire. Even if true love lay in the future, its description was found in the past, where "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature."⁸¹

This page intentionally left blank

5

Medicine

In 1861, as the Confederacy fired on Fort Sumter, and the white plague rampaged through tenement houses, Andrew Jackson Davis was counseling the weary about the medical benefits of true love. Davis's latest work, *The Harbinger of Health*, had gone into its sixth edition in a single year, and the fervor for his medical advice would not die down for five decades. As the primary theologian of the Spiritualist movement, Davis's word on any topic could be heard from New York to Sonoma Valley, and his word on this particular topic was in high demand. His weekly tabloid, *The Herald of Progress*, boasted a column devoted to health and routinely serialized books by physicians. If Spiritualism may be understood as the religious vehicle for giving voice to the dead, this new and voracious interest in the embodied experience of the living opens a curious aperture on the concerns of white middle-class America. The typically other-worldly focus of Spiritualism turned to the living body and its ailments, and, I will argue, in so doing inscribed cosmological significance on the body.

The profession of medicine in the nineteenth century presented such a frenzy of alternative theories and epistemological flux that amateurs and charlatans were frequently indistinguishable from their pedigreed counterparts. In the midst of this cacophony of competition, Spiritualists threw their hat into the ring with at least as much legitimacy as other hawkers of health. Spiritualism already had a vast vocabulary for progressive ideas, and many of its central

tenets (such as animal magnetism) sprang from the medical discourses of the day. In their unprecedented focus on the daily goings-on of the dead, Spiritualists projected the march of history into heaven where both spirits and their spirit-bodies progressed through seven spheres toward perfection. The telos of time seems unshakable in this construct—transferring the notion of improvement from social ills to the body required very little effort.

However, it is precisely the idea of progress that is at odds with the *topos* of the body: whereas the trajectory of history might be culturally “read” as the unidirectional parade of time toward perfection, the trajectory of bodies is less willing to be interpreted as constant progress. Common sense mandates that the telos of the body is ultimately a process of decrepitude that leads to inevitable death. It is the clash between these two temporal systems that I will argue shows a fissure in ideas about time, a rupture in the system of improvement that betrays larger cultural concerns about the status of progress and the direction of time.

Medicine in pre-Revolutionary America clung tenaciously to classical notions of the body, and the majority of cures were based on balancing the four humors, or bodily fluids: blood, black and yellow bile, and phlegm. Surgery and internal medicine were almost unknown as the risk of infection trumped most inclinations to operate. Cures designed to regulate the bodily fluids, such as purging and bleeding, were predominant from the Colonial period straight through the Civil War. Inconsistent and often lamentable credentialing practices changed from state to state, with government agencies, universities, and medical societies vying for the right to regulate. Poor sanitary conditions and questions about the validity of contagion as a disease vector kept life expectancies low and slowed progress toward effective medical treatments.¹

Prior to the Revolution, two major advances were made in American medicine—first, the inoculation against smallpox begun in the Boston epidemic in 1721 and drastically improved by Jenner’s vaccination of 1799, and, second, the introduction of cinchona bark to treat malaria. Both smallpox and malaria remained on the roster along with malnutrition, yellow fever, cholera, and, most deadly, tuberculosis, as the major epidemics of early America. Research in France had begun in earnest, made possible by state support and the large-scale introduction of autopsies, but Americans were slow to embrace these improvements, deeming them impractical or even suspect.² Arguments waged over whether improvement of living conditions or strict quarantines of the sick was better policy, often resulting in delayed action and general confusion that prevented either from being implemented effectively.

Like most disciplines that became increasingly professionalized over the course of the century, medicine initially began at home. Akin to the practice of

caring for the dead, women were the front line when it came to the realm of illness, and oral tradition governed home care through the early Republic. These women handled a broad spectrum of daily maladies often without recourse to expertise or medicines other than local plants. In the absence of medical professionals, rural families were forced to rely on themselves and on published material such as almanacs. Home remedies included “simple lotions, syrups, salves for assorted insect bites, burns, poison ivy cases, indigestion, coughs and colds, cuts, bruises, and sprains. [Family members] bandaged injuries, took care of the bedridden, and with or without midwives, managed childbirths.”³ For larger communities, apothecaries played a vital role in maintaining health, but their supply of medicines relied on shipments from England, a process that was erratic at best.

Medical books, stripped of Latin jargon and designed for home use, were published before and during the early Republic, giving the woman of the house both the ability and the authority to exceed the common run of folk medicine. Manuals such as William Buchan’s *Domestic Medicine*, published in Philadelphia in 1771 and reprinted at least thirty times by the mid-nineteenth century, assured the layperson that she was fully qualified to handle the vast majority of human ailments. *Domestic Medicine* and its long chain of imitators sought to purge the obfuscatory language from medical discourse so that healing could be more readily available to a marginally educated public. Buchan in fact believed that most medical discernment fell under the aegis of “common sense,” where neither supernatural mystery nor superhuman intelligence influenced one’s ability to cure.⁴ Newspapers and almanacs contributed to the growing body of medical literature that Americans relied upon in a time bereft of readily available professional advice. By the arrival of the Revolution, self-reliance and the ethos of equality took on new meaning for American medicine.

Antebellum America was hardly a felicitous environment for the seriously ill. As John S. Haller has shown in *Kindly Medicine*, public euphoria over the still-novel idea of a democracy spilled over into cultural articulations of equality where not even science could stem the tide of populism. Credentials smacked of elitism and rigorous training had the airs of the aristocracy. In this environment of egalitarianism, the line between the professional, the well-meaning amateur, and the common carnival quack quickly eroded.⁵ Debates between competing schools were hot and frequently lethal: allopaths prescribed fighting one disease with the introduction of another one on the assumption that the body could contain only one illness at a time. Homeopaths believed that “like cures like” and gave minute amounts of drugs designed to promote the symptoms of the disease in question, as if the body could be nudged toward

curing itself before it became truly ill. Thomsonians relied on second-century Roman medic Galen as their primary source of medical information and as such worried about the balance of the humors. The Botanicals challenged the hegemony of the so-called regulars—regular physicians—and replaced mineral-based drugs with herbs. Mesmerists, phrenologists, and bald-faced charlatans wove through the crowded schools of thought, helping and harming at a ratio perhaps equal to their colleagues.⁶

By midcentury, many states had eliminated licensing altogether, removing any zone of distinction between the trained doctor and the potential quack. Even among the mainstream professionals, the scientific method had not yet been rigorously applied to the discipline of medicine. Enlightenment rationalism, or nonpartisan general training, had not yet embraced empiricism, so that repetition and experience eluded even the educated doctors who studiously avoided pseudoscientific methods and mystical leanings. As the century progressed, mainstream medicine would turn to empiricism in a self-conscious attempt to garner more respect for the profession.⁷ Heavily influenced by the writings of their Parisian colleagues, well-educated American medical professionals would embrace observation and would eventually unite the “regulars,” elevating them above the many schools competing for both theoretical and public hegemony.

Before the therapeutic revolution of relying on empirical data, American medicine “embodied the remnants of the Enlightenment hope that some unifying medical principle would be found, a law of disease and treatment that would prove as fertile for medicine as the law of gravity had for the physical sciences.”⁸ The search for a single cause of disease underlay many of the more prominent schools of medicine and practically all of the more fringe movements. In an epoch when bloodlettings and induced vomiting were still commonplace in standard medicine, many sought a cause—and a cure—that was more accessible to the layperson and less brutal in its remedies.

This search for a unified theory had its roots in antiquity, with Galen still being consulted in the American Republic. Ancient theories about humors held that they needed to be balanced with temperature, and illness resulted from too much or too little of a particular humor being combined with the wrong temperature. This holistic view of the human body meant that specific effects were not attributed to specific causes but rather to the entire body being out of whack in a more general sense. In *The Therapeutic Perspective*, John Harley Warner explains:

Etiological theory sustained this way of thinking about disease and cure. With only a few exceptions (smallpox and syphilis being

the most notable), etiology in the early nineteenth century was nonspecific. Diseases were thought to be generated not by discrete causative agents—one invariably producing pneumonia and another typhoid fever—but rather by a variety of destabilizing factors acting singly or more often as an ensemble to unbalance the system.⁹

Warner details how this vision of the body implicated the life choices of the dissolute and the promiscuous. If bodily harmony was the product of good living, then the lack of it would be apparent in the illnesses of the overindulgent. The elision of morals and health would have sat very well with the majority of middle-class Americans, and the idea of the body in balance turned out to be a construct that many were unwilling to give up so easily. By the middle of the century, doctors were turning away from the harmony of the body toward the specificity of the disease and Spiritualists, among others, dug in their heels.

In what Paul Starr has called the “medical counterculture” of the epoch, popular medicine reacted against both the elitism of the medical profession and its embrace of new theories. Retaining a “cultural sedimentation” of prior theories as well as a love in principle of linking health to morality or at least to moderation, lay people continued to flirt with pseudoscientific and outright religious explanations for disease and discomfort. Hovering between the home remedy and the trained professional, these frequently itinerant practitioners undoubtedly honed a certain amount of skill in their claims of specialization. Starr comments, “Botanic practitioners and midwives were probably the most numerous of the lay therapists, but there were also uncounted cancer doctors, bonesetters, inoculators, abortionists, and sellers of nostrums.”¹⁰ More overtly mystical and proto-psychological tendencies continued alongside mainstream medical speculation, many of them still enamored of the single-cause theory that proved so elusive to the trained professionals. In this atmosphere, Mesmerism, phrenology, hydropathy, and Spiritualism offered answers to the cause and cure of disease that remained accessible to lay people.

From the outset Mesmerism had been conceived as a medical panacea and began not as a prototype of hypnosis but rather as the single-cause theory of animal magnetism. As I discussed in relation to magnetism in chapter 2, animal magnetism as developed by Franz Anton Mesmer posited that the planets had, by reason of universal attraction among objects, an effect on one another, the tides, the earthly atmosphere, and the human body. All parts of the chain of being were subject to the dynamics of a fluid that penetrates the universe and are thus affected in an analogous way to how gravity causes tides in the ocean.¹¹ Mesmer proposed that the attraction among these bodies was a magnetic one and that the fluid flowed into the human body from the outside.

Phrenology, brought to America by Johann Gaspar Spurzheim in 1832, was something of a cross between neurological speculation and physiognomy. Originally a map of the human brain that located personality characteristics in specific physical locations, phrenology was transformed in America from being prescriptive to mostly descriptive. Spurzheim departed from his mentor Franz Josef Gall, the founder of phrenology, and argued that “specific faculties, sentiments, or propensities could be consciously strengthened or inhibited. Not only did this give phrenology a specific psycho-behavioristic dimension, but it paved the way for unlimited human improvement.”¹² Phrenology’s credibility in America was quickly eroded by the introduction of “head readings,” which were based on the idea that the physical characteristics of one’s head reflected the character of the person. These character determinations were used in assessing the honesty and similar personality traits of others, and were used to identify who had criminal tendencies and even to secure marriage matches.¹³

Hydropathy was another single-cause theory of the period, assessed by Marshall Scott Legan as “one of the least harmful”¹⁴ medical experimentations of the day. Hydropathy proposed that the human body could be cured of practically any ailment through the application of cold water. Ushering in the opening of health spas and bathhouses, hydropathy undoubtedly contributed to the overall cause of American health by improving hygiene.¹⁵ The water cure, as it was called, involved wrapping the patient in a sheet soaked in cold water and then swaddling her with several blankets and placing the patient under a feather mattress. Once the patient started sweating profusely, she would be relieved of the layers and promptly doused with cold water. Along with homeopathy and animal magnetism, hydropathy was a favorite cure among the Spiritualists, and Spiritualist newspapers serialized books from doctors on the topic and frequently had columns devoted to the latest developments in alternative medicine.

Clearly one of the most successful religious articulations of health—and a serious competitor to Spiritualism—was Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science. Plagued by chronic physical illness and severe mental distress, Eddy was cured of her nearly paralyzing condition in 1862 by the mesmeric healer Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Quimby had been an early student of animal magnetism and demonstrated an unusual gift to heal; although he eventually dismissed Mesmerism and its related phenomena of trance-induced diagnoses, like many Spiritualists Quimby maintained that the divine animated the body and that disease was the product of misunderstanding. Following her miraculous recovery, Eddy expounded Quimby’s teachings both in print and in public after his death in 1866.

Eddy was clearly aware of the similarities between her “science of health” and the medical claims of the Spiritualists. In fact, she was frequently mistaken for a medium, and her major work, *Science and Health*, has a chapter devoted to distinguishing her position from that of the Spiritualists. Christian Science famously eschews the majority of medical practice (dentistry and “mechanical” problems like broken bones being the primary exceptions), favoring instead prayer and faith. Unlike Spiritualism, Christian Science maintained a clear alliance with normative Christianity, recalling the healing miracles of Jesus as foundational exempla of faith and health. The centrality of sin and the true existence of evil demarcate Christian Science from the Spiritualist movement in their most fundamental and cherished tenets. These clearly Christian ties appealed to a cast of mind different from that of Spiritualism, and the movement sparked a renewed interest in healing in Protestant churches, an effect that is still felt today. Both competing theories were particularly appealing to women, offering them self-definition, mobility, and a public voice, and both sought a single cause of disease that was related to the divine. Christian Science found that common thread in faith, whereas Spiritualism found it in knowledge.

In 1850, a white male who survived to the age of twenty had a 73.5 percent chance of making it to fifty and a 41.2 percent chance of making it to seventy.¹⁶ Although the era of “heroic measures” such as excessive purging and bloodletting was receding, most Americans still craved less invasive and less painful procedures. By midcentury the American introduction of anesthetics made surgery viable on an unprecedented scale. Coupled with vigorously enforced sanitary conditions and the social acceptance of specifically trained nurses and doctors, the landscape of American illness radically improved toward the end of the century.¹⁷ However, the majority of Spiritualists were still surrounded by competing theories that the layperson had little chance of assessing accurately and still clung to the fervent hope that the body did indeed reflect the state of the soul. Looking for medical answers that were sympathetic to their cosmological claims and social hopes, Spiritualists cast about among the alternative schools and frequently devised their own theories about the body and its place in the harmony of the whole.

The Spirit of Health

In 1862 the pioneer physician Dr. Charles Von Geldern laboriously collected the weekly edition of Andrew Jackson Davis’s *Herald of Progress*, bound the year’s bounty in a sewn volume, and indexed the work by hand, according

to his interests. Trained in Germany and one of the first doctors to arrive in California, Von Geldern's interests in both Spiritualism and emergent medicine, particularly hydropathy, shed light on the intersection of these two discourses of ostensible progress. The charming treasure trove that is his homemade index is bound on elephant leaf paper preceding the year's newspapers. Entries under "K," for example, seem to capture the range of his interests in this newspaper that he had shipped all the way from New York: "Kidneys; Kindness; Killing; Kingdom of Heaven, shortest road to."

The *Herald of Progress* routinely ran several columns devoted to matters of health and healing and frequently serialized books by doctors even when they lacked any remote resemblance to Spiritualism. Von Geldern's indexed and underlined articles on medicine frequently refer to strict medical discourse devoid of religious content. Some, however, make a clear association between the two, such as this August 1862 letter to the editor: "I had frequently had occasion to notice that Spiritualists were Homeopaths . . . being myself accounted a believer in both of these alarming innovations upon the established order of things. I was gratified that one of so large an experience [a prior columnist] should consider them twin systems of faith and practice."¹⁸ The perceived compatibility between science and Spiritualism contributed to a mutual fostering of interests; the very newness of both forms of knowledge also allied them as breakthroughs from stodgy tradition.

The author's fear of normative medical practice is tangible, and the uncertainty of the period comes through easily. He writes, "It is this discovery—that it is the *quality* and not the *quantity*, upon which the curative energy of the medicine depends—which gives to homeopathic practice its crowning excellence. *It is safe!* There is no *drugging to death*, which every honest practitioner of the old school will confess is too frequently the case under many other reputed systems of cure."¹⁹ As with Mesmerism, the cure rate of homeopathy may be spectacularly indebted to the placebo effect, but irrespective of cause, adherents of both systems reported remarkable physical improvement or at least the perception of such improvement: the distinction between those two states falls somewhere between pedantic and irrelevant.

Participating in a temporal ambiguity, Spiritualists claimed that these new methods were simultaneously revolutionary products of progress and cultural artifacts as old as the ancients. Always seeking to legitimate new endeavors with a patina of the past, Spiritualist discourse conscripted the classical world as the genesis of modern knowledge: "Pictorial representations of the process commonly known as magnetizing a human subject have been found in the Egyptian catacombs; and there is no other mode of accounting for the marvels recorded of ancient Egyptian priestcraft, the later Grecian oracles, or some of

the feats of Hindoo jugglery...as that which supposes the operators to have possessed a competent knowledge of what is popularly designated Mesmerism, Psychology, Clairvoyance, & c., & c. Medical books of observation, written centuries ago, record phenomena of like nature with those of Clairvoyance."²⁰ Although the past could not fully account for the medical wonders of the day, the naturally occurring phenomena described by Spiritualists—trance states, magnetic fluid flowing throughout the universe—had to have been noticed by the sages of the past and presaged the contemporary rediscovery of this wisdom. Even where the body was concerned, time flowed backward and forward, recuperating the past and pointing toward the future.

Cast adrift among the medical and pseudoscientific schools of thought, many Americans favored discourses that allied health with moral or at least moderate living. For Spiritualists, who had disbanded hell and reassigned sin to the eminently operable arena of ignorance, this tendency was written and thought about overtly as a problem of knowledge. The lack of knowledge, rather than the lack of ethics, accounted for many bodily misdeeds and mishaps. By shifting the discussion of disease from a physical state to a mental one, the Spiritualists distanced believers from painful practices while forwarding their agenda of spiritual education and progressive politics.

Through the ascending tiers of heaven, with earthly existence as the very beginning of the educational process, it was no wonder that ignorance ran rampant throughout the population, bringing with it physical as well as social ills. An 1861 *Banner of Light* captures the tone of much Spiritualist writing on this issue: "All disease, whether mental or physical, is an effect of sin.... Yet sin to us is not the monster it is to you. The child sins, but it is the sin of ignorance, and believe us, judgment will be visited upon that sin as upon the sin of riper years. The child sins, and disease fastens itself upon the little form, and thence comes suffering, a holy monitor, teaching you to avoid sin in the future."²¹ Disease is merely a symbolic manifestation of ignorance, a benign form of punishment designed to promote understanding.

Ignorance can attack both the body and the spirit, and maladies of the mind were also attributed to a lack of knowledge. Frequently the apparent consequences of sin were the result of a discord between behavior and one's inner moral compass. A diseased spiritual state was akin to a diseased bodily one, and both could be combated with increased knowledge. The paper recounts, "There is quite as much disease in the spiritual world as in the physical and spiritual combination in which you live. The spiritual of man is often as much diseased as the physical. The conscience, the conscious part of man, is the law of man and if you at any time violate that you bring on mental disease, and that which follows close after is sorrow and repentance, and then comes a cure.

Now, then, seek to avoid all that which will turn you aside from your own law, that which God hath given you alone—not the law of your neighbor.”²² Discord produces disease, and ignorance is its root, whether the location is the body or the soul.

The interconnected nature of the corpus and spirit accounted for the manifestations of disease in one as a result of a problem in the other. The boundary between the body, the world, and the heavens was permeable, and ripples among the three were felt throughout. The body was not merely a vehicle of the soul, a necessary evil that trapped and transported the spiritual aspect of humanity, but rather it played an integral role in the drama of life and death. For support for this theory, I will argue, Spiritualists reached back into the Renaissance cosmology in which humans were a reflection of the divine rather than a fallen invention awaiting redemption.

Heavenly Bodies

In this atmosphere of the rebirth of the ideals of antiquity, Spiritualism may be understood as a cultural expression of Neoplatonic Renaissance thinking refurbished for American use. Specifically, the undercurrent of American hermeticism came to its fullest if most populist expression in Spiritualism, with Davis himself citing the works of such early modern magicians as Cornelius Agrippa, Marsilio Ficino, and Giordano Bruno. I will argue that it is from this Neoplatonic strain that Spiritualism drew its main tenets about the body and the proper *techne* for it: infused with Kabbalism, the Renaissance magus tradition posited that the body was the microcosm of divine order, the mirror of God's mind.

Although Plato himself is called upon in service of Spiritualism, with authors most frequently citing Socrates' daemonic lapses as proof that he was a proto-medium, it is the Renaissance refusal to separate the body from the soul that Spiritualism ultimately inherits and reintroduces. The esoteric strain running through Renaissance discussions of the body is indebted to a long line of speculation about the creation of the body and its place in the cosmos. Unsurprisingly, much of this discussion is grounded in Plato himself. In the *Timaeus*, Plato draws a detailed and fabulous description of the creation of the cosmos. Begun by the primordial demiurge, the universe was bounded and filled with immutable objects such as the stars fixed in their orbits. Since perfection is understood to be a static and singular state, the ability of matter to move and change (and its concomitant susceptibility to decay and death) is introduced slowly and by gradation—the immutable is increasingly alloyed

with the mutable until the final creation of the body and its alliance with the immutable soul.

Subject to both pain and passions, the body may either abet the soul in the pursuit of wisdom or else overwhelm it with the satisfaction of physical desires. As noted in the *Timaeus* and several other dialogues, Plato does not believe that one ever wills to do evil; the existence of malice in the world, then, stems from a poor understanding of what constitutes the good. The relationship between the body and the soul is negotiated by the talents of the mind, a critical role that not only will determine whether the two exist harmoniously but will also govern the future of the soul itself. The principal culprit is ignorance: "The diseases of the soul that result from a bodily condition come about in the following way. It must be granted, surely, that mindlessness is the disease of the soul, and of mindlessness there are two kinds. One is madness, the other is ignorance. And so if a man suffers from a condition that brings on either one or the other, that condition must be declared a disease."²³ Ignorance leads to the overindulgence of the body and the eventual abandonment of the pursuit of wisdom.

Plato scholars have argued vigorously for both pro- and anti-body tendencies in his corpus. Both strains are present in the collected writings, and excellent arguments are clearly available to both camps. In terms of the transmission of Platonic ideals, however, I would argue that the *Timaeus* holds a pride of place in the history of Western religions—it is Plato's most sustained discussion of the immortality of the soul; it is the principal support given for later, mostly Christian, claims that Plato was a proto-monotheist; and it was the only Platonic work available in Latin through antiquity and the Middle Ages. In both content and availability, the *Timaeus* shines as a defining moment in the history of religion, and in my estimation it is easily one of his most pro-body writings. Although the body can indeed lead the soul astray, its very existence encapsulates the creation of the cosmos: "One who takes care to develop his body should in his turn practice the exercises of the soul by applying himself to the arts and to every pursuit of wisdom, if he is to truly deserve the epithet 'fine and good.' And the various bodily parts should also be looked after in this same way, in imitation of the structure of the universe."²⁴ Harmony, balance, and mutual aid, then, mark the proper relationship between the soul and the body, with the happy outcome being "the most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore."²⁵

Following Plato, perhaps the most elaborate religious exposition of the human body and its intrinsic tie to the entire cosmos is the Jewish mystical system of Kabbalism. The Kabbalah denotes a series of books written over several centuries that share certain theological characteristics. Like Plato

himself (particularly in the *Timaeus*), Kabbalism was heavily influenced by Pythagorean mysticism in which numbers are necessary to the process of creation.²⁶ It also drew heavily from the fantastical apocalyptic musings of the book of Ezekiel, particularly the vision of the chariot ascending. Early predecessors such as the *Sefir Yetsirah* (Book of Creation) speculated that the numbers one through ten and the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet were the primary building blocks of the universe.

In the twelfth century, the *Book Bahir*, written in Provence, took the numbers one to ten and attributed characteristics to them. Not pure mathematics alone but actual aspects of God's personality became the fundamental tools for creating the cosmos. The sephirot, as the ten were called, came to their full exposition in the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, or the Book of Splendor, which became the sine qua non of Kabbalism; all later works had to resonate with the *Zohar* to be considered Kabbalistic. Simultaneously abstruse and sublime, the *Zohar* is a mystical novel that recounts the descent of the sephirot from the monistic perfection of the godhead through the emanations that are perceived by people to be human characteristics of God. The infinite is thus fused with the anthropomorphic descriptions of God as a personality subject to moods and changes. The sephirot each have names and particular powers; they also govern different body parts and aspects of nature. Half are feminine, half masculine, and explicit sexual imagery is frequent in Kabbalistic writings; following God's first injunction in the Hebrew scriptures to "Be fruitful and multiply," the sephirot sexually produce souls.²⁷ Finally, the last sephira, Malkuth, is understood as being the collective presence of Israel in the world. The godhead reaches up to the divine infinity and down to the people, with each aspect influencing the behavior of all of those tethered together in this chain of being. (See Figure 5.1.)

Kabbalists described this potential trespass on monotheism as the sun shining through a stained glass window—the source of the light was singular and unified, but its aspects could fracture and appear as different to those looking on. This reconciliation of the charms of polytheism with the demands of monotheism both described God's mind and prescribed a path of mystical ascent, a Neoplatonic ladder through the aspects of the divine toward perfection (although one can only hope to reach the seventh sephira, after which the divine substance is too pure for human apprehension). Finally, this schematic applied to the human body as well as the cosmos at large—the lower seven sephirot literally mapped onto the body as the head, torso, arms, legs, phallus, and feet of the primordial man, Adam Kadmon. Although this was not the first or by any means the only Neoplatonic claim to a cartography of the human body, it was widely circulated and functioned as a medical template for centuries.

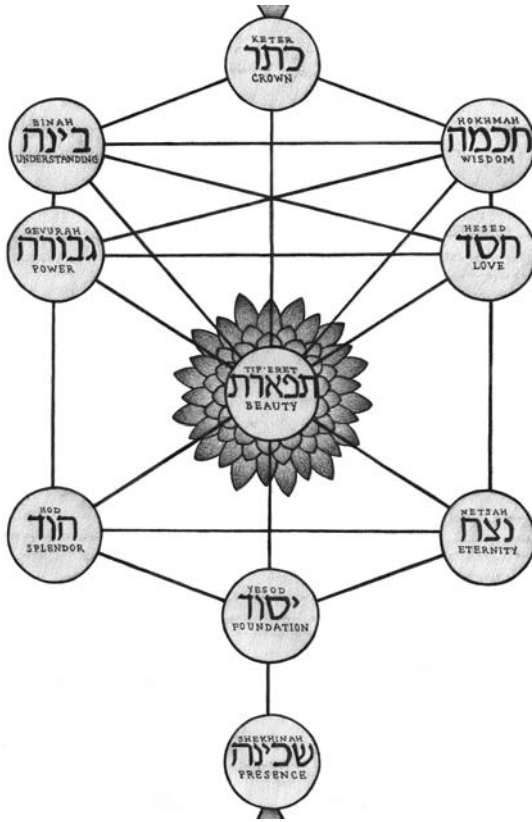


FIGURE 5.1 Diagram of the Kabbalistic sephirot. Original drawing courtesy of Courtney Cunningham.

The Kabbalah, with its attendant speculations on the human body and its strategies for interpreting sacred text, became quite popular outside of the Jewish mystical world and infiltrated Christian thought to a grand degree. In the late fifteenth century, Pico della Mirandola, author of “The Oration on the Dignity of Man” and as well as 900 Theses, semi-infamously claimed that the Kabbalah proved the truth of Christianity but that the Jews were just not reading it right. Shortly before Pico, Marsilio Ficino translated Plato’s collected works, circulated and translated all of the major Neoplatonists from antiquity, and wrote numerous commentaries on both bodies of scholarship. Together, Pico and Ficino were largely responsible for the tenor of Neoplatonism in the European Renaissance, with Pico laying the groundwork for the wholesale Christian appropriation of Kabbalistic ideas for generations to come. The so-called Christian Kabbalah flourished alongside the new outpouring of

Platonic and Neoplatonic translations, setting the stage for all subsequent esoteric tidings in the Renaissance.²⁸

There has been a lively scholarly controversy over the direct influence of the Kabbalah on Emanuel Swedenborg. Eminent historians of the Kabbalah such as Moshe Idel have tentatively concluded that a direct influence is likely; eminent historians of esotericism such as Joscelyn Godwin have concluded the same. Wouter Hanegraaff has undertaken a detailed study of whether Swedenborg's uncanny parallels to the Kabbalah were direct or came via other Neoplatonic sources like Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah denudata*. Hanegraaff concludes that there is no proof of a direct influence but agrees that other paths of Neoplatonic thinking may have led Swedenborg to very similar conclusions about the state of the universe.²⁹

Whether achieved through direct transmission or through more circuitous pathways, Swedenborg shares two primary tenets with Kabbalism—a two-tiered system of reality in which the lower world was a poor reflection of the higher one and a concept of the Grand Man, a cosmic design that was then reflected in the making of humans. The similarities between the Grand Man and Adam Kadmon are extensive, but the idea that humanity is a microcosm of the universe is implicit in many Neoplatonic writings, and is clearly already in existence in the *Timaeus*. Although the precise origin of Swedenborg's articulation of the Grand Man remains obscure for the moment, the entire strain of Western hermetic thinking flows into it and through him, into America.

Davis and the Disease of the Soul

Andrew Jackson Davis began his career as a mesmeric trance healer and concluded it as a country doctor. Despite his sometimes tortured relationship to mainstream Spiritualists, Davis remains an excellent bellwether for the interests of the more sober core of Spiritualists, those who were seeking to reconcile their aspirations for this world and the next with the often gruesome condition of their experiences, particularly during the Civil War. Like other Spiritualists, Davis relates physical well-being to spiritual health and ties them together with the curable cause of ignorance. Davis, however, is both more systematic than other Spiritualists and much more prolific than most writers and was able to mount a fairly sustained view of disease. His *Harbinger of Health*, which went into nineteen editions between 1861 and 1909, succinctly explains:

Disease, in the very shortest phrase, is *discord*. . . . When the body is thus besieged with "discord," how can the soul feel harmonious?

It cannot; for mind must suffer with the organs by which it exists. This fact, however, is of the highest significance. It teaches that the soul—which is the Fountain of forces out of which the mind rises into entity from an elemental state—contains the conquering and health-giving powers. From these energies, and not from medicines, the sick may expect relief.³⁰

The Harbinger of Health is broken into sections on theory and practical application. In the former parts, Davis rails against the use of drugs, advocates animal magnetism and the use of clairvoyance to detect the cause of disease, and enumerates a binary nervous system corresponding to the will and the soul. More than half of the book is taken up with answering specific questions from correspondents. These queries ranged from the best cure for a rattlesnake bite to the effects that silk dresses have on the wearer. To this, the usually humorless Davis responded that they tended to cause “pride, approbation, and temporary shallow-mindedness.”³¹ Throughout the book and elsewhere, however, Davis repeatedly made a single point about ill health: its cause is ignorance. Disease as we know it is not an invasive outside force but rather an internal lack in the ill. By shifting the vector of disease from one’s bodily health to spiritual knowledge, Spiritualism affected a sea change in discussions of the body: philosophy, not medicine, had the power to cure.

In *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, Ann Taves has detailed the shift over time from a mechanistic model of mediumship predicated on the telegraph to a trance-based model that more closely resembled a psychological state. Spiritualist ideals of healing followed suit. She writes, “By the late 1850s, the ‘medium’ had largely subsumed the range of phenomena formerly associated with the clairvoyant. Healing and especially ‘trance-speaking’ mediums rapidly superseded rapping and writing mediums.... As the new image gained in prominence, it precipitated an underlying theoretical shift away from an electrical or fluid-based animal magnetism toward a state or trance-based psychology.”³² In terms of healing, Davis stood as a linchpin between these paradigms; although he began his career as a mesmeric healer, and many of the cures he prescribed were as tangible as decent nutrition and reasonable exercise, he also advocated a more philosophical Spiritualism than did many of his contemporaries. The health of the body could be regulated with common drugs and common sense, but the health of the soul was a prerequisite.³³

As Swedenborg had articulated before him, Davis posited a body made up of the soul animating the body, with disease being the product of discord between the two. His use of rhetoric echoes the strains of American hermeticism that Spiritualism was so indebted to, and his concept of the body was

reminiscent of both Plato and the Renaissance system of correspondences in which the body is a microcosm of the universe. Nineteenth-century American articulations of hermetic knowledge, including Spiritualism, were grounded in earlier European lore frequently conveyed through secret societies such as the Freemasons.

America, however, had the distinction of showmanship, and the quasi-religious claims of healing results within the movement were widely publicized. According to Versluis, Davis was emblematic of coalescing the European folk tradition with Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, and homeopathy.³⁴ The Renaissance inheritance of correspondences, in which the natural world—including the body—reflected the order of the cosmos writ large can be heard in Davis's work. In *The Harmonial Philosophy* he wrote,

The human organism is a world of motions, a solar system, or otherwise a universe in miniature. . . . Disease or discord is the inevitable consequence whenever anything disturbs the circulation of the spiritual principle from the brain. . . . We are thus led to conclude that the mind or spiritual force which inhabits and moves the combination of matter in man's physical economy is a substantial principle. The principles of action, development, refinement and reciprocity are the same everywhere and are unchangeable. Therefore, health consists in the unhindered operation of these laws, firstly, between the spirit and the body, secondly, between both these and universal nature.³⁵

Disease is not the product of an invasive pathogen but rather the product of an error, ignorance or a spiritual misjudgment that disturbs the harmonious relationship of the body to the soul. Rectifying this discord depends on advancing in spiritual knowledge, bringing the body back into alignment with the soul and therefore the cosmos. The body reflects the state of the soul, but the soul is the locus of change and concomitantly that change will result in health. By shifting the parameters of the discussion about health from focusing on the body to improving the soul, Spiritualism provided an alternate articulation of medicine and health.

Davis had begun his philosophic writing and trance-induced healing practices prior to the Fox sisters' events of 1848, and his allegiance to the movement had been beneficial to both parties for a long time. By the 1870s Davis had parted ways with the majority of Spiritualists who, in his opinion, had lost sight of the more pressing goals of universal love and brotherly harmony, contenting themselves instead with the drama of the séance and issuing increasing demands for materializations and other forms of showmanship.

Davis launched public attacks on well-respected Spiritualists who responded in kind, and although he maintained his own status as a medium he had by 1878 denounced Spiritualism as an institution, founding instead the First Harmonial Association of New York. The association in turn endowed a chair at the United States Medical College in New York City. In his fifties, Davis decided to become pedigreed.

Davis enrolled in the Medical College and produced a thesis titled "The Reality of Imaginary Disease" in which he argued that all disease was spiritual in origin with the exception of illness caused by accidents or mechanical issues like broken limbs. Culminating his decades of thinking about animal magnetism and the necessity of knowledge to cure the soul, his thesis declared that regular bodily functions "originated in, and depend upon corresponding processes going on in the mysterious universe of invisible motion, life, sensation, and intelligence."³⁶ Davis graduated with doctorates in both medicine and anthropology and spent the majority of the rest of his life practicing medicine.

Following his graduation, Davis promptly fled Manhattan for the quieter haven of Watertown, Massachusetts, where his psychically enhanced medical practice flourished. Partly in response to the growing animosity between himself and many Spiritualists and fueled by Davis's somewhat scandalous divorce and quick remarriage, Davis distanced himself from the mainstream Spiritualist movement for a couple of decades. His reputation would be resuscitated and the man himself embraced by Spiritualism yet again in the early twentieth century, but in the meantime Davis devoted himself to the practice of healing and to reinfusing contact with the spirit world with what he had always maintained was the more important aim—philosophical inquiry into the nature of the cosmos. Rather than a rupture with his past, this hiatus represented a refining of his lifelong interests in the bigger picture, humanity's rightful place in the universe. By focusing on the system of correspondences and the centrality of the living body, Davis turned directly toward his hermetic forebears and the echoes of esotericism in America.

The Grand Man in America

The body as naturally in harmonious accord with the soul is the beginning of Davis's understanding of the proper knowledge of health. The care of the body replicates nothing less than the cosmos itself: "The human organism is a world of motions. a solar system, or otherwise a universe in miniature."³⁷ He gets this notion from his immediate predecessor Swedenborg, who calls the body a "heaven in miniature," and Swedenborg in turn took this from Plato's

Timaeus and numerous later Neoplatonists. Health is tantamount to the symphonic motions of the solar system: "The internally healthy man, beheld with spiritual perceptions, looks like an illuminated world, a typical summary of the life, beauty, and harmony of the universe.... So accustomed should we become to moving, sleeping, and thinking right that it should be as hard for us to deviate from the regular path prescribed by Nature as for earth to depart from its orbit."³⁸ Alive with motion, the healthy body reflected the symmetry of the cosmos and its mirror in the soul.

This vision of the body as replicating the movement of the planets is clearly influenced by the Renaissance articulation of correspondences and, I will argue, specifically the Kabbalistic concept of the primordial man, Adam Kadmon. Much of Spiritualist writing about the body bears the stamp of Kabbalism, both implicitly and explicitly. In *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg outlines how the design of heaven in toto is in the image of the Grand or Divine Man, and how each subsequent division of heaven represents increasingly smaller but identical images of the human body. He explains that just as each body is composed of parts (organs, vessels, viscera, etc.) that function as a unified whole, so too does heaven comprise seemingly independent functions that actually work together with God ruling the universe as he would a single man. Every angel in heaven is in the image of the body, and God himself is in the form of man.³⁹

Swedenborg laments in numerous places that by his day, the knowledge of correspondences has already been lost but that it remains of primary importance in understanding the workings of heaven. A complicated correspondence exists with the Grand Man, more of a hall of mirrors than a simple reflection; heaven is divided into two kingdoms that correspond to the heart and the lungs. Innumerable smaller and dependent systems branch out from these two main organs. Moreover, precisely where a planet or an angel or a human is located in the spatial arrangement of the Grand Man will govern the gifts and talents of the beings there, such that those who reside in the head are the wisest in all things, those in the breast the most charitable, the arms the most powerful, and so forth.⁴⁰ Swedenborg's uncanny resemblance to Kabbalah here results in a profoundly corporeal claim wherein the body is not the prison of the soul; instead, returning scripture to its Jewish roots, humanity is made absolutely literally in the image of God. (See Figure 5.2.)

The resemblance of Swedenborg's system to Adam Kadmon and the specific powers attributed to the particular sephirot is remarkable.⁴¹ Attempting simultaneously to accept a fundamentally Cartesian view of the universe in which spirit is elevated over matter and to retain a system of correspondences, Swedenborg eventually accomplishes this only by declaring the natural world null without the spiritual one. Hanegraaff argues, "Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences emerges as an impoverished version of the esoteric original,

principles do not merely mirror each other; the former illumines the latter at the expense of an intrinsically enchanted natural world.

Davis intellectually inherits the basic template of the Grand Man as well as the importance of reading the world according to a system of correspondences. If Swedenborg affected a compromise between the Cartesian and esoteric paradigms available to him, Davis performed a similar, if less intellectually gifted, feat between the worlds of Swedenborg and Mesmer; he rejoined the spiritual and material worlds. In the "Morning Lectures" of 1865, Davis delivered a very rare Spiritualist critique of Swedenborg's thought, arguing against Swedenborg's application of the correspondence system, here to the Bible. Swedenborg had applied the theory of correspondences to writing itself, particularly scripture, claiming that words had interior and exterior meanings, to the extent that a fully interior reading of the Bible would result in a creation that was unrecognizable as dependent on the exterior text. This system, also probably an inheritance of Kabbalism, rendered every word a stand-in for another concept based on association: for example, a lamb actually signals a gentle disposition, and the Israelite temple sacrifice prefigures the bread and wine of the Christian communion.⁴³

Davis takes umbrage at this reading strategy and denies Swedenborg's proposition that there is any disjuncture between the interior and exterior truths of anything. After apologizing to the great man for saying so, Davis writes, "The reasoning is sophistical, and all such fanaticism is foreign to a healthy mind. For the rest, the internal and the external of all things are married together and correspond literally to each other, and that which is true inwardly is also true without. . . . In their proper understanding, word and deed harmonize universally."⁴⁴ In short, Davis rejects the hierarchical dualism and reinfuses the body and the natural world with the divine.

The Return of Love

Davis articulates a similar theory for disorders of the soul, but for him a discord of the soul is tantamount to a disease of the body: "The miserable millions of earth groan and weep—why? Not because they have faithfully labored in the vineyards of Progress, and failed to realize great crops therefor, but because they erringly have chosen the delusive slumbers of idleness and ignorance. . . . Say to the world. . . 'Salvation from all disease and discord. . . is possible only through personal obedience to every known requirement of the law of love and justice.'"⁴⁵ The disease of ignorance plagues society, and its cure is not pharmaceuticals but the philosophy of spiritual harmony.

The path of progress, however, is not a unidirectional telos but rather a return. The body, as the microcosm of the universe, has inherent within it the order of the divine. Restoration to health is a matter of realigning the soul with what was preexistent. Davis writes, "The Cause of all things must produce ultimates corresponding to its own nature. If the First Cause be perfect so must the end also. . . . If these things be so, then spirit, individualized through the instrumentality of Nature and Man, shall become like the Primitive Essence from which it derives, bearing the impress and containing the properties of its source."⁴⁶ Progress, then, leads to the past.

According to the *Timaeus*, the soul is divided into the immortal soul (carried around in the head) and various mortal souls, comprising one near the head to hear reason, another in the liver for the purposes of divination, and the last in the marrow to connect and animate the body. Davis also views the soul as multiple, but it is all divine and all related to states of perception—love, wisdom, and will. Love is the mediator between the spiritual and the material, ferrying the impressions of the tangible world to the soul and relating the ways of the spiritual realm to lived experience.⁴⁷ Although on occasion unruly, love connects the interior to the exterior; it serves "to establish an inseparable connection between the material and the spiritual."⁴⁸ Wisdom serves to temper the errant ways of love, and will brings the soul—and the body—back into proper reflection of the cosmos.

The unity of spirit and the instrumentality of love in service of achieving spiritual order resonates with the thinking of the Renaissance mages Davis was so enamored with. In *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, Ioan Couliano writes of the magus tradition that erotic love was the dominant metaphor for the magician's relation to the world. Brimming with Neoplatonism, this school of Eros posited an interlocutor between the soul and the body, sometimes called the "pneuma," and this go-between spoke the language of love. Love acts as the translator: "The pneuma is a mirror with two faces, one of which reflects perceptions coming from the external senses and the other the phantasmagoria of the soul. If the surface turned toward the soul is not sufficiently clean, the individual is reduced to a lower, almost bestial state. [I]t is a matter of polishing the mirror, removing its impurities—acquired, not congenital—restoring to the clouded spirit its original transparency."⁴⁹ Magic as an erotic engagement with the world sought to manipulate the astral forces and their representatives on earth; humanity, at the center of creation both metaphysically and spatially, would be the recipient of cosmic influences.

Janus-faced and indispensable, love traverses the worlds of the visible and invisible. The communications of the heart, however, are in service of a higher order, and love itself functions as the instrument by which a soul may ascend

to knowledge of God. For both the Renaissance magus and the Spiritualist healer, God's mind is manifest in nature, and knowledge of divine order is no farther than the perfection of the stars in their orbits. The cosmos writ large, however, follows divine will and never deviates; individuals, subject to free will and lax habits, may stray, and in so doing discover discord and disease.

The remedy for the troubled soul is ascension on the ladder of truth with love as the guide. The journey is a return to a prior state of perfection rather than a telos of time, and the constitution of the self is what is at stake. Of the Renaissance, Couliano writes, "Since Eros is the tool that helps to traverse the intelligential stages separating God from his creatures, it would be unthinkable to treat the subject of love without first dealing with ontology. Moreover, because humans occupy the most privileged position of all creatures, they are the only ones to contain within themselves all levels of the cosmos, from God to matter. That is why they are also the only beings capable of climbing to the top of the ladder of creaturehood into invisible worlds.... The thinking of the first Neoplatonist [Plotinus] comprises an *apostrophe*, or estrangement from the essence of being, which humans alone can make good by the opposite process of *epistrophe*, or return to being."⁵⁰ According to this schema, right relation with the divine consists not in temporal improvement but rather regression toward the perfect past.

In *The Harmonial Philosophy*, Davis echoes his hermetic forebears on nearly every count. Humanity occupies center stage between the world of the beasts and the ethereal spheres of the dead. Free will governs the choice to abase oneself in the material or to strive for the harmony of the spheres. Moreover, bodies encapsulate the infinite expanse of the universe, with the corporeal connecting the great chain of being.⁵¹ The Renaissance mirror is again replete, with love as the link between worlds. Davis writes, "The universe is the body of love and its perfect form.... Hence it is highly necessary that mind should comprehend the great truth that nothing exists in the outer world except as produced and developed by the interior essence, of which the exterior is the perfect representative."⁵²

Both the Renaissance mage and the American Renaissance Spiritualist got their information directly from Plato, of course, each interpretation molded to its historical moment and accounting for prior readings. Whereas Plato sometimes appears to sever the soul from the body, turning the corpus into a temporary vehicle for and constant distraction to the soul, the Renaissance magicians were too heavily influenced by Kabbalism to dispense with the body.⁵³ For the Jewish mystics and their Christian inheritors, man was created in the image of God, fusing the cosmos and the corpus. By overlaying monotheism onto ancient polytheistic constructs, the Renaissance invented a Platonic return to

the image of a biblical God. This particular brand of Neoplatonism, refracted through Swedenborg's writings, was articulated in America in a grand historical irony in Spiritualism. The religious movement that dwelled on the by-ways of the soul in death could now prescribe the same remedies for the ailments of the body.

It is the task of medical or pseudo-medical discourse to detail routes from illness to health, and Davis's work was no exception to this. The illness of ignorance could be cured through ascending the ladder of knowledge, and this ladder was purely Platonic in origin and expression. Davis describes the progress of love as ascending from the basest form, self-love, through conjugal, parental, fraternal, filial, and finally universal love.⁵⁴ While systematized through spheres corresponding to the tiers of heavens, this progression from the finite to the increasingly abstract echoes and enlarges the originary formulation of the Platonic ladder. (See figures 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5.)

In the *Symposium*, Plato delineates the process of knowledge through the metaphor of Eros. The movement from the concrete to the philosophical marks the soul's progress toward truth. Plato writes, "In the activities of Love, this is

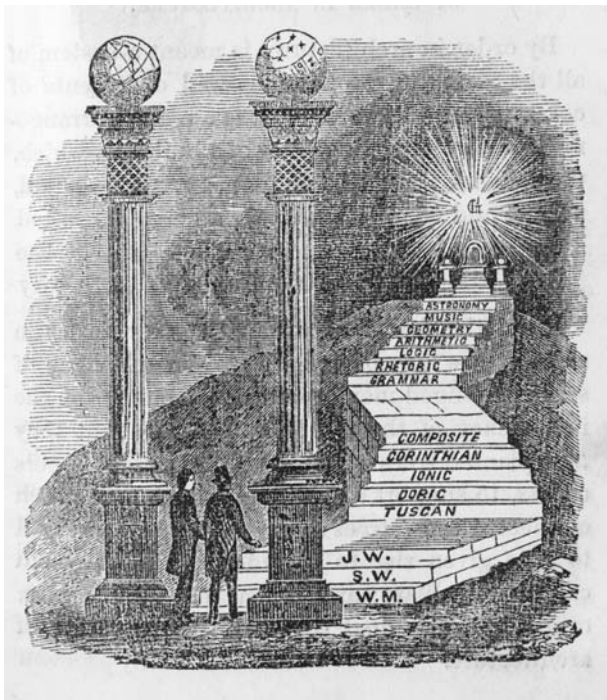


FIGURE 5.3 Masonic ladder of the liberal arts from the *Freemason's Monitor*, 1864.

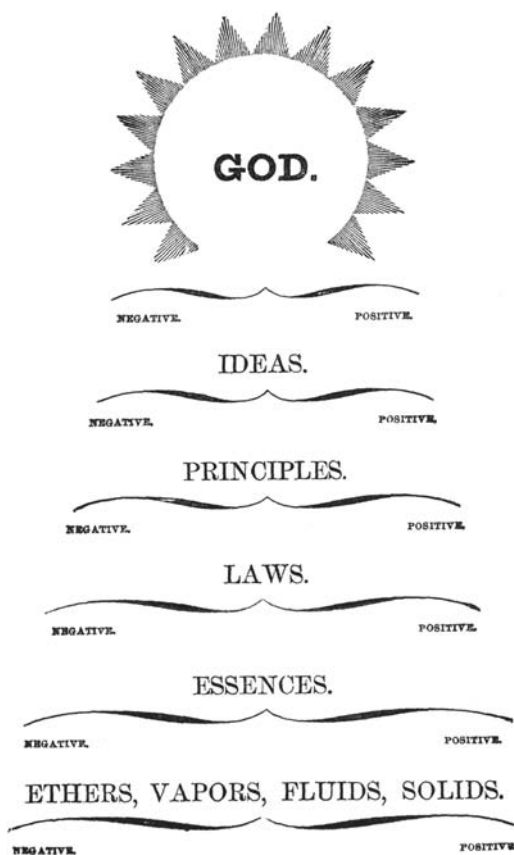


FIGURE 5.4 Andrew Jackson Davis, ladder of ascent, *A Stellar Key to the Summerland*, 1867.

what it is to proceed correctly: Beginning from beautiful things to move ever onwards for the sake of that beauty, as though using ascending steps, from one body to two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful practical endeavors, from practical endeavors to beautiful examples of understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty is.”⁵⁵ Love is the instrument of knowledge in search of the truth.

However, knowledge for Plato is never a fresh inscription on a blank slate but rather a recollection of that which came before. Platonic perfection, then, is a going backward to a prior state rather than forward to a future *parousia*. Just as Davis’s prescriptions for bodies are a return to their prior state of properly reflecting the divine order, so too is his proscription for philosophy—the truth

		POSITIVE.	NEGATIVE.
EXPLANATION.			
The Sphere of MIND.	The fountain Source of all Laws, Forces, Principles, Ideas, is universally called <i>God</i> .	GOD.	SPIRIT.
	The universality of motion, heat, light, life, sensation, order, beauty, intelligence, love, will, wisdom, reveal <i>Ideas</i> .	IDEAS.	REASON.
	The uniformity and universality of these laws of cause and effect unfold the higher revelations of mind, called <i>Principles</i> .	PRINCIPLES.	POWER.
	The first manifestation of Mind is Motion; the effect of Force; and the modes of the actions of this Motion are termed <i>Laws</i> .	LAWS.	FORCE.
The essence of magnetism is the fine conducting fluid with matter.	Ether-atoms are atoms in the highest possible degree of motion, constituting an infinitely rare medium, chemical, dynamic, elastic, and all-pervading, called <i>Essences</i> .	ESSENCES.	MAGNETISM.
	The vapor-atoms ascend one degree higher in the scale and expand throughout all space with an increase of motion, and are termed <i>Ethers</i> .	ETHERS.	ELECTRICITY
	The fluid-atoms receive an increase motion with an increase of temperature, cohesion is overcome, and they expand into the condition known as <i>Vapors</i> .	VAPORS.	ATMOSPHERE
	The solidity and cohesion of the same atoms disappear when they are visited by a given quantity of motion; heat is developed, and those become <i>Fluids</i> .	FLUIDS.	WATER.
	Atoms, when slowest in motion and coldest in temperature, drop into a compact body, for which the general term is <i>Solids</i> .	SOLIDS.	EARTH.
The Sphere of MATTER.			

FIGURE 5.5 Andrew Jackson Davis, the ladder of progress and its composition.

of bodies, love, and God lies in the past. Spiritualism's embrace of Renaissance ideals and Platonic progress encoded the body with cosmological importance. As the reflection of the universe, the body would not be ill per se, the mind could only be mistaken. Disorders of the soul replaced the diseases of the material, and instead of positing an antagonistic relationship between body and soul, Spiritualism brought out the hermetic undertones of its predecessors and argued for a metaphor of illumination in which the soul is the lamp of the living body.

Kabbalah on the Edge

A second strain of Kabbalism can be found at the fringes of the Spiritualist movement among its more occult-minded kin. Representatives of this group

were generally more elite, secretive, and directly in touch with European hermeticists than were the significantly more mainstream Spiritualists; their interest in the primordial man and the system of correspondences was likewise more arcane and serious than prescribing folk remedies for illnesses. Too much taxonomical distinction between the occultists would quickly turn artificial, but the authors whom I have found thus far fall basically into those interested predominantly in alchemy and those interested predominantly in a single esoteric truth from which all religions and admirable philosophic views spring. World religions and acceptable philosophies contain kernels of the original truth but that truth has become distorted, camouflaged, or even purposefully obscured over time.

The latter form comes to its grandest articulation in Theosophy, a religious movement born in New York in 1875 and ushered into prominence by the exceedingly colorful and enigmatic figure of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. A self-christened "countess," Blavatsky began her career as a Spiritualist medium and esoteric omnivore. She traveled on four continents and in circles of Freemasons, Sufis, mesmerists, and magicians. Blavatsky's writing is generally divided into two periods, the so-called "Egyptian" period and the Buddhist one. The former period overlaps with her embrace of Spiritualism and many prominent Spiritualists both in New York and abroad. Despite her later disavowal of the movement, Blavatsky never denied Spiritualist phenomena—she only criticized the Spiritualists themselves for not delving deeply enough into the occult implications of their own claims. Her magnum opus in this period, *Isis Unveiled*, was published in 1877, just one year after *Art Magic* and shared with that work several theological concerns to uncover the unified truth of the past. Many such works prefigure Blavatsky, and *Isis* could be charitably described as borrowing heavily from several of its immediate influences.

The text is perhaps America's greatest conspiracy theory and is characterized by Blavatsky's paranoid tone. *Isis* is riddled with references to every variety of Neoplatonism imaginable and draws heavily on classical, Renaissance, and hermetic tracts. No fan of Christianity, Blavatsky throws the gauntlet in the direction of the Church as the primary force that expressly wishes to obscure the truth from the masses. While not interested in the care of the body as a pseudo-medical discourse, Blavatsky conscripts Plato, Kabbalah, and every conceivable form of esoteric thinking to demonstrate that, contra-Christianity, the material world is infused with divine properties. She writes:

"All things," says the *Kabala*, "are derived from one great Principle, and this principle is the *unknown* and *invisible* God. From Him a substantial power immediately proceeds, which is the image of God,

and the source of all subsequent emanations. This second principle sends forth, by the *energy* (or *will* or *force*) of emanation, other natures, which are more or less perfect, according to their degrees of distance, in the scale of emanation, from the First Source of existence, and which constitute different worlds, or orders of being, all united to the eternal power from which they proceed. *Matter is nothing more than the most remote effect of the emanative energy of the Deity.*"⁵⁶

Again, while the body is not the primary or even secondary objective in this fairly accurate description of the Kabbalah, the enspirited nature of matter rather than its subjugation at the hands of the Christians is. The Renaissance cosmos where the divine is manifest in the world reasserts itself in America.

Because all the true systems of meaning in the world are pointing to a single hidden truth, chronology becomes arbitrary and merely linguistic. Plato and the Kabbalah obliquely point to the same truth, and both are preceded by other messengers of the same: "It is undeniable that the theologies of all the great nations dovetail together and show that each is a part of 'one stupendous whole.' Like the rest of the initiates we see Plato taking great pains to conceal the true meaning of his allegories. Every time the subject touches the greater secrets of the Oriental Kabala, secret of the true cosmogony of the universe and of the ideal, preexisting world, Plato shrouds his philosophy in the profoundest darkness."⁵⁷ She proceeds to declare that the *Timaeus* in particular can be understood only by an initiate. We have moved from the happily democratic goings-on of Spiritualist heaven to the shadowy world of early Theosophy, where the goal was not universal progress with the aid of the past but explicit uncovering of the past that requires a special knowledge and mastery available only to the few.

The tendency to universalize the Kabbalah and its description of the universe is found again in *Art Magic*, but that work remains explicitly friendly to the endeavors of the Spiritualists. The author of *Art Magic* goes to great lengths to trace the ancestry of Judaism only to deny its claim of authorship as something the Jews generally borrowed or stole from their more ancient neighbors: the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Hindus. The Kabbalah, however, is one aspect of the unified truth that has been variously dispensed over the ages, and the author equates the divine emanations that result in the creation of Adam Kadmon with similar sacrifices of the primordial man in Brahma, Osiris, and Mithra, and, less clearly, the Greek *logos* (which does not appear to refer to Jesus and his primordial sacrifice). The hierarchies of celestial emanations from there include angels, planetary spirits, demons, elementaries (a kind of residual spirit), humans, heavenly spheres, and more. As with Theosophy,

the Renaissance cosmos prevails with emanations from the godhead proceeding throughout the universe, as Ezekiel's wheel reenacts the ascent of the macrocosm and the descent of the microcosm.⁵⁸ This core of knowledge, we learn in the final chapter, is the sole truth of the universe that magic and Spiritualism point to—that the human and the divine are interdependent, interpenetrating, one.⁵⁹

Ghost Land, an occult novel written by the same mysterious Louis as *Art Magic* and also published by Emma Hardinge Britten, contains a surprisingly accurate description of emanations from the godhead paired with the fervent hope that “the time will come when the Cabala of existence shall be read as an open page.”⁶⁰ The description of the emanations is written about as a vision given by a “revealing angel,” with the author implicitly arguing against a materialist worldview—the cosmos as a whole is alive, and each constituent part is a living creature. Louis writes, “Could our own burning sun and its shining family of planetary orbs be all creatures of parts and passions, organs and susceptibilities, within a framework of rocky ribs and mountain bones and sinews; veins and arteries coursed by the fluid-life of oceans and rivers; heaving lungs aerated by the breath of winds and atmospheres; electric life evolved from the galvanic action of metallic lodes threading their way like a gigantic nervous system through every globe.”⁶¹ In direct resonance with the *Timaieus*, Kabbalistic visions of Adam Kadmon, and the Swedenborgian Grand Man, the universe itself is a human body, alive and in motion.

In addition to the searchers for the single lost truth, Kabbalah and the attendant focus on the body is present in nineteenth-century American writings that wish to preserve or resurrect the practices of alchemy. While contemporary historians of science tend away from mystical interpretations of alchemy and toward the practical and proto-scientific view of the practice, for many people alchemy had a religious as well as a material component. Flourishing in Europe from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, alchemy was the precursor to modern chemistry, and the alchemists produced a great deal of knowledge about the properties of matter.⁶² Some were interested in the transformative potential of matter and attempted to turn base material into gold: these people were perceived by governments as dangerous not for their subversive religious views but rather for their ability to torpedo an economy should they ever succeed.

This perception of danger led to a shroud of secrecy surrounding alchemy, with alchemists encrypting their labors in bizarre images that lend themselves easily to religious speculation.⁶³ Other alchemists appear to have been self-consciously interested in the transformative process itself and how this related to their spiritual state.⁶⁴ Although some current scholars believe that this has

been wildly overstated in academic literature, fueled particularly by the work of C. G. Jung and Mircea Eliade, the very richness of the imagery and the air of subversion and secrecy make alchemy beguiling for many religious-minded seekers, perhaps especially those on the esoteric edge. (See Figure 5.6.)

Among the alchemical treatises, the most heartrending story is that of Mary Ann South Atwood, whose magnum opus on the topic, *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, was burned in nearly its entirety of the print run by the author and her father at the latter's behest. A couple of copies were salvaged and given to friends; Joscelyn Godwin offhandedly mentions at least one that traveled to America among the Spiritualists.⁶⁵ The work is an erudite amalgamation of Kabbalists, ancient Greek philosophers, myriad Neoplatonists, and even Kant, Fichte, and Schelling (whose mind she assesses as superior to the minds of the other two.) Given the general conflation of



FIGURE 5.6 Hermaphrodite imagery in alchemy. From Michael Maier's *Symbola Aureae Mensae*, 1617. Image courtesy of the British Library.

all of these systems into a single hermetic project, it is difficult to pull out exactly where Kabbalism ends and another topic begins, but she performs a rather subtle reading of Kabbalistic creation as denying a subject/object division between the divine and the human.⁶⁶

This lack of distinction between the realms of the human and divine leads to the inability to separate mind from matter. After a discussion of which ancient Greeks take what element as a first principle, she concludes, "But whilst these celebrate Mind as precedential, and those desire to indicate the subsistence of Matter, in either case it is the same; for the mind is not without the matter (the universal element we mean), nor that matter without the mind; but all things, however various in manifestation, are consubstantial in their Cause."⁶⁷ Matter, however, while it may be suffused with mind, remains mutable and corruptible, and it is the goal of the adept to mold and transform the seemingly distinct variations of matter back into their primary unity as pure matter, the essential and enspirited wholeness that is the undifferentiated truth of the universe.⁶⁸

Alexander Wilder stands as another exemplar of one who was primarily concerned with the rejuvenation of the lost secrets of alchemy; however, like Mary Ann South, his interests in a primary and single case for the universe translate easily into a quest for a lost but unified religion, and indeed, a great deal of Wilder's work was liberally borrowed in the writing of *Isis Unveiled*. In the curious pamphlet "New Platonism and Alchemy," Wilder describes a single system of truth that has been disseminated but distorted by a usual list of suspects that includes the Egyptians, Pythagoras, the Gnostics, the Essenes, Confucius, Socrates, and Jesus. Although Kabbalism is by no means his central concern, he is well in line with everyone else I have discussed here in attributing to the Jews the most effective of all the systems for keeping secrets among the initiated—Kabbalistic wordplay and numerology.

For Wilder, the ultimate end of alchemy is the creation of the *pharmakon*, the draught of truth so powerful it cannot be consumed. The elixir is not the conquering of matter but its perfection. He writes, "The elixir was supposed... to have the power generally of bringing to its highest perfection any substance to which it was applied; indeed, the philosopher's stone was itself the universal medicine—the all-*geist* or all-pervading spirit."⁶⁹ However, only the true adept can swallow such a substance, and Wilder opines the number of would-be philosophers who must have perished under its effects because they were not yet truly initiated enough to know how to receive it without destruction. The elixir of life is therefore suicide or immortality, and the perfection of knowledge must precede the perfection of matter or else both will be consigned to death.

Both Theosophy and philosophical alchemy in America wove through the Spiritualist movement and influenced, traded, and reclaimed adherents among themselves. Those who were more self-consciously interested in the occult frequently began as Spiritualists but left the ranks to pursue more active forms of magic or initiation. Some, including Emma Hardinge Britten and the alleged Louis, maintained their alliances with both Spiritualism and esotericism. Both mainstream Spiritualists and more occult-leaning Spiritualists shared a view of the body as a microcosm of the universe, with the universe demonstrating the pattern of balance and perfection of the divine mind. Beginning in Plato's *Timaeus* and running through Neoplatonic texts from Plotinus to the Kabbalah, the great chain of being descended from the godhead to every creature in the universe, describing a cosmos that was enchanted and a humanity that was inextricably a part of the grand plan.

The Spiritualists were the inheritors of the Renaissance worldview, indebted to hermeticism in general and Kabbalism in particular, that viewed the natural world as utterly shot through with the divine. With the universe as the infinite replication of the divine man, the human body itself took on a central importance as a representative of the image of the cosmos and the vessel for the influx of the universal material or fluid. In rejecting Christian doctrine in the form of both predestination and the exclusivity of salvation, Spiritualists in effect rejected the superiority of the spiritual over the material. The divine reigned again in the natural world and could be explicated through the doctrine of correspondences; how difficult and abstruse the reading of the book of nature was or should be remained a matter of some contention, but in all iterations, the body and the cosmos stood in ultimate reflection of each other.

Many scholars have noted that Spiritualism was at the forefront of democratizing American Christianity; believers inveighed against Calvinist election, fought for the equality of the sexes and for something approximating equality of the races, dispensed with hell, and threw heaven open to all religions. Something that has been less remarked upon in the literature, however, is that Spiritualism refused to accept a model whereby the body was the temporary prison of the soul, and argued instead for a form of enspirited matter in which the soul cast the light in the lamp of the body. Thanks to the hermetic undercurrent in American society, there were many who gave no credence to or were completely unaware of the Cartesian dualism in which the spirit is privileged at the expense of the body. By creating a cartography of the corpus and the cosmos, Spiritualism reunited body and soul as they progressed together toward the past.

This page intentionally left blank

6

Minds

In 1858, an unmarried seamstress recorded only as “C.” was admitted to an insane asylum. C. had increasingly been controlled by spirits that spoke through her. Many were violent, and some were even bent on inducing her to suicide. C. arrived at the asylum under her own volition, encouraged by her mother. After months of treatment that included horizontal restraints at night, a prototypical form of psychotherapy with a clearly sympathetic doctor, and a diet consisting largely of brandy, cod-liver oil, and beef consommé, C. was well enough to be sent back home. There is no question that C. regarded herself as suffering and that she welcomed the help of the “mad doctor” who treated her. There remains the question, however, of whether she was insane. C. maintained throughout her treatment that she was not a madwoman but rather an unskilled medium. She could not control the voices that spoke through her and was unable to reliably distinguish evil spirits from good ones. Her doctor, while never capitulating to the theological claims of Spiritualism, agreed: this was a battle not about proving phenomena but of naming them.

The Spiritualist movement that wanted more than anything the legitimation conveyed by empiricism had found its most formidable foe in its fondest desire: science. The movement that fostered self-induced trance states, multiple voices speaking through the instrument of a single body, auditory and visual manifestations from an unseen world, and women in particular uttering social and religious blasphemies, soon discovered that its

precious communications with heaven looked to some like sheer madness. Budding mediums and other religious rebels were institutionalized, new diagnoses sprang up to describe the spiritually insane, and American asylums filled to overflowing. As with the case of C., it was not the existence of alternative states of consciousness that was being debated but rather all other claims about them. What these states referred to, how they should be valued, whether they indicated proof of metaphysical claims or evidence of derangement, were all overtly contested during this period. In this final chapter I will analyze the heated and utterly self-conscious argument between Spiritualism and psychology. As I shall try to show, at stake in this debate was nothing less than what constituted a self and who got to determine that.

Where women utter subversions, trouble is usually afoot. In the mid-nineteenth century, social censure could be and often was delivered in the form of sanitized condemnation within a mental asylum. An article in *Harper's Weekly* from 1857 reports that Spiritualism was causing an epidemic of insanity, noting that several hundred Spiritualists had already been institutionalized. *Harper's* went further to call for the indictment of prominent Spiritualists, charging, "They are making lunatics every week. It is high time they were a subject of penal inquiry."¹ Although it is tempting to dismiss this as a bit of high-toned paranoia on the part of *Harper's*, the fact is that Spiritualism does share several characteristics with schizophrenia, the nineteenth century's precursor to multiple personality syndrome,² as well as with the more generic brand of hysteria and its subsets in the nineteenth century ranging from monomania to neurasthenia. I will argue that Spiritualists went to great lengths to distinguish themselves from the patently mad, launching a full-fledged effort to differentiate between women who have numerous personalities talk through them and women who are constituted by numerous unwelcome personalities.

Contemporary scholarship on the history of psychology is currently embroiled in its own battle of naming. On one side is the camp we may designate as the social constructivists, headed up by the late Michel Foucault and formidably assisted by current scholars Elaine Showalter and Sander Gilman. The social constructivists tend to read the history of madness as the designating, outlawing, pathologizing, and managing of deviance. This does not necessarily entail the masterminding of society by evil geniuses, although insanity and enfeeblement have certainly been conscripted into service for such purposes. Rather, in Foucault's masterwork on the topic, *Madness and Civilization*, he argues that burgeoning capitalism redefined the lazy and the poor as deviant and therefore mentally ill. The response, massive-scale institutionalization in workhouses and asylums in England and France, was in his view not

a benevolent gesture aimed at curing people but rather a socially acceptable reason to round up paupers and set them to menial labor for little or no financial reward. The social constructivists argue that it is the changing tides of morality and fashion, and not a medically real illness with roots in biology, that define madness. Contrary to some of the claims made by their critics, these scholars have never denied that there are biologically determined mental diseases or that people do not suffer when afflicted by a strictly social illness. They are pointing out that the field of psychology, perhaps more than any other discourse of health, is susceptible to misuse by judging, labeling, and incarcerating the merely different as inexorably diseased.

On the other side of this debate stand Edward Shorter and his followers who defend the objective reality of most mental illness and the authentic therapeutic intent behind psychology in general and the asylum system in particular. Shorter's visceral dislike of Foucault comes through repeatedly in his 1997 landmark work, *A History of Psychiatry*. For his part, Shorter does not claim that the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness is entirely free of a social component. He makes a compelling case that the social versus the biological has been tearing at the very center of psychiatry from its inception and he is well aware that he and the social constructivists are re-creating on a scholarly level what has been festering on the therapeutic level since the beginning. He writes, "One vision stresses the neurosciences, with their interest in brain chemistry, brain anatomy, and medication, seeing the origin of psychic distress in the biology of the cerebral cortex. The other vision stresses the psychosocial side of patients' lives, attributing their symptoms to social problems or past personal stresses to which people may adjust imperfectly."³ This basic divide is replicated in the literature on the history of psychiatry.

What Shorter does maintain is the biological basis of mental illness in nearly all diagnosed cases. But the numbers involved should give one pause: in the United States alone, the number of patients in asylums grew almost sixfold in the fifty years between 1820 and 1870. By Shorter's own estimation, the rapid increase in diagnosed lunatics made any hope of curing them simply impossible by 1880, and the numbers continued to rise for the next few decades.⁴ This staggering increase in lunacy was matched by similar explosions in Germany, France, and England, leaving the question of what could possibly account for it begging. According to Shorter, the wild upsurge among the institutionalized is attributable to a factual increase in mental illness.

Shorter proposes two primary reasons for the population explosion in asylums: the first he calls the "redistribution of illness." In brief, he means that changing patterns of familial relations and social expectations of what could be tolerated at home account for some of the numbers. And this is undoubtedly

true: as the century wore on, and the middle class emerged as sufficiently moneyed and socially invested in cure rather than simple containment, many people who would previously have been quietly taken care of at home were instead institutionalized. The second leg of Shorter's argument is that there was an actual increase in mental illness during this period. Specifically he cites neurosyphilis, alcoholic psychosis, and possibly schizophrenia, although he admits that this last one is a more tentative claim and that the data could yet overturn it. Neurosyphilis, the mental and physical breakdown during the final stages of syphilis, has been all but eradicated in modern times. Shorter argues that the current invisibility of syphilis-related disease is a prime reason that the social constructivists failed to notice a real increase of mental illness in the nineteenth century. His claims of an increase in alcoholic psychosis are also credible, as westward expansion frequently meant that corn, wheat, and other grain-based hard alcohols replaced the ubiquitous beer and wine of colonial days. His claim that consumption of alcohol vastly increased in the nineteenth century is dubious, however; social historians of the period have ably documented that the besotted country increasingly sobered up during the years preceding the Civil War.⁵

His claim of an increase in the occurrence of schizophrenia is unlikely; medical science has shown a strong probability that schizophrenia has a genetic basis and is therefore not prone to such an increase in diverse and mobile populations like America's. Shorter calls for a reassessment of historical case files from the period by contemporary psychiatrists in an effort to determine once and for all whether the bursting seams of the asylums were best accounted for by a concomitant increase in insanity or by other forces in society. Some of the work done in that direction pertains directly to our topic of institutionalizing Spiritualists for religious mania. Before we get to that, however, we need to take a brief excursion into the meaning of the mind in America.

Insane in America

The history of madness in America, like that of medicine or even marriage, is one of a private affair becoming increasingly professionalized and made increasingly public over time. Insanity, however, bears a special relationship to the history of religions, as altered realities and unusual zones of consciousness have long been prime real estate for religion to stake its claims. Many have noted the nearly invisible line between prophets and madmen, and religion repeatedly calls into service what some call mad: hallucinations, heteroglossia, multiple selves, and the belief in the ultimate efficacy of words, gods, or one's

own actions are all routinely supported and cultivated by religious pursuits. The approach to the ineffable and the designation of insanity are perennially locked in a hermeneutic competition that Spiritualism was about to uncomfortably discover.

Plato himself extols the virtues of madness in a number of dialogues, comparing it to the overwhelming sensation of love and the creative swoon brought on by the Muses. In the *Phaedrus*, madness is a gift from the gods: it is nothing short of the ability to recognize a higher order to truth than other mortals, making the true philosopher the maddest of them all. In his extended metaphor about recollection, in which a soul grows wings when it recalls the perfection it had known, Plato discusses four kinds of divine madness. The ability to prophesy, the relieving of grief by taking over the mind, and possession by the Muses constitute the first three divinely given uses of madness. The fourth is love.

Love for Plato is always in service of higher knowledge. Erotic love drives one to recollect the memory of the Forms, as the beauty radiated by the beloved reminds the soul of Beauty itself. Recollection seems like madness to those who retain their mundane perspective: "The fourth kind of madness [is] that which someone shows when he sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up, but is unable to do so; he gazes aloft, like a bird, paying no attention to what is down below—and that is what brings on him the charge that he has gone mad."⁶ Madness is a shift of vision, a glimpse of the divine: the kinship between altered states and divinity would continue in America, with many agreeing that it was a gift from the gods.

In *The Mad among Us*, Gerald Grob makes the delightful decision to begin a discussion of American insanity with the unusual choice of Cotton Mather. The Massachusetts Puritan minister who is perhaps best known for his participation in adjudicating the Salem witch trials, Mather epitomizes a pivotal moment in the history of mental illness in America—he totters between explaining mental states as epiphenomena of God's will and as organically based diseases inflicting individuals with no metaphysical reference to retribution or holiness. Mather's then-unpublished treatise of 1724, *The Angel of Bethesda*, marks this shift by simultaneously advocating the inherently divine origin of insanity and its character as created by or at least contained in the individual: "These *Melancholicks*, do sufficiently *Afflict themselves*, and are Enough their own *Tormentors*. As if this *present Evil World*, would not *Really* afford Sad Things Enough, they create a *World of Imaginary Ones*, and by *Mediating Terror*, they make themselves as Miserable, as they could from the most *Real Miseries*."⁷ Grob argues that this shift in perception concomitantly

moved insanity out of an ontological category and into the realm of the operable: both in its inception and in its cure, madness could be manipulated by human intervention.

Insanity, then, stood alongside other social ills that could be addressed or even eradicated by benevolent families, Christian charity, and public policy. Impoverishment was insanity's handmaiden from the beginning. Almshouses had begun as early as the seventeenth century, providing some sort of public support for the poor in colonial America. Workhouses stood alongside charity and more informal familial and local infrastructure to absorb the socially and economically marginalized; there is evidence that parishes largely helped women and children in financial need and that aid to the poor was frequently a stopgap measure to address an emergency rather than a long-term commitment.⁸ In the early eighteenth century, institutions devoted specifically to housing the insane began to be opened. The complicated relationship between controlling the population out of fear of insanity, the criminal element, or simply the need for order was negotiated at the interstices of jails, hospitals, charities, and private homes. No single ideology prevailed in the years before the Revolution, and the common goal of reform, whether physical, mental, or moral, would mark the optimism of the emerging Republic and the antebellum period as a whole.

The invention of the asylum as a site of curing, however, would require a concatenation of events that had as much to do with European developments as with American demographic factors. Most histories of psychology begin their story with the French doctor Philippe Pinel, the man credited with unchaining the madmen at Bicêtre, the Parisian asylum for men, and later abolishing such restraints at Salpêtrière, the women's asylum. Filled with Revolutionary fervor and Enlightenment ideals, Pinel is frequently considered the starting point in the reform movement for the insane. Shorter argues that although the image of Pinel freeing the madmen remains his romantic legacy to many, his real contribution to the advancement of psychiatry was the realization that the asylum itself could be therapeutic: removing the insane from their living conditions could be used not just to contain them but to provide the structure of their cure.⁹ The reigning paradigm of cure, rather than confinement, would permanently mark the asylum ethos.

Just as famously, England boasted William Tuke, a Quaker who founded the York Retreat in 1792. Unlike Pinel, Tuke conscripted the language of religion to promote the cause of recovery. Basic ethics and evidence of industry were considered necessary for curing the insane. This classification began inadvertently with Pinel's theory of *traitement moral*, which in French is divorced from any hint of ethical or religious overtones and refers instead solely to treating

the mind or spirit. The phrase, however, garnered new meaning when transposed into English and became perhaps even more descriptive of the regimen than Pinel's had been. Moral management became a hallmark of healing the insane. In Tuke and his grandson Samuel's hands, this meant instilling and enforcing the bourgeois values of self-control and economic productivity in the asylum.

Elaine Showalter, one of the foremost social constructivists in the current fray, has argued that this method of cure could bleed easily into enforcing the status quo and silencing social revolutionaries such as women seeking suffrage. The social constructivists, including Foucault, question whether the removal of physical restraints was as worthy of unadorned praise as it has been given or whether shackles were merely exchanged for a more insidious form of control. Showalter writes, "In a sense, every vaunted innovation of moral management could be seen as a form of duplicitous constraint. The substitution of surveillance for physical restraint may well have imposed another and perhaps more absolute kind of restraint on the insane which implicated their whole being. . . . Furthermore, the 'therapeutic labor' could be seen as exploitation, a way of making money out of the inmates."¹⁰ Showalter is not casting aspersions on the intent of most of the mad doctors of the epoch but rather is questioning the boundaries in which they could envision psychological health. Moral management had shifted to instilling a middle-class sensibility and was subject to the vagaries of such standards.

The Enlightenment goal of curing rather than simply containing madness made its way to America with the English-language publication of Pinel's *A Treatise on Insanity* in 1806. Similarly, detailed accounts of treatment at the York Retreat became available in America in 1813, and America's own Benjamin Rush's work on the topic was published the year before.¹¹ According to Grob, the ease of intercontinental communication meant that Americans were both apprised of innovations speedily and could travel to be educated in these new locales. The therapeutic revolution, then, was about to take place: "The work of Pinel, Tuke, and others led inescapably to a radical conclusion; insanity was not necessarily a chronic illness, that with the appropriate treatment recovery was probable, and that investment in mental hospitals would yield a high proportion of cures."¹² Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York all had hospitals or wings of hospitals devoted to lunacy before 1810, but prior to the publication of wide-scale calls for reform they primarily used traditional methods of drugging and emetics.

According to Shorter, the actual methods of curing madness in America were nearly entirely indebted to the European counterparts of the alienists (doctors of mental alienation) until well after the Civil War. However, demographic

changes contributed to Americans' embrace of this new role for the mad and their doctors: an increasing population that was also increasingly mobile and urban coincided with rapid immigration in the Northeast. The parameters of what constituted acceptable behavior shifted with westward expansion; so too did the explosion of new religious beliefs known as the Second Great Awakening. The awakening, so-called for the fervor of religious sentiment that accompanied the great era of tent revivals and itinerant preachers, was also host to creating and sustaining the majority of American religions ranging from the Oneida Community to Mormonism. Although religious creativity in a culture generally speaks to a perceived concern that traditional religions are unable to accommodate changes in the world, it also indicates that many people were willing to experiment with the very core values that the mainstream understood as being American: normative Protestant Christianity, the nuclear family, and gender roles in particular were contended subjects.

The religious zeitgeist contributed to a sense of advancing toward an endless tomorrow, one that held promise for curing social ills and perhaps physical and mental ills as well. This overlay of millennialism, whether taken literally as the immediately anticipated return of Jesus or more informally as the march of progress, contributed to the embrace of optimism.¹³ A curious and offhanded sense of cultural superiority came with the rise of insanity and the attempts to cure it. Madness itself came to be seen as a by-product of a civilized culture. Casual colonialism infiltrated this discourse, with Americans viewing themselves as perched atop a social hierarchy that generated madness as a form of cultural detritus—by comparison, the slaves and the indigenous populations did not suffer from these maladies because they were not “advanced” enough to contract them.¹⁴ While not all people were self-congratulatory on this point—many saw the changing political and economic times as so stressful as to cause a rise in dangerous madness—there remained a certain sense in which insanity accompanied accomplishment, representing a double-edged sword of progress and pain.

Despite the intentions of the reformers, financial support, public approval, and the quality and qualifications of the personnel did not always suggest that therapy was the primary goal. Inside the asylums, conditions across the board were often discouraging and frequently atrocious. In *Homes for the Mad*, Ellen Dwyer has undertaken a detailed study of the living conditions in two nineteenth-century asylums, that in Utica, New York, and the Willard State Hospital in New York for the chronically insane. Her findings, while demoralizing, are not particularly surprising: intolerable food, frequent abuse from attendants, a disruptive and even violent atmosphere created by patients, and sometimes physically filthy living conditions marked the daily life of these institutions.

Patients were frequently conscripted to do the more revolting work required of the attendants, and many experienced their hospitalization as incarceration. Patients were grouped by how disruptive they were: in Utica, there was a five-tiered system of ward classification, with the first two enjoying relatively pleasant employment and leisure activities. The threat of demotion to a lower ward, where the inmates might howl or worse, was a constant source of control.¹⁵

Not all lunatics were created equal, and the better behaved could carve a fairly comfortable niche for themselves: "Both Utica and Willard classified patients on the basis of their self-control rather than their disease. For the quiet and industrious, life could be pleasant, if monotonous."¹⁶ Moral management required some proof of industry, and being allowed to work outside of the asylum was a privilege of the better adjusted. Permission to walk around unattended, called "parole," was the highest form of freedom allowed to patients, and even the occasional theatrical or educational event broke the rigid tempo of daily routine. Although administrators sought to pursue a cycle of predictable similarity, those outside the institutions punctuated the asylum's routines with frequent interruptions.

The public demonstrated relentless curiosity about the daily lives of lunatics and serious suspicion about the policies of the asylums and their potential for abuse. Although doctors and administrators reported incidents of assaults and physical harm caused to both the patients and the staff, concluding that a certain amount of violence is par for the course when containing deranged and dangerous patients, local tours of insane asylums and newspaper coverage of every lapse were constant companions. Visitors and gawkers toured the more genteel halls of the institution with such ardent interest that some patients refused to move to the better-appointed halls because of the increased noise that visitors produced. Public demonstrations of enforced normality, such as the lunatics ball, put the mad on display in an effort to quiet the public's concerns about what went on inside the asylum's walls.

Whether caused by rapid social flux, actual physical ailments, or increased attention given to the issue, America's insane were exponentially on the rise in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although estimating the number of individuals afflicted with insanity is impossible given the untold numbers kept in jails or at home, the sheer number of asylums and public hospitals for lunatics illustrates a sea change in either diagnoses or public policy. Before 1810, only the commonwealth of Virginia had a public insane asylum; by 1860, twenty-eight states of the thirty-three that then existed had state-supported asylums.¹⁷ And the numbers swelled in each one. According to Grob's statistics, the average annual admissions to an American insane asylum rose from 40 in 1825 to 162 in 1867.¹⁸ In 1848, the famed asylum reformer Dorothea Dix

told Congress that America had twenty-two thousand insane people and fewer than thirty-seven hundred openings at institutions.¹⁹

The alarming escalation in cases of insanity created impossible conditions for doctors and other asylum administrators. Based on their European counterparts (which were also undergoing an explosion of numbers), asylums were designed to be intimate and to replicate a benign patriarchy with the psychiatrist as its head. Under these conditions, the hope of curing people with moral management techniques proved to be utter folly. Statistics indicate that the number of chronically ill climbed in institutions, filling new ones to near capacity and eventuating the opening of Willard State Hospital solely to house the permanently ill. Among the newly insane, rates of cure remained excellent throughout the 1840s: those with illnesses caught early enough were significantly more likely to be released. According to advocates of early diagnosis, cure rates went from 80 percent for those detained for less than a year down to 9 percent for those who had been in treatment for five to ten years.²⁰ While the reported rates of cure were not disinterested data for hospital administrators trying to raise money and awareness of their efforts, those treated most effectively were those who did not languish long in the therapeutic environment.

While myriad causes indubitably contributed to the influx of the insane in American asylums, some features of the institutionalized population suggest rampant cultural biases or economic sequestering on a large scale. According to Grob, "A large proportion of the inmates, as with other municipal institutions, were poor immigrants. In a typical year 501 out of 861 patients were foreign-born (immigrants at this time constituted slightly less than one-third of the city [of New York's] total population)."²¹ Of American immigrants, Irish and German groups were disproportionately represented in asylums; the non-Protestant population in particular was suspiciously deemed mad at alarming rates, and their survival rate inside the asylums was the lowest.²² Heads of the household who took work along the Erie Canal left impoverished wives and children to fend for themselves for long periods, creating "a vicious cycle of poverty, disease, and delinquency among Irish immigrants, who then entered welfare and penal institutions at a significantly higher rate than their proportion in the general population."²³

Clearly cultural forces other than organically based insanity were at play in the creation of policy for the insane. Against the backdrop of poverty, prejudice, and structural violence, a new subset of madness emerged in America. I will now turn to the role of religion among the insane, and how religious deviance in general and Spiritualism in particular created a population of lunatic women in America who loudly protested this diagnosis: instead of losing their minds, they were gaining their voices.

Mad Women, Angry Men

To return, then, to the problem posed by the realist versus constructivist debate on American madness, in my opinion the most striking oversight in Edward Shorter's work is the complete absence of analysis based on ethnicity or gender. A most cursory reading of writings of institutionalized women reveals not an increase in organically based insanity tended to by a caring cadre of doctors but rather a legal means of disposal and frequent vicious mistreatment of inconvenient wives. Although the record is obviously skewed here because the writings of women in asylums were produced by women who could write and therefore may represent a higher social or financial standing than many institutionalized women, I see no reason to doubt their assessment that the majority of their fellow inmates were as sane as they themselves were.

As with the case of C., many women found themselves summarily institutionalized based on the new nosological entity "monomania." Monomania was first adopted by the famed early psychiatrist Jean-Etienne Esquirol, a protégé of Philippe Pinel who aimed to implement his teacher's reforms. The two largely succeeded in setting the tone and goals of asylum-based therapy for the next century. Esquirol forwarded the diagnosis of monomania, now completely fallen out of existence and sharply criticized by his fellow alienists even then. In America, R. L. Parsons refuted the use of the term while handily defining Esquirol's claims: "A monomaniac is generally understood to be a person who is insane in regard to a single subject only, while in all other respects his mental faculties are entirely sound."²⁴ Parsons cites the lack of clinical usage of the term as indicative of its troubling nature: it is misleading etymologically, confusing in courts, and potentially spurious in its claims. The mind, according to Parsons, cannot be deranged in only one aspect. A single delusion may have taken hold of a person, but that would be a different matter. He cites such famous alienists as Samuel Tuke (grandson of William), Henry Maudsley and William Sankey (midcentury British alienists who brought psychiatry to London universities), and Bénédict Morel (the French founder of the idea of hereditary degeneration) as also finding the term uncomfortable at best and inaccurate at worst.

Before the term fell out of usage, however, it seems to have been applied frequently to women, often those who specifically disputed their husbands' religious views. Elizabeth Packard, one of the most influential women demanding legal reform during the century, was legally imprisoned in an asylum by her husband for disputing his religious views. Her exposé, *Modern Persecution, or Married Woman's Liabilities* is a shocking amalgamation of first-person

memoir, transcripts from court cases, personal letters, legal documents, and newspaper accounts of her own experiences and those of other women she met in the Jacksonville, Illinois, asylum. Elizabeth Packard was not a Spiritualist but rather a liberal Protestant who disagreed with the doctrine of predestination and who believed that all forms of Christianity should represent striving toward perfection under the guidance of a caring God.

Having spoken out in a Bible class suggesting these views contrary to her husband's version of the Presbyterian party line, Mrs. Packard anticipated no repercussions for expressing herself: "I regarded the principle of religious tolerance as the vital principle on which our government is based, and in my ignorance supposed this right was protected to all American citizens, even to the wives of clergymen. But, alas! my own sad experience has taught me the danger of believing a lie on so vital a question. The result was, I was legally kidnapped and imprisoned three years simply for uttering these opinions under these circumstances."²⁵ Her story was horrific: taken from her morning bath and declared insane after a doctor checked her pulse, Packard was told by her husband to get dressed and accompany the men to Jacksonville Insane Asylum. Protesting that she was both sane and not convicted by a jury, Packard soon learned that her husband had complete legal rights to have her institutionalized and that he alone could have her released.

After refusing to recant her religious views, Packard was imprisoned for three years. She compared her situation to slavery with the stark exception that unlike slaveholders, asylum administrators had no economic incentive to keep their prisoners healthy or even alive. Her diagnosis was monomania, insanity in one respect only—religious difference. In her calls for legal reform and an overhaul of the asylum system, she repeatedly denounces monomania as a diagnosis inviting abuse. A transcript of the trial that she won after this term of imprisonment recounts the words of a Dr. Christopher Knott, who initially diagnosed her as insane: "I visited her on request of Mr. Packard, to determine if she was insane. I learned from him that he designed to convey her to the State Asylum. Do not know whether she was aware of my object or not. Her mind appeared to be excited on the subject of religion; on all other subjects she was perfectly rational. It was probably caused by overtaxing the mental faculties. She was what might be called a monomaniac. Monomania is insanity on one subject. Three-fourths of the religious community are insane in the same manner, in my opinion."²⁶ The doctor proceeds to assess Henry Ward Beecher and Horace Greeley as also monomaniacal. The next witness, the physician J. W. Brown, produced to testify for her husband, cited her "aversion to the doctrine of the total depravity of man" as well as her "dislike to be called insane" as indications of hopeless lunacy. Brown was laughed off of the witness stand.

In *Modern Persecutions, or Married Women's Liabilities*, Packard collected firsthand accounts of other women who had been imprisoned by their husbands for religious rebellion. In 1865, Tirzah F. Shedd was incarcerated in the Jacksonville Insane Asylum for charges of monomania and belief in the spirit world. The Spiritualist contingent was vocal enough to worry the doctors about exposure: "There are a great many spiritualists there whom he called insane like myself, for this reason alone, seeming to fear them as witnesses against him, unless they carried his diploma of 'hopeless insanity' upon them."²⁷ Shedd recounts many forms of systematic abuse at the asylum—food too vile to eat, patients held underwater until they nearly drowned, attendants hitting and pinching the patients, and even nightly secret removals of the untimely dead: "They bury the dead in the night, and with no more religious ceremony than the brute has. We hear the dead cart go round the house in the night to bury those prisoners who have been killed by abuse; and their next door room-mates would not know, sometimes for months, what had become of them, because they were told they had gone home, when they had gone to their silent graves!"²⁸ Shedd claims that her doctor quietly acknowledges that she is perfectly sane and that she is not the only inmate to be thus detained by her husband's wishes.

In the six years following her imprisonment in the asylum, Elizabeth Packard wrote seven books, helped pass laws to protect the institutionalized in Illinois, Connecticut, and Iowa, and finally reunited her own family after many years of attempting to retrieve her children from her husband. *Modern Persecutions* concludes with an appendix of Mrs. Packard's appeal to the Connecticut legislature to enact laws to protect married women in all aspects as distinct individuals with inherent legal rights. In her writing, the charge of monomania is nothing short of men censoring women for having their own opinions, and indeed many women diagnosed with monomania appear to have been rebellious wives.

Spiritualism and many related American new religions appealed largely to women and presented opportunities for women that mainstream religions lacked. When women's "natural" trajectory was motherhood and marital monogamy, any deviation from that was likely to court an official or unofficial diagnosis of insanity. Religions begun or promulgated by women seem to have been specifically targeted as acts of madness, and the Shakers frequently caught as much shrapnel as the Spiritualists did. Begun in England by Ann Lee and brought to America in the Revolutionary days, Shaker religion expounded strict celibacy and even suggested that its founder was the second coming of Jesus in the form of a woman. In an era of high mortality rates among infants and among women in childbirth, the celibacy offered by

the Shakers was attractive to many women; it also flew in the face of most American mores concerning the centrality of the family. Contemporary mental doctors lambasted Shaker belief as thoroughly insane.²⁹ In his sweeping 1881 survey on nervous derangement, Dr. William Hammond, retired surgeon general of the U.S. Army and “professor of diseases of the mind” at the University of New York, discussed the relationship of hysteria to religion: “[They] have never been more distinctly shown than in the fact that women under its influence, have been able to gather numerous followers and actually to originate new religious faiths, of such preposterous tenets and practices, as to inevitably lead to the conclusion that the adherents are either fools or knaves.”³⁰ His first example is the Shakers but they are by no means the only group categorized as hysterical across the board. Religion itself, it seems, could be mad.

The sociologist Williams Sims Bainbridge was able to compile statistics gathered during the 1860 census from all forty-two insane asylums in America. Of those, seventeen kept records on the cause of insanity; the cause is distinct from the form of insanity, which in the same census was synopsized as mania, monomania, melancholia, moral or emotional insanity, and dementia.³¹ In that year, the percent of insanity attributed to “religious excitement” ranged from 1.3 percent in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to 14.6 percent of Augusta, Maine. The total percentage of cases of insanity caused by religion was 6.1, or 2,258 individuals that year. Spiritualism and Millerism (the belief that the world would end in 1843) were the only religions given their own categories.

Of the twenty-two causes of insanity recounted on the census, religious excitement and Spiritualism combined rank seventh on the list, following, in descending order, illness, masturbation, intemperance, domestic problems, epilepsy, and heredity. Of the diagnoses that were more common than religion, illness and epilepsy were obviously physical in nature, and according to Bainbridge, masturbation would have been largely diagnosed among the floridly schizophrenic who would make no attempt to hide such behavior.³² Excepting causes of madness that were more or less reliably physical in nature, religion, including Spiritualism, ranked among the leading diagnoses of American insanity. Between the cause of religious madness and the form of monomania, the landscape of mental illness was primed for abuse.

Some more thoughtful doctors, however, were well aware that one person's mental disease was another person's religious freedom. C.'s doctor undertakes a refutation of the diagnosis of monomania, citing her good judgment, healthy appetite, lack of lasciviousness, and sound intellect on all other matters as proving that she is not insane. He suggests that singling out an unpopular religious belief and claiming that the holder is mad in that one respect is irresponsible. Alienists and Spiritualists engaged in a struggle of naming:

How much of the insanity does this delusion represent? If a dozen years ago, and previously to the first development of Spiritual phenomena, an hypothesis of the relations of disembodied spirits to men, like that which has since come to distinguish a numerous sect, had belonged to a single individual, that man would have been, without doubt, mad. There can be just as little doubt that at present, thousands of persons of nearly, at least, an average soundness of intellect, hold precisely the same belief in terms as did our patient. The simple belief, then, in spiritual phenomena, as actual or possible facts in her experience, was not previously to her attack of mania and is not since her convalescence, an insane delusion. It became an insane delusion only when it was associated with a condition of insanity.³³

C., unlike Elizabeth Packard or Tirzah Shedd, entered the institution of her own free will and because she experienced mental anguish. Her object was never the cure of madness but rather the control of mediumship. C. felt that she was at the beck and call of myriad spirits that tormented her and spoke through the vehicle of her body. Just as her doctor recognized competing claims to naming her symptoms without converting to Spiritualism, C. was never converted to the diagnosis of madness. She left the asylum cured not of monomania but rather of uncontrolled manipulation by the spirit world. Her case study is silent about whether she went on to become a medium as she had wished.

The Creation of the American Mind

The meaning and value of alternative states of consciousness were highly contested in nineteenth-century America, but their existence was pretty much agreed upon. Since Mesmer's first explorations of animal magnetism the pseudo-scientific community on both sides of the Atlantic was aware of a trancelike state that some said could be artificially induced. It was not Mesmer, however, who first introduced the phenomenon that would erroneously bear his name but rather his student and later apostate, the marquis de Puységur. In 1784, the marquis had accidentally stumbled across an artificially induced trance state that resembled sleepwalking: the entranced subject could walk, talk, eat, and otherwise behave as if he were awake, but he did not act or speak as he normally did. This second state Puységur called "magnetic sleep," and his revelation would split the future of animal magnetism into the strictly physical and the psychological camps.

This second self manifested some surprising characteristics. According to Puységur, magnetic sleep functioned like artificially induced sleepwalking, but the patient was highly suggestible to anything the magnetizer said; this condition Puységur called being in "rapport." Moreover, the second self was more articulate and even more moral than the usual waking self: his initial discovery was conducted on one of his own estate workers, a local peasant named Victor Race, and the marquis discovered that Victor was significantly more eloquent under conditions of magnetic sleep than while he was awake. He also found Victor's judgment to be improved, and soon the marquis took to consulting patients on their own cures while in this state because of their heightened faculties. The second self was more intellectually capable and more ethically inclined than the waking self was.

Although the waking self had no recollection of the second self, the self in the magnetized trance state was fully aware of the goings-on of the waking self. The magnetized patient had a continuous memory of both the first and the second states. Puységur also noted that the magnetized sleeper exhibited some signs of what we might call paranormal abilities. He was less interested in this aspect of his discovery than later people would be and continued to use the magnetic state primarily as a healing tool.³⁴ Despite his continued interest in the physical aspects of magnetism, however, Puységur concluded that the "remarkable phenomena of mesmerism implied psychological, not physical, causality,"³⁵ particularly with reference to the prominent place of suggestion. Mesmer himself was forced to recognize this new kin of somnambulism, which he credited as a by-product of the physical process of animal magnetism. Although Mesmer was never keen about this aspect of his discovery, in a variety of mutated forms it would outshine the single-cause panacea of animal magnetism and enjoy a therapeutic life of its own in the new domain of psychoanalysis.

Animal magnetism traveled to America quite late and in the form of Charles Poyen, although one historian reports that Lafayette had tried to import the new technique during the Revolution only to see it quashed by Thomas Jefferson. Poyen was a Frenchman and a student of Puységur's who also held that the ability to induce magnetic sleep outstripped the other phenomena associated with Mesmer and his initial trials. He combined this new form of knowledge with a flair for showmanship and drama that enticed Americans grown increasingly hungry for amusement along with their education. According to Robert Fuller, "In addition to employing the services of a professional somnambule, Poyen also made a practice of enlisting a few volunteers from the audience. He explained to his subjects that his manual gestures would heighten the activity of their systems' animal magnetism to the

point where what he called 'external sensibilities' would temporarily recede into a sleeplike condition.... Loud hand clapping and jars of ammonia passed under their noses failed to evoke even the slightest response. To all appearances, their minds had withdrawn from the physical world."³⁶ Further advancing his cause, Poyen linked the rhetoric of animal magnetism with American progress, promising that the embrace of this new knowledge would forward the utopian cause of America's coming perfection.

As the popularity of magnetism grew in America, so too did competing factions and frequent concerns. Although Poyen positioned his new gift as strictly scientific in both cause and consequence, others took the new revelations to indicate the existence of higher states of consciousness that pointed to or even accessed a mystical plane; religious explanations for magnetic sleep and the antimaterialist bias that its existence suggested were rife in the young Republic, much to Poyen's displeasure.³⁷ Still others worried about the salacious potential involved in inducing a trance state on the unsuspecting, particularly one in which the subject was very susceptible to verbal cues. The possibilities for abuse were evident to all and of dire concern to some. Finally, the paranormal abilities attributed to some mesmerized people increased the magnetized state's relationship to the esoteric undercurrent in the popular mind: suggesting the conscious self had contained in it not only a secret self but one that could potentially access abnormal powers effectively allied animal magnetism with the tidal wave of religious experiments of the day.

As magnetic sleep soldiered on under a number of related titles, the academic community was much slower to embrace mesmerism and its related manifestations. After the initial failures of Mesmer to gain credibility among the medical establishment in Paris, his eponymous treatments were further met with skepticism particularly after they were so wholeheartedly accepted by the pseudo-scientific, religious, and outright magical discourses of the day.³⁸ The man credited with getting the medical profession to seriously investigate claims of animal magnetism is the Scottish doctor James Braid. Braid, who coined the term "hypnosis," did so to distinguish the scientific exploration of some of Mesmer's claims from its billing as a cure-all for any disease. In his 1843 work *Neurypnology; or, the Rationale of Nervous Sleep*, Braid writes, "I trust that it [hypnotism] can be investigated quite independently of any bias, either for or against the subject, as connected with mesmerism; and only by the facts which can be adduced. I feel quite confident we have acquired in this process a valuable addition to our curative means; but I repudiate the idea of holding it up as a universal remedy; nor do I even pretend to understand, as yet, the *whole range of diseases* in which it may be useful."³⁹ Braid successfully got the academy to reconsider magnetic sleep under its new guise as

hypnotism and personally recounted a number of cures that he attributed to his new method.

Braid also took the speculation on hypnosis a step further and, unlike Mesmer and his followers, Braid recognized that the authority of a mesmerizer was not always necessary. According to Edward M. Brown, "Braid laid the foundations for the scientific study of trance through his demonstration that the direct agency of the hypnotist was not necessary to induce such states, and that, in a susceptible individual, any prolonged monotonous concentration on a beam of light, spot on the wall or the like was sufficient."⁴⁰ This lack of a need for a mesmerizer made the process much less attractive to those who wished to use hypnotism for therapeutic or pecuniary gain. Simultaneously, however, it appealed in the broadest sense to a swelling republican feeling that the hallmark of a meritocracy was a self-made man rather than a trained professional or a well-connected aristocrat. In short, hypnosis was designed to appeal to Americans.

John Bovee Dods, a Universalist minister from Poughkeepsie, published *Six Lectures on the Philosophy of Mesmerism* also in 1843; he would later function as a primary early influence on Andrew Jackson Davis, who began his career as a mesmeric trance subject.⁴¹ Dods and his fellow American explorer J. S. Grimes—who specialized in phrenology—understood early and perhaps independently of Braid that self-induced trance states were possible.⁴² The power of suggestion given by the hypnotist was both overwhelming and potentially dangerous in Grimes's writings: "Tell him [a hypnotized subject] that water is rum, or ink, or hot, or cold . . . that he cannot lift a feather or a penny, and it will seem so to him. . . . Tell him that he is a negro, a female, a dog, a fish, a post, a steam-engine—that his head is a coffee mill—that he is Richard, Hamlet, whatever you please, and he is transformed instantly."⁴³ The power of suggestion and the power of the populace were potentially at odds in America.

The entrance of Spiritualism recast the question of the mesmeric trance state: altered consciousness firmly pointed toward a theological position, and mediums, especially women, could induce their own trance states without the aid of or potential misuse by a mesmerizer, hypnotist, or doctor. The removal of the (often male) controlling force to the trance state aided Spiritualism's ascendancy in the popular imagination. It also undermined medical exploration of hypnosis's value as a therapeutic tool. According to Brown, "[The rise of Spiritualism] meant that supernatural, as opposed to medical views, dominated the field. Indeed a physician's first encounter with trance phenomena during this period was more likely to occur at a séance than in a clinic. For this reason, those physicians interested in the medical investigation and application of trance phenomena simply could not ignore spiritualism."⁴⁴ One

such person, the already-cited William Hammond, was a primary case of an American doctor who wished to debunk Spiritualist claims as he tested hypnosis's possibilities. (See Figure 6.1.)

Even the pugnacious Hammond, who blithely classified everyone from the Salem “witches” to Teresa of Avila as hysterical,⁴⁵ acknowledged that science and religion were involved in a war of words, the outcome of which was critical. Hammond recognized that phenomenologically similar traits have occurred across time and space and that interpretation was the key: “Ecstasy has frequently played an important part in the history of the civilized world—at one time, leading to a belief in witchcraft; at another, to demoniacal and angelic possession; at another, to mesmerism and clairvoyance; and [in] our day to spiritualism.”⁴⁶ Distinguishing the medium from the madness would occupy a great deal of Spiritualists’ energy and rhetoric, as their beloved science made its bid to control the language of minds.

An Unquiet Madness

The twentieth-century paradigm of an ever-present unconscious that acts as a warehouse for repressed memories and asocial drives had its precedents in the discursive snarl of mesmerism and Spiritualism. On the simplest plane,



FIGURE 6.1 French engraving of Mesmer's animal magnetism, 1780.

the religious articulation of a soul or spirit indicated a *tertium quid* between body and mind. Dr. Robert Hare, professor emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania whose objectivity machines were discussed in chapter 3, lent extraordinary weight to Spiritualism's claims to be scientific and empirically based. Hare's research into Spiritualism did not end with his attempts to make empirically verifiable contact with those in the afterlife; like all good scientists, he forwarded a hypothesis that would account for the phenomena he had documented. Hare proposed that humans have a spiritual double in both body and mind. He understood this to be an invisible force which is not conscious but is capable of will, and this third part of the person was depicted as a law of physics: just as gravity and inertia merely name preexistent forces, so too had Spiritualism merely uncovered a scientific fact.

On the basis of what he understood to be proof of a newly discovered law of nature, Hare concludes that an alternate consciousness is factual, and brings in everyone from Comte to St. Paul to support his claims. The naming of this thing which is neither body nor mind is a trickier matter, since it is also not the soul: "But between these two kinds of things, mind and matter, we have an intermediate thing called spirit, which is sometimes confounded with mind. . . . In chemistry, it ["spirit"] has been applied to every thing obtained by distillation, as, for instance, spirit of wine, spirit of salt, spirit of nitre, of vitriol, spirit of turpentine. Hence, by analogy when the mind of a mortal, after death, was seen, or supposed to be seen, in a shadowy form called a ghost or shade, it was conceived to be the spirit or essence of the mortal body which it had inhabited."⁴⁷

Employing the First Cause argument, Hare continues that there must be a medium—as in material of transmission—through which God's will is made manifest in the world. Furthermore, humans have a limited capacity to participate in this medium, frequently designated as "ether." Hare charmingly asks, "The human will, with its comparatively minute, humble sphere of action, must require also a medium analogous to that with which God acts; otherwise, how does a thought move so quickly to the toe?"⁴⁸ The transmission of will from the invisible to the concrete makes use of the ethereal realm, where, not coincidentally, spirits inhabit.

The invisible will of consciousness's doppelganger is demonstrated by hypnosis and by hysteria. For Hare, both derive from the same source: "The power of the will exists and is displayed in the mesmeric phenomena, where the will of one individual dominates over the limbs of another. The power of the will of an individual over his own muscles, not only in the usual movement, but in producing a rigidity of the muscles of the arm or thigh, is of course notorious.

But it appears that there are some persons morbidly susceptible of this rigidity, or at least preternaturally liable to it."⁴⁹ Upon death, the invisible will is able to participate in the ether commensurably, as it is now purer and therefore closer to divine. During life, however, the will can either be conscripted in the service of spirituality or else corrupted in debilitating lunacy.

Proponents of Spiritualism readily admitted that hysteria and mediumship had a single source.⁵⁰ For American Spiritualists, the cause and effect of hysteria and mediumship were reversed. If the psychoanalytic community deemed mediums hysterical, the Spiritualist community often deemed hysterics mediums under the influence of negative suggestion. In his 1871 *Mental Disorders*, Andrew Jackson Davis writes:

The truth which lies at the foundation of such insanity is the truth of psychology—the power of one mentality to affect the other—by which the *positive will* controls the *passive mind*, causing it to reason erroneously from correct impressions, and compelling the weaker will to assume another character, to the temporary exclusion and forgetfulness of its own, and thus personify that which is *pro tempore* paramount in the imagination. To separate the chaff from the wheat, in the sphere of such mysterious mental manifestations, is a part of the work of Spiritualism.⁵¹

The language of the will is rife in Spiritualist discussions of mediumship and insanity, and frequently functions as an intermediary between the body and the soul. Both insanity and trance states occupy the nebulous ground of alternative consciousness, but the will must always govern the intent and discretion of the entranced. Davis continues, "In short, no mind must permit itself to be overrun and controlled by another's will. Passivity or negativeness to the will and wishes of superior intelligence is permitted by the Divine Code only when the highest ends are believed to be only thus attainable."⁵² Thus, suggestibility distinguishes the mad from the medium, and since the American medium had no need of a mesmerizer, only the hysteric was left to the negative influences of control.

Proponents quickly developed a vocabulary for distinguishing Spiritualism from psychology, and admitted that some people who understood themselves to be mediums were merely mad. Others who received antisocial or violent instructions from the spirit world might not yet have reached the proper degree of mediumistic proficiency. The Spiritualist cosmos allowed for such distinctions by its inherent flexibility. New mediums were prone to receiving messages from spirits on the lowest of the seven-tiered heavens. Since death did

not instantly result in heavenly perfection but rather inaugurated a long process of improvement, spirits themselves frequently made errors in judgment. Not only, then, were contradictory messages from the spirit world resolved—the spirits were mistaken—but ethical issues were also solved: one might have come into contact with an unprogressed and evilly inclined spirit.⁵³

From the outset, Spiritualists were destined to be plagued by charges of madness. Mesmerism was already threatening the line between hypnotism and hysteria, and the Spiritualist declaration that alternate states of consciousness in fact should be fostered made adherents a target for both the scientific community and amateurs who saw a threat to Christianity in the movement. Although the definition of hysteria has changed radically over the last two hundred years, a common consensus is that hysteria is essentially unwilling hypnotism: the hysteric is locked in a state of alternative consciousness.⁵⁴ Conversely, hypnotism has been seen as an artificially induced hysteria.⁵⁵ By willingly inducing trance states that resulted in a hypnotized consciousness, Spiritualists evaded either of the medical poles of knowledge on the subject—hypnotism was neither a pathology nor its cure.

Spiritualists recognized medical discourse's threat to their religious claims and made a full effort to counter pathological characterizations of hypnotic activity. Moreover, they understood the language of psychology as potentially damaging to mediums' ability to do their jobs. If the second self of mesmerism was too closely related to hysterical states, mediums would never trust themselves enough to cultivate that necessary proximity. Taking the mesmeric legacy one step further, Spiritualism disputed the construction of the unconscious as disjunct from consciousness: alternative psychic states certainly existed, but for the theological (and economic) betterment of humanity. In his 1912 how-to manual on Spiritualism, the Reverend E. W. Sprague argues,

Every mental medium when placing himself in a condition to be hypnotized by his spirit helpers, becomes subject to suggestion; therefore it is detrimental to the medium's development and to the results of the séances to suggest that there are, or may be, "evil spirits" present. . . . When a medium gets his mind full of [the] theory of the "Subconscious Mind" and is filled with fear of "Evil Spirits," he had better cease trying to develop his mediumship. A belief in either of these theories is almost sure destruction to his development.⁵⁶

Spiritualists took aim at not only the proximate causes of hypnotized states in nascent psychology but also their results. In 1900, Hudson Tuttle,

arch-defender of the faith, laid bare the distinction of referents between the movements. He writes, "Theorists attempt to account for the mental manifestations, as trance, writing, etc. [*sic*], by mesmerism or psychology.... But mesmeric impressions do not go outside of the person or objects *en rapport* with the subject. They never reveal what is unknown to those in connection. Spiritual impressibility reaches outside of surroundings, and reveals the thoughts of the spirit who is *en rapport*."⁵⁷ In psychological understandings of the hypnotized state, the second self and all of its attendant qualities—whether the patient is sick or morally superior to the usual self—refer back solely to the hypnotized subject. Neither mesmerism nor psychology move beyond the self to higher planes of spiritual existence. The closed self-referentiality of these discourses of the mind did not sit well with the Spiritualists who rather saw an ability to open the very vista of heaven.

Moreover, Spiritualist trance states were constituted by the appearance of several voices or personalities that were distinct from that of the medium. The change in personas, essential to cultivating mediumship, bore an uncanny resemblance to a nineteenth-century subset of hysteria, multiple personalities. "Schizophrenia," as the phenomenon was frequently called, emerged as a diagnosis in the second half of the nineteenth century. The parallel between Spiritualist mediumship and schizophrenic behavior was so clearly delineated that Ian Hacking has argued that Spiritualism was a primary cause for the continued diagnosis of schizophrenia in America long after it had fallen out of use in France. He writes, "The disorder always needs a host, much in the way that a parasite needs hosts.... In New England in particular, and in both America and Britain more generally, an additional host [to hysteria and hypnosis] was psychic research linked with spiritualism. One idea was that alters [alternative personalities] were departed spirits; mediumship and multiple personality drew close."⁵⁸ Hacking notes as well that the American diagnosis of schizophrenia declined concomitantly with the popularity of the Spiritualist movement.

The crux of the debate is relatively simple: mesmerism had shown that an alternative consciousness may appear under certain conditions. The interpretive battle raged over what that consciousness referred to, however, and whether it was to be lauded or cured. For early mesmerists, the alternative consciousness produced in magnetic sleep was akin to somnambulism. As Adam Crabtree has shown, the apparent second personality of mesmeric sleepwalking was firmly grounded in the subject. Whereas a similar phenomenon a hundred years earlier would have been culturally "read" as demonic forces inhabiting a person against her will, in Puységur's hands the second consciousness was an artifact belonging solely to the subject. Moreover, the

second consciousness was understood to be wiser and more morally apt than the waking consciousness.⁵⁹

Spiritualism shifted the referent of the alternative consciousness outside of the self. The seemingly endless number of personalities that could temporarily inhabit a body referred not back to the subject but to external sources. Like Puységur, Spiritualists saw the alternative personalities generally as wiser, more benevolent, and more ethically advanced than the medium in her waking state. However, the spirits of the dead were called upon predominantly to dole out advice or comfort the grieving; the move from a medical model to a religious one largely depleted the hypnotized state of its relationship to curing. And the trance state itself most certainly did not require curing in the eyes of the Spiritualists, as many of its detractors argued.

In *Rewriting the Soul*, Hacking argues that the concept of schizophrenia is predicated on memory becoming an object of scientific speculation. In his elegant formulation, he proposes that the science of memory “emerged as a surrogate [for] sciences of the soul,”⁶⁰ giving empiricism entrance into a new domain—the religious imagination. Schizophrenia is notable less for the numerous personalities that appear to inhabit one self than for the fact that this results in a loss of continuous memory. The inability of the schizophrenic to produce a coherent narrative of her life is the locus of pathology for the nineteenth century. I will argue that the Spiritualists offer an alternative reading of similar phenomena, differing not only on the causes of multiplicity but also on the resulting idea of what constitutes a self.

The burgeoning arena of psychology, largely in response to hysteria and its subset, schizophrenia, responded to the travails of memory with the creation of an omnipresent unconscious. By the end of the nineteenth century, the second self became omnipresent and the repository for memory. The story once again begins at the asylum at Salpêtrière, this time with Jean-Martin Charcot at its center. Charcot was in charge of a number of women hysterics at the asylum and even a small wing of hysterical men. By employing hypnosis, Charcot was able to both induce and relieve hysterical symptoms in his patients. He was also the first to employ photography on a large scale to document his patients' symptoms as well as the course of therapy: the images from his classes became the iconographic celebration of this moment in psychiatry. Although Charcot has been criticized by some feminist thinkers for his heavy-handed authoritarian techniques and his rapid deployment of objectifying photographs of hysterical women, he was at the time compared by a young Sigmund Freud to Pinel, once again freeing the insane at Salpêtrière.⁶¹ By demonstrating that hysteria had a psychological origin and was not merely the fantasy of selfish



FIGURE 6.2 Jean-Martin Charcot with hysterical patient. Painting by André Brouillet, 1887.

women, Charcot had returned credibility to the women as he had vested it on the disease. (See Figure 6.2.)

Charcot's students included Pierre Janet, who would become a heavy-weight in the discussion of hysteria and multiple personalities, as well as the young neurologist Freud.⁶² Janet, Freud, and Josef Breuer would all follow their teacher's model and employ hypnosis as a therapeutic tool for the alleviation of disorders such as hysteria, although Freud would abandon its use in favor of the talking cure. Alternative states of consciousness, in the hands of dynamic psychiatry, were not benign multiplicities available through natural states, much less a sign of the spiritually gifted. In *Studies in Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer assert that hysteria results from an infraction of memory; a traumatic memory is repressed in the unconscious. This produces a state of

artificial hypnosis, which can only be rectified by therapeutic hypnosis, under which the patient remembers the trauma that caused the hysteria in the first place.⁶³ Fragmented memory creates pathology by blocking not only recollection but also the emotions that accompany the memory.⁶⁴ The analyst's job is to excavate the memory and its related emotions, thus dispelling their hold on the victim.

Puységur's second self had become a constant companion and a malevolent one at that. The unconscious, harboring scandalous wishes and antisocial impulses, was for Freud the secret self that asserted its presence through dreams, slips of the tongue, and psychological illnesses such as hysteria. By concretizing symptoms in the body, hysteria functioned as a rebus for the mind: the secret knowledge locked in the unconscious had to be brought to the surface through the instrument of language and made accessible once again to memory. Even after Freud dispensed with using hypnosis for therapeutic purposes, he continued the practice of the talking cure, a process of verbal association designed to unseat stuck memories and move them into conscious reflection. The problem of memory became the bailiwick of early psychoanalysis, and although Freud has received well-deserved credit for his role in actually listening to women and attributing their illnesses to being stifled and bored, the discourses of the mind reintroduced the need for an external authority. The cultivation of multiple voices and alternative consciousnesses would be permanently replaced by the subordination of the second self to a new breed of master mesmerizers.

Recalling Recollection

As I began this book with a discussion of memory and its role in a uniquely American renaissance, so too shall I end it. As the discourses of the mind had been safely ensconced in scientific prose, the emergence of the unconscious as the rightful referent of these phenomena consumed Spiritualism's claims without necessarily obliterating its possibilities. It also gave rise to new articulations within the scientific community about the nature of the mind. According to S. E. D. Shortt, "The empiricism championed by the neuroscientists of the 1870s had, in less than a decade, stripped spiritualism of the supernatural to create the nascent but scientifically legitimate field of abnormal psychology. Expurgated spiritualism, now dubbed psychical research, was highly congruent with medicine's new-found interest in the unconscious. . . . In effect, medicine was in the process of replacing the static nineteenth-century paradigm of mind, centered on the notion of omniscient Will, with the concept

of a dynamic unconscious, an explanatory model into which the residue of spiritualism was readily assimilated.”⁶⁵

The primary bastion of psychical research was the London-based Society for Psychical Research, which soon set up shop in America as well. Their proceedings, which continue to be published today and are readily accessible on-line, represent the single most erudite collection of speculation into the nature of paranormal mental activity. Frederic W. H. Myers, respected psychologist and longtime contributor to the society, was not quite ready in the 1890s to let alternative states of consciousness become pathologized quite so quickly. Myers opted instead for a more scientifically rigorous version of Spiritualism’s multiple personas and argued for a view of the self that embraced multiple forms of consciousness as an aspect intrinsic to personality. Myers’s construction of the self was not unlike Freud’s tripartite psyche, made up of the superego that enforces society and religion’s standards, the id that constantly demands selfish fulfillment, and the ego that negotiates between the two. In Myers’s estimation, however, human nature did not reach downward to base instincts but rather potentially upward to the realm of metaphysics. Once again, the key was memory:

All this psychical action, I hold, is conscious; all is included in an actual or potential memory below the threshold of our habitual consciousness. For all that lies below that threshold *subliminal* seems the fitting word. “Unconscious,” or even “subconscious,” would be directly misleading; and to speak (as is sometimes convenient) of the *secondary* self may give the impression that either there cannot be more selves than two, or that the *supraliminal* self, the self above the threshold—the *empirical* self, the self of common experience—is in some way superior to other possible selves.⁶⁶

In addition to advocating the existence of multiple possible selves and to denying the clear superiority of one over the others, Myers also argued for a patient’s right not to restore the usual personality but to replace it with a better one. Remarking on a well-known case of dual personality, that of Félida X, Myers sides silently with Puységur and the generations of Spiritualists who found in the second self not amoral drives but higher instincts. He writes, “But the point on which I wish to dwell is this: Félida’s second state is altogether *superior* to the first—physically superior, since the nervous pains which had troubled her from childhood have disappeared, and morally superior inasmuch as her morose, self-centered disposition is exchanged for a cheerful activity.... The case shows us how often the word ‘normal’ means nothing more than ‘what happens to exist.’ For Félida’s *normal* state was her *morbid*

state; and the new condition...has brought her to a life of bodily and mental sanity which makes her fully the equal of average women of her class."⁶⁷ Multiple selves did not mean that the dominant one was the best one, and the referent of the true self could never be distilled back into singularity.

In an 1889 article on auditory hallucinations, particularly among Spiritualists and their ilk, Myers investigates the alleged causes of these phenomena but is unwilling to reduce, as many of his colleagues had, the experiences of Joan of Arc and other luminaries to mere insanity. He sets out to find a figure beyond compare, who all will agree follows a higher, rather than lower, calling. He finds Socrates: "We must at least select some instances where no circumstance, except the voice itself, can be held to indicate insanity, and where the substance of the messages given is above and not below the normal level of human thought.... But there is one instance—an instance well-observed and well-attested though remote in date—which will at once occur to every reader. The Founder of Science himself—the permanent type of sanity, shrewdness, physical robustness and moral balance—was guided in all affairs of life by a monitory Voice, by the 'Daemon of Socrates.'"⁶⁸

After a lengthy survey of the appearance of Socrates' daemon and an exhaustive discussion of how it is always in the service of good, Myers concludes that Socrates' inner voice can neither be the product of physical ailment nor of mental derangement. Rather, the daemon indicates the presence of a higher state of consciousness within the self. He writes, "But I must leave here the story of Socrates... cited here only as an example of *wise automatism*; of the possibility that the messages which are conveyed to the conscious mind from unconscious strata of the personality—whether as sounds, as sights, or as movements—may sometimes come from far beneath the realm of dream and confusion—from some self whose monitions convey to us a wisdom profounder than we know."⁶⁹ Through all of the machinations of alternative personalities, multiple memories, and the superior knowledge of the spirits, Myers finally espoused recollection: the self has only to remember the higher state that it knew all along.

Although the twentieth century saw the triumph of the sciences of the mind soon eclipsed by the sciences of the brain, the heyday of trance states and multiple voices was over. Spiritualism had brought the esoteric impulse in America to the masses in a palatable and even therapeutic form, but it was ultimately a religious quest that could neither garner scientific recognition nor outlast the challenges that the emerging medical practices put to its claims. Whereas Spiritualism had harnessed the prestige of the afterlife in support of radical reforms in its day and undoubtedly served well as an amateur form of grief counseling, by the First World War it was largely depleted of any real

religious or political content. The Neoplatonic teachings of a universe alive with the divine fell apart at the feet of the twentieth century. The death of God in the forms of science, secularism, and war was also the death of the spirit world. Although remnants of Spiritualism's impulses can still be heard in alternative health discussions, the New Age movement, and even televised mediums still talking to dead people, I believe that its lasting gifts have been to multiculturalism: the religion that opened heaven to all opened a new vista of ethical, not scientific, possibility. The ghosts that Spiritualism loosed upon the world were ultimately happy specters, visions of the past ushering in a brighter future.

This page intentionally left blank

7

Conclusion

I have argued from the outset that the Spiritualist movement betrayed a cultural ambivalence about time: in love with futurity and deeply committed to progress, Spiritualists spilled a lot of ink over the dangers of archaic behaviors and the moral lapses of those who held onto old ways. The importance of these critiques ranged from the casual to the sublime, as the condemnation of silk dresses marched alongside prison reform, divorce law, women's equality, and abolition all as emblems of progress. Time seemed to fly swiftly into tomorrow, borne on railroads and sent via telegraph, captured on glass negatives or regulated globally with the establishment of the Prime Meridian.

At the same time, America was a young country, a political experiment hatched from a rebellious explosion. With no international track record to rely on and no institutions older than a few hundred years, the Republic was in dire need of legitimacy and turned to unassailable cultural heroes to be its prototypes and its defenders. The classics in particular were conscripted into service: in architecture, pamphleteering, currency, and even the names of cities and towns, the classical world lent its gravity and its tacit approval to the new nation that echoed Athenian democracy.

This double helix of time epitomized the Spiritualist notion of how the cosmos worked. Reaching backward into the past for guidance and comfort, Spiritualists proposed that the spirits of the dead could usher in the future. With heaven as the moral template for life

on earth, Spiritualists saw progress—social, scientific, and technological—become increasingly possible with the aid of the wisdom of the past. This temporal bind, I have argued, displays social conflicts about change that religious ideas swept in to address. New modes of thought were required to adequately accommodate new terrains and experiences.

The Spiritualists concretely represent this discomfort with time, and one of their primary instruments to negotiate it was Platonic and Neoplatonic thought. Spiritualists correctly intuited a coming rift between science and religion and sought to hold onto an alliance of progress between the two. Terrified of mere materialism, Spiritualists did everything in their power to retain a world in which the universe could be both scientific and enchanted. Renaissance patterns of thinking, imbued with Neoplatonic ideas of progress in the form of cosmic ascent, proliferated throughout Spiritualist writing. The universe would be the map of God's mind, not the descent from the spiritual into the material where we all reside banished from the divine.

I began this book with a chapter on memory, and I concluded with another on the same topic, tracing the beginnings of Spiritualism through its denouement as emblematic of the past as a conceptual problem. Platonic recollection, I have argued, was the perfect symmetry for the travails of time: the future constituted a rediscovery of what one had known all along. The path of ascent from the material to the increasingly spiritual was expanded straight through heaven in Spiritualism—knowledge never ceased, and the soul was never static. Overtly and covertly, Spiritualism shared an elective affinity with Platonism in general and recollection in particular. Thinking with Plato (or even watered-down, secondhand, and outright deviant versions of Plato) invested importance on the American project and filled the cosmos with sacrality. Recollection came the closest to naming the problem of time and to assuring all that despite apparent setbacks, time really was going in the right direction.

The movement was indebted to Mesmer's animal magnetism and trance states. Mesmer himself had been unwilling to give up an enchanted universe and proposed sympathies throughout all of creation that tugged on neighbors like tides were pulled to the shore. Grounded in the body but connected to the cosmos, animal magnetism was too tempting for the mystically inclined who eventually wrested the idea away from the medical claims that Mesmer had so ardently wished to be remembered for. Expanded and redirected by the marquis de Puységur, mesmerism became an instrument of the mind, allowing induced trance states, benign multiple selves, and the possibility that one harbored a secret self that held the secrets of better knowledge.

Swedenborg vies with Mesmer for the place of prominence in Spiritualist influence. The mystical insights of the sojourner to heaven provided the movement with the basic description of the geography of the afterlife and its busy social affairs. Characterized by constant learning, continued converse among the dead, and love in the afterlife, Swedenborg's heaven became an abbreviated version of Spiritualism's. Retaining a version of the universe as Grand Man and proposing a Platonic or biblical (or both) centrality of love, Swedenborg transmitted central classical concepts to an American audience. Spiritualism's primary revision was dismantling the duality of a hell to accompany heaven.

By disbanding hell, Spiritualists replaced the binary model of standard monotheistic thinking: rather than separate all souls into the saved and the damned, they maintained a Neoplatonic ladder of ascent to the divine. Progress, rather than judgment, would mark all of humanity. Spiritualists conceived of improper behavior as a crime created by poverty, ignorance, and social injustice rather than an ontological state of sin. Declassified from sin to crime, the causes of bad behavior could be ferreted out and cured. Destructive intent was thus moved into the realm of the culturally operable; no longer facing the looming possibility of damnation, society could cure its own ills. In banishing hell, Spiritualists dismantled the primary binary of perfection and imperfection, tearing apart the mental apparatus that allows for the simple mathematics of apocalypticism.

It was not alone in this quest; the Universalists had abandoned hell as well, and both American Transcendentalism and deism lacked concepts of the apocalypse and a judging God. However, in tandem with these movements and with a much broader interest base countrywide, Spiritualism paved the way for the possibility of a real encounter with difference. It did not entirely succeed, of course, and the movement is besmirched with embarrassing moments of colonialist condescension and untrammelled racism. In the main, however, in articulating a theology with no expectation of perfection, Spiritualism eradicated the initial barrier to encountering the other—those who have correctly grasped truth and those who have failed to.

These two worldviews, inclusive and apocalyptic, skitter throughout the history of Western religions, determining whether the model of conceiving otherness will be the standard us-and-them of the saved and the damned or whether it will more closely resemble a Neoplatonic ladder of ascent to truth via knowledge, love, or mysticism. These forms are still with us long after the initial rush of religiosity has lost momentum. Culture takes over where religion falters, offering husks of epistemes, familiar patterns of thought that can slip by, comfortable and undetected, but creating no new meaning and devoid

of any sense of ultimacy. If the Spiritualists often thought with Plato without being aware that they were doing so, we too often think with well-worn ideas about time that may or may not be in our best interests.

Apocalyptic thinking divides the saved and the damned into extreme and irrevocable opposition. Like all religious thought, it is a sense-making position, a radical concluding note that retrospectively will make the current trials worth the effort. Apocalypticism stands at the far end of the spectrum that is millennialism, where time itself is conceived of as investing meaning in relation to the whole of time. In order to see the whole, one must see the end. The world is out of control, and millennialism, whether heading immediately toward a violent end of days or a softer, more gradual version, assures believers that events are never random. Catastrophes and horrors can be accounted for in God's plan, even if we are unable to see the big picture. But like Neoplatonism, apocalyptic structures of time have filtered down into the culture without reference to a specific religious intent.

Like ghosts from the past, our culture is still haunted by these templates for thinking about time. Anyone who recalls the Y2K scare of the turn of the year 2000 has trod in these paths—time began somewhere (Eden, the Israelites, the big bang), is racing through this dangerous, frightening moment, and is cruising toward a cataclysmic end. Taken out of the rhetoric of fervent religions, templates of time continue without any cause or direction. Whether guided by serious environmental concerns or merely the desire to see Bruce Willis atop an asteroid, apocalyptic doomsday scenarios abound in popular culture. Desiccated of meaning, the world is going to end because that is just what worlds do. What I would consider a subset of apocalyptic thinking, the paranoid style, continues grandly in popular television and film. Like apocalyptic readings of the world, someone is clearly in charge of the unfolding of cataclysmic events, but unlike millennialism, we are not sure who the perpetrator precisely is but are positive that he is both cruel and sneaky.

The complicated, inclusive worldview of Spiritualism remains in pattern if not specific religious intent, with ample characters in movies and on television wishing to talk to ghosts to right past wrongs and heal grief. The success of myriad programs about the afterlife all betray a cultural need for continuing contact with the dead and representations of death as continuity. Young, old, black, white, angry, or scared, these ghosts never embark on theological niceties or even large-scale discussions about a single cosmic truth. Heaven is clearly inclusive and multicultural: it is just not discussed.

I concluded the last chapter by claiming that although Spiritualists wanted empirical proof of their beliefs and to be recognized as a scientific endeavor, their real contributions were to the realm of ethics. And here I would like to

suggest that Neoplatonism as a template for thinking about time has ethical consequences. The Spiritualists fare well as antagonists of oppositions and embracers of diversity because they have conceived time and the structure of the cosmos itself as ascent rather than duality. And this defeat of binary privileging of one party over another went beyond an us-versus-them model of groups of believers. The body was not subject to the soul but rather served as its handmaiden and companion into the hereafter; matter was not secondary to form, as the heavens reflected God and man; women were not deformed versions of men but rather were the intellectual, legal, and sexual equals of their counterparts; and slaves were not inferior to masters, as indeed the entire system of slavery condemned all of humanity by its injustice. By retaining a Renaissance cosmology, in which the universe stands in divine reflection of God's mind, where the world and all of its inhabitants are shot through with divinity, Spiritualism traveled forward into the past, recollecting a brighter tomorrow.

This page intentionally left blank

Notes

CHAPTER I

1. Cited in Howard Kerr, *Mediums, Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 17.

2. John B. Buescher has recently written the first sustained examination of the interplay between Universalists and Spiritualists and does a fine job explaining the ramifications to traditional Christianity when heaven is opened to all. He also has a nice discussion of Spiritualists' embrace of Darwin (or at least a modified version of Darwin) as part of their millennialist understanding. See *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004), 203–206.

3. See Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

4. See Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), particularly chap. 4.

5. The ability to trace certain forms of knowledge, particularly those produced by people invested in hiding them, is notoriously difficult, and I rely here on scholars of hermeticism to find many material connections between people and ideas. The veil of secrecy or claims of ignorance are long-standing methods to garner credibility in religious modes of thinking. Two of the primary influences on Spiritualism, Emanuel Swedenborg and Andrew Jackson Davis, both denied having read works of their probable precursors. This putative lack of influence buttresses mystics' claims of direct apprehension of the divine. While the Spiritualists were not as

difficult to navigate as occultists are, I nevertheless must oscillate between arguing for Platonism's direct and indirect influence on my subjects. When judgment is called for on this issue, I try to err on the side of caution.

6. Alfred J. Gabay, *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2005), particularly chap. 5.

7. I am indebted to my friend Hugh Urban's use of this felicitous phrase in his book *The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Secrets in the Bush Administration* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

8. See Paul R. Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest* (Philadelphia: Temple University Publications, 1963).

9. R. W. Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (London: John Chapman, 1850), 65.

10. Luc Brisson has written the most extensive examination of Platonic myths and their function in the corpus as a whole. He argues that Plato self-consciously opposes *logos* (truth or rationality) with the inferior and unprovable *mytho*, stories that do not admit of logical scrutiny and that appeal to belief instead of reason. Brisson argues that Plato was essentially capitulating to his audience when he deployed myth in the dialogues. This strikes me as continuing a long-standing and flawed distinction in Plato studies between philosophy and religious endeavors, but the work is rich and interesting nonetheless. See *Plato the Mythmaker*, trans. Gerard Naddaf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

11. See, respectively, the *Atlantic Monthly* 74: issues 443 and 444, 1894; the *North American Review* 83:172, July 1856; and *New Englander and Yale Review* 46:203, 1887.

12. Alexander Wilder, *New Platonism and Alchemy* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons, 1869), 6–7. Reprinted by the Wizards Bookshelf, Secret Doctrine Reference Series, 1975.

13. In *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*, Robert S. Cox makes a serious attempt to unseat some of the Spiritualists' reputation in academia as unabashed progressive reformers. Although his work in general is excellent, and I do think he has made an important corrective to the conversation, overall the vast majority of Spiritualist material I have ever read is indeed quite progressive and frequently even shocking for its day. I will return to his work in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2

1. Mary Blount White, *Letters from the Other Side: With Love, Harry and Helen* (Hinesburg, Vt.: Upper Access, 1987), 49. In a curious turn of historical events, this work was composed by the great aunt of Lisa Carlson, longtime director of Funeral Consumers Alliance and ghostwriter for the final chapters of the second edition of Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death*.

2. For one of the clearest definitions of the characteristics of postmillennialism, see Catherine Lowman Wessinger, *Annie Besant and Progressive*

Messianism. It should be noted that Wessinger has recently argued to replace the academic terms of pre- and postmillennialism to “cataclysmic” and “progressive.” She is joined in this call for linguistic reform by Richard Landes, who prefers “transformative” for the latter category.

3. For an excellent treatment of this phenomenon, see Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 3.

4. Much excellent theoretical work has been done on the relationship of time in narrative and religions. Millennialism more than most religious expressions attempts to grasp the one true story of the world, where time began to where it will end, and to create meaning in relation to the ending. For the classic works on narrative and the apocalypse, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), vol. 2, esp. 19–28. See also Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5. See Nancy M. West, “Camera Fiends: Early Photography, Death, and the Supernatural,” *Centennial Review* 40, 1 (1996): 171–172.

6. There are numerous excellent treatments of this phenomenon. For the classic one, see Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 409–474. For an interesting discussion of artistic representations of Victorian death in painting and poetry, see Carol Christ, “Painting the Dead: Portraiture and Necrophilia in Victorian Art and Poetry,” in *Death and Representation*, Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 133–151.

7. See Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), particularly 32–43, for a discussion of how Americans conceived of Calvinism and how Spiritualism contributed to its downfall.

8. Cora L. V. Hatch, *Discourses on Religion, Morals, Philosophy, and Metaphysics* (New York: B. F. Hatch, 1858), 309–310.

9. There are numerous excellent works on this period, each tackling a different angle of the Second Great Awakening and post-Revolutionary religion in America. For a sample, see R. H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974).

10. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1981. For a detailed discussion of infant baptism among the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in this period, see 66–71. See 155–165 for the increasingly emotional status of families.

11. For the seminal work on women and Spiritualism, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

12. For a discussion of the details of Victorian mourning, see Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1976), 197–202.

13. Gary Laderman, “A History of Death in Antebellum, Anglo-Protestant Communities of the Northeast,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, 1 (1995): 36–37.

14. Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799–1883* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 37–38.

15. James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 105–107.

16. Ann Douglas, “Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830–1880,” in *Death in America*, David Stannard, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 60.

17. Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), chap. 5.

18. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 13.

19. See Howard Kerr, *Mediums, Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 17.

20. Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 427–428.

21. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Seen and Heard* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1876), 148–149, section 246. No translator is given. Wherever possible I try to use nineteenth-century translations, even if they are less accurate than modern ones.

22. *Ibid.*, 152, section 252.

23. *Ibid.*, 313, section 464.

24. *Ibid.*, 315, section 465.

25. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Death and the After-Life: Three Lectures* (New York: published by the author, 1866), 21. This figuration of memory as the judging angel may well have been taken directly from Swedenborg’s work. Although it is certain that Davis was a devoted follower of Swedenborgian thought, I cannot prove that he read this particular passage, although it seems likely: “Whatever a man thinks, speaks, or does from the will, is appropriated to him and remains. . . . Such things are each and all inscribed on his internal memory; and nothing is wanting. This memory is his book of life, which is opened after death and according to which he is judged.” Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Compendium of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*, Samuel M. Warren, ed. (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1974), 137.

26. John W. Edmonds and George T. Dexter, *Spiritualism* (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1855), Vol. 2: 363.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 365.

29. Carlyle Petersilea, *Letters of the Spirit World. Written through the mediumship of C. P., by his father Franz P., and other spirit celebrities* (Chicago: Progressive Thinkers, 1905), 71.

30. Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.

31. Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, Vol. 2: 367.

32. The Spiritualists were not interested so much in accurately describing the processes of memory but rather were using memory as a tool for thinking about time and ethics. According to contemporary psychology, they were wrong on nearly every point from a medical stance. Most people view forgetting as a problem rather than a goal, and modern scientists have had to step in and argue for the necessity of forgetting. Daniel L. Schacter, for example, compares the mind to an Internet search engine and argues that too much retrieval from memory could render the information insensible and useless. He is trying to convince the reader that the daily vexing lapses of memory are in fact for our own good overall. Contemporary writing on memory tends to be psychological or neurological rather than bear on ethics. See Schacter's *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

33. Hatch, C. 315.

34. Emma Hardinge, *Six Lectures on Theology and Nature* (Chicago, Ill.: Np, 1860) 128.

35. Florence Marryat, *The Spirit World* (New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894), 50. The italics are Mrs. Marryat's.

36. Ibid., 140.

37. Ibid., 141.

38. Ibid., 144.

39. Ibid., 145.

40. Ibid., 146.

41. Ibid., 147.

42. Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, Vol. 2: 346–347.

43. Ibid., 347–348.

44. Ibid., 213.

45. David Gross, *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 34.

46. Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

47. Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 480–481.

48. I am using the collected works of Plato here: John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

49. Hudson Tuttle, *Arcana of Spiritualism: A Manual of Spiritual Science and Philosophy* (Manchester, England: Two Worlds, 1900), 102.

50. Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death* (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1912), 220.

51. James H. Fletcher, *Letters from Astrea* (New York: Published by the author, 1908), 41–42. Reprinted in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, Gary L. Ward, ed. (New York: Garland, 1990).

52. *Ibid.*, 19.

53. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 5.

54. For a historical example of the importance of vivid images and their placement in relation to each other, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 130–134.

55. See Yates, *Art of Memory*, chap. 9.

56. I am hedging on the depth and extent of Bruno's involvement in magic because the subject is hotly contested among historians of the era. Bruno's late works do specifically address magic, and his wholesale reliance on the writings of Marsilio Ficino suggests a penchant for the dark arts. However, Frances Yates's study *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* has been the topic of heated academic debate, and it appears that Yates severely overstated the case for Bruno's being primarily a magician.

57. On the point of temples of memory, I can find no instances of them in Swedenborg's writing. Although there are temples in Swedenborg's heavens, they are purely churchlike institutions, and temples of memory appear to have been Davis's creation alone. For a discussion of temples in heaven, see Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1876), sections 187, 221, and 223. In *The Art of Memory* Frances Yates traces memory theaters from Platonic times to their echoes in the works of Leibniz. Although Yates herself states that her examination is not exhaustive, she does argue that Renaissance humanism and the printing press contributed to the loss of the art of memory or at least its retreat from prominence into the more shadowy world of magic. Ioan Couliano similarly argues that the legacy of the Reformation was the death of the imagination, including Giordano Bruno and his memory theater. See his *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

58. See, for example, Godwin's discussion of influences on Swedenborg. Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 95–107.

59. See Francoise Waquet, *Latin: Or the Empire of a Sign* (London: Verso, 2001), 33–34.

60. Davis's spellings of these names are idiosyncratic and often incorrect (e.g., “Xenephon” for Xenophon and “Anaxagorus” and Anaxagoras). I have also tried to spare the reader the majority of these new words, but the text is riddled with them. None appears to be real words in either Latin or Greek, although the linguistic roots of most are a mixture of those two languages. However, none of the words corresponds etymologically with its definition given in the text. For example, the name of the island is “Akropanamede,” which the reader is told means “All-Sided Perfection.” In Greek, it combines three roots that mean “tip” or “edge,” “all,” and “plan.” My special thanks goes to Eric Casey for going over the Latin and Greek for me for each of these words.

61. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Death and the Afterlife: Eight Evening Lectures on the Summer-Land* (Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1911 [1870]), 191.

62. *Ibid.*, 93.

63. *Ibid.*, 92. It should be noted that this image is reminiscent of the sorts of images used in memory theaters. See Frances Yates, *Art of Memory* above.

64. *Ibid.*, 95–96.

65. *Ibid.*, 93.

66. *Ibid.*, 97.

67. *Ibid.*, 98.

68. Plato, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 249c. For the entire allegory, see 246b–252b.

CHAPTER 3

1. Clark Blaise, *Time Lord: Sir Sanford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 36.

2. R. Lawrence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 2.

3. Fred Nadis, *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9.

4. James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 28.

5. The on-line Ephemera project has an excellent array of Spiritualist inventions, including the remarkable story of Amanda Theodocia Jones, to whom the spirits explained both inventions and patent law to wonderfully felicitous effect: “In 1873, Jones received two patents for the process of canning food through vacuum processing, an innovation that revolutionized the food industry.” See <http://www.spirithistory.com/invent.html> for this and other stories.

6. David Freeman Hawke, *Nuts and Bolts of the Past: A History of American Technology, 1776–1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 193.

7. For a good discussion of this phenomenon, see Gerhard Dohrn-Van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 324.

8. G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 162.

9. Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 88.

10. I believe I have found an updating of the metaphor from telegraph to telephone in the 1909 *Both Sides of the Veil*. The spirit who is being contacted is a recently deceased general who requires help with a machine that allows him to talk to the living. However, the machine is not easily mastered, and the general requires a tutor at first. Although telephones are never mentioned, I suspect the change in metaphoric register because of references to wires that allow communication. The first transcontinental phone call, also made by Alexander Graham Bell,

was in 1915 upon completion of a phone line that extended that far. By 1909, the association between phone lines and instantaneous speech must have been in the air. The general says, “So the casting off of the mere body, the shell, is nothing, it is nothing; it goes to waste but my spirit lives to speak. Without the wires I could not communicate so easily, but with the wires my thoughts are registered clearly, are they not?” See Ann Manning Robbins, *Both Sides of the Veil* (Boston: Sherman, French, 1909), 150.

11. See George J. Bloch, *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Medical and Scientific Writing of F. A. Mesmer, M.D.* (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufman, 1980), 46.

12. *Ibid.*, 35.

13. See *Phaedo* 98c, 109c, and 111b as well as *Timaeus* 58d for Plato on the ether. Thomas Kuhn’s *The Copernican Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) is the classic work on the history of astronomy and includes a very lucid chapter on Aristotle’s ether. Robert Cox’s thesis on the Spiritualist worldview being predicated on a belief in sympathies, or invisible attractions between people and objects, is also apt here.

14. See Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), chaps. 1 and 2.

15. For the best treatment of this, see Crabtree, *ibid.*, chap. 2.

16. *Ibid.*, 65–72.

17. Plato, *Ion* 533d–e. Trans. Paul Woodruff. Many sensible commentators believe that Socrates is mercilessly mocking Ion throughout the dialogue and would question whether any part of the piece should be taken without irony. Shelley, however, seems to have translated the dialogue in earnest and found the portrayal of poets and their inspiration complimentary. The Spiritualists were a mixed bunch in terms of their intellectual gifts and training, but I suspect that many would have followed Shelley’s cues on this.

18. *Ibid.*, 534d.

19. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, “The Esoteric Uses of Electricity,” *Aries* 4, 1 (2004): 87.

20. For the parallels between magnetism and electricity, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 4–5.

21. For an account of these tests, see Earl Wesley Fornell, *The Unhappy Medium: Spiritualism and the Life of Margaret Fox* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 81.

22. See the *New York Times*, July 14, 1860.

23. Fornell, *Unhappy Medium*, 117.

24. Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 230.

25. See Item *i* accompanying Plate I in the preface to Hare’s book. He notes how game the spirits are to try the Spiritoscope even if they haven’t figured out how to work it yet. Robert Hare, *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations* (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1856).

26. See Hare, *ibid.*, 108. The results are disappointing. The messages, while slightly more articulate than most communications, are nearly identical to a hundred other Swedenborg-inspired visions of heaven. We are told that criminals and heathens live on the first sphere but that their ignorance is no more their fault than a mean dog is at fault for having a mean master. Children attend school in the third and fourth spheres, and the British poets dominate the fifth. The seventh is reserved for Seneca, Plato, Socrates, Solon, and “all the philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome,” as well as Jesus and Confucius. The very uniformity of the descriptions, however, serves to buttress Spiritualist claims, since consistency adds to the appearance of objectivity.

27. Craig James Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 12.

28. *Ibid.*, 5–9.

29. *Ibid.*, 103.

30. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 51.

31. The Unitarian-Universalist Historical Society has a very nice and brief biography of Spear on-line at <http://www.uua.org> that includes a short bibliography as well. I am indebted to my aunt Diane Duprey, also of New Bedford, Massachusetts, for finding that for me.

32. See R. Lawrence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 91–93.

33. I am indebted to my student Nell Champoux for the fine paper she wrote on Spear and his machine as well as the excellent bibliography she compiled on Spiritualist machinery, upon which I am relying heavily here.

34. Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism* (New York: Published by the author, 1870), 221.

35. Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Hawthorn, 1970), 172–173.

36. Cited in Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, 9.

37. John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 17.

38. Cited in Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 222.

39. See Brown, *Heyday*, 176, for a discussion of this. S. B. Britten, an important Spiritualist in his own right and editor of a weekly newspaper, appears to have found this cataclysmic ending a little too convenient.

40. Cited in Nancy M. West, “Camera Fiends: Early Photography, Death, and the Supernatural,” *Centennial Review* 40, 1 (1996): 171–172.

41. *Ibid.*, 172.

42. See Robert S. Cox, “The Transportation of American Spirits: Gender, Spirit Photography, and American Culture, 1861–1880,” *Ephemera Journal* 7 (1994): 94.

43. James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and other Rare but Allied Phenomena* (New York: Arno, 1973), 200. Reprint of the 1911 edition.

44. See William H. Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1875), 4–6.
45. Crista Cloutier, “Mumler’s Ghosts,” *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, Clément Chéroux and Andreas Fischer, eds. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 20.
46. The *Times* reprinted a full transcript of the closing arguments. See the *New York Times*, May 4, 1869.
47. Nadis, *Wonder Shows*, 118.
48. Clément Chéroux, “Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment and Belief,” *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, Clément Chéroux and Andreas Fischer, eds. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 46.
49. *Ibid.*, 51.
50. Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, xv–xvi.
51. See the *New York Times*, April 13, 1869.
52. *The Banner of Light*, August 20, 1859.
53. M. A. Oxun (Moses Stainton), “Researches in Spiritualism,” *Human Nature: A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science*, 149.
54. *Ibid.*, 151.
55. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 230–231. For a discussion of photographic representation in colonial contexts, see Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: Studies in Healing and Terror* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
56. I am indebted to my good friend and colleague Geoffrey McVey for not only this excellent observation but also this felicitous phrasing.
57. Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 161.
58. Chéroux, “Ghost Dialectics,” 53.

CHAPTER 4

1. Parts of this section were first published in my article “Deadly Dates: Bodies and Sex in Spiritualist Heaven,” *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffery J. Kripal, eds. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 309–332.
2. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Love in Marriage*, trans. George F. Dole (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992) sections 332, 463, and 276.
3. *Ibid.*, sections 90 and 92.
4. *Ibid.*, 332 and 463.
5. Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 235–236.
6. See Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830–1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 40–50.
7. Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 38.
8. Seidman, *Romantic Longings*, 31.

9. Cited in Seidman, *ibid.*, 44.
10. *Ibid.* Italics are in the original.
11. Plato, *Symposium*, 189c.
12. *Ibid.*, 191b–191d.
13. Swedenborg discusses married angels united as a single body. Though it is unclear to me whether he gets that figure from Genesis or Plato (or quite possibly both), John Patrick Deveney thinks it is the latter, and I am happy to concur. See his note on 382. John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997).
14. *Banner of Light*, November 8, 1862.
15. There is a long history of Judaic commentary making a very similar claim, arguing that the first account of creation, when “In his image he created them, male and female he created them,” (Gen. 1:27) was such a spherical, androgynous creature and the sexual union actually recapitulates the image of God. Although many Spiritualists were familiar with the Kabbalah and some better educated ones with the Talmud, I have found no direct link here, but it is certainly not out of the question. See Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) for a full discussion of this topic.
16. Carlyle Petersilea, *Letters from the Spirit World* (Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1905), 254.
17. *Ibid.*, 255.
18. Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death: A Study of Human Evolution and Transfiguration* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912) 18.
19. This problem gets worse the higher up the spheres one goes, since spirit bodies (usually) become increasingly ephemeral; spirits on the higher echelons are clothed in light and often consume aromas. These reaches where the tactile becomes more elusive, however, tend only to be rumored in heaven. Even such culturally vaunted dead as Shakespeare and Swedenborg reside only on the third to fifth heavens, generally speaking, and the uppermost levels are almost never contacted directly.
20. George Lawton, *The Drama of Life after Death: A Study of the Spiritualist Religion* (New York: Henry Holt, 1932), 115–116.
21. James H. Fletcher, *Letters from Astrea* (New York: Published by the author, 1908), 41–42. Reprinted in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland, 1990), 65.
22. Fletcher, *Letters from Astrea*, 64.
23. *Ibid.*, 65.
24. John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825–1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 97.
25. Andrew Jackson Davis, *A Sacred Book Containing Old and New Gospels Derived and Translated from the Inspirations of Original Saints* (Boston: William White, 1873), 64.
26. See Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy* (Chicago: Advanced Thought, n.d. [1910]), 94 and 51, respectively.

27. He includes a series of ladders of colors, which is reminiscent of Goethe's work on the subject. See Davis, *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* (Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1910), 83–88.
28. Davis, *ibid.*, 89.
29. Plato, *Symposium* 211C.
30. Fletcher, *Letters from Astrea*, 4.
31. Cf. 2 Corinthians 7.
32. Fletcher, *Letters from Astrea*, 41–42.
33. *Ibid.*, 12.
34. *Ibid.*, 35.
35. Petersilea, *Letters from the Spirit World*, 161–162.
36. Most scholars either do not notice or else do not find it interesting that rather than having heaven be a projection of earth (as scholarship frequently characterizes it and for good reason), for the Spiritualists, earth was a poor copy of heaven. One of the few exceptions to this is the on-line Ephemera project, the author of which rightly notes that earth is a second-rate imitation of heaven and that it exists in a temporally later state than heaven which has progressed far beyond it. See <http://www.spirithistory.com/invent.html> for details.
37. *Herald of Progress*, May 17, 1862.
38. Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 9.
39. I am drawing the parameters of what constituted free love very widely here, so that anyone who had an interest in marriage reform would be included in its definition. Amanda Frisken in *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) makes this claim even more strongly.
40. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 131–132.
41. Sears, *Sex Radicals*, 22–23.
42. Spurlock, *Free Love*, 117.
43. Emil F. Ruedebusch, *The Old and the New Ideal: A Solution to That Part of the Social Question which Pertains to Love, Marriage and Sexual Intercourse* (Mayville, Wis.: Published by the author, 1896), 74.
44. Austin Kent, *Free Love: Or, a Philosophical Demonstration of the Non-Exclusive Nature of Connubial Love* (Hopkington, N.Y.: Published by the author, 1857), 25.
45. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
46. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 95.
47. For a frequently heartbreaking account of such difficulties, see Tirzah Miller's diary, *Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*, Robert S. Fogarty, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
48. See John Humphrey Noyes, "Essay on Scientific Propagation," pamphlet (Oneida, N.Y.: published by the Oneida Community, n.d.), 1–2. Noyes begins his argument with a long quotation from the *Republic*, book 5, and meshes Darwin and later thinkers into the "Platonian argument," as he calls it.

49. Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 203.

50. Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church, reached a similar conclusion in the 1830s. Smith determined that angels' not being married in heaven meant that marriages were not performed in heaven; marriages conducted on earth could continue eternally in the afterlife. Although Smith was in fact less concerned with the continuation of sex in the afterlife, the rationale for early polygamy largely focused on the eternal continuation of bonds of kinship and the central importance of marriage to the experience of the hereafter.

51. Bret Carroll has argued that the existence of just such organizations should indicate that Spiritualism was much less amorphous and much better organized than scholarship portrays it. I find his argument ultimately untenable. See his *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* for more information.

52. Most of this section was previously printed in my article, "Sex in the City of God: Free Love and the American Millennium," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15, 2 (2005): 187–208.

53. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Death and the After-Life: Eight Evening Lectures on the Summerland* (Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, [1877] 1911).

54. Victoria Woodhull, "Tried as By Fire; or, The True and the False, Socially" (New York: Woodhull and Claflin, 1874), 17; Victoria Woodhull Martin, "The Elixir of Life; or, Why Do We Die?" (New York: Woodhull and Claflin, 1873), 14.

55. Woodhull, "Tried as By Fire," 19

56. Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution*, 27.

57. Amanda Frisken, "Sex in Politics: Victoria Woodhull as an American Public Woman, 1870–1876," *Journal of Women's History* 12, 1 (2000): 94.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Woodhull Martin, "Elixir of Life," 7.

60. See Nicholas P. Spanos, *Multiple Identities and False Memories: A Sociocognitive Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1996).

61. Woodhull Martin, "Elixir of Life," 15.

62. *Ibid.*, 16.

63. Henry Olcott, "People from the Other World," *The Daily Graphic: An Illustrated Evening Newspaper*, 6: 536 (1874), 182.

64. Woodhull Martin, "Elixir of Life," 15.

65. *Ibid.*, 17.

66. *Ibid.*, 23.

67. See Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 196–197.

68. Emma Hardinge [Britten], *Six Lectures on Theology and Nature*, (N.p.: R. R. Hitt, 1860), 44–45.

69. Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 203–204.

70. See Godwin, *ibid.*, 206–212 and 300–304.

71. Anonymous, *Art Magic, or the Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism* (Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1898 [1876]), 59.

72. Ibid., 60.
73. Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 303.
74. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 12.
75. Ibid., 65.
76. There is great scholarly debate about whether the word “Gnostic” is even appropriate nomenclature for widely disparate groups of early quasi-Christian heterodoxies. Moreover, we have no evidence that anybody in late antiquity would have self-identified as a “Gnostic.” However, that is the language employed in the nineteenth century and appears to be the only intelligible shorthand for a set of beliefs that share a family resemblance. For the naming controversy, see Michael Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).
77. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 214.
78. Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 74–75. See Randolph’s use of the *Timaeus* in his *Pre-Adamite Man: Demonstrating the Existence of the Human race upon this Earth 100,000 Years Ago!* (Toledo, Ohio: Randolph, 1889 [1863]) 132–133. Reprinted by Health Research Books, 1970.
79. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 218.
80. Cited in Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 76.
81. Plato, *Symposium*, 191d.

CHAPTER 5

1. According to Richard Harrison Shyrock, there are no reliable statistics on life span in the seventeenth century other than what can be gleaned from gravestones and ephemera. He claims that estimates put infant mortality at nearly 50 percent but acknowledges that this is contested. See his *Medicine in America: Historical Essays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), chap. 1.
2. See Shyrock, *Medicine in America*, 17.
3. James H. Cassedy, *Medicine in America: A Short History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 11.
4. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1982), 32–33.
5. John S. Haller Jr., *Kindly Medicine: Physio-Medicalism in America, 1836–1911* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 3.
6. I am indebted to Haller’s overview of the American medical landscape for this; see his *Kindly Medicine*, 1–24.
7. John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820–1885* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 37–40.
8. Ibid., 40.
9. Ibid., 86.
10. Starr, *Social Transformation*, 48.

11. George J. Bloch, *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Medical and Scientific Writing of F. A. Mesmer, M.D.* (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufman, 1980), 46.
12. Arthur Wrobel, ed., "Phrenology as Political Science," *Pseudo-Science in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 124.
13. Nelson Sizer, *Forty Years in Phrenology; Embracing Recollections of History, Anecdote, and Experience* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1888), 20 and 61.
14. Marshall Scott Legan, "Hydropathy, or the Water-Cure," *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Arthur Wrobel (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 74.
15. *Ibid.*, 81.
16. David Hackett Fisher, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 275.
17. See James H. Cassedy, *Medicine and American Growth, 1800–1860* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 142, for early use of anesthetics in missions and his *Medicine in America*, 31, for the central role of America in the field of anesthesia.
18. *Herald of Progress*, vol. 3, no. 26, August 1862, 1.
19. *Ibid.*; italics are in the original.
20. "Modern Spiritualism," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1853), 59.
21. *Banner of Light*, January 19, 1861.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Plato, *Timaeus*, 86b, trans. Donald J. Zeyl.
24. *Ibid.*, 88c.
25. *Ibid.*, 90d.
26. The *Timaeus* has a long and tricky-to-follow discussion of numbers and geometry; see 31–33 and 36 for examples. The *Phaedo* as well attests to Plato's dealings with Pythagorean theory, as a number of the men mentioned at Socrates' death scene were known Pythagoreans. See Debra Nails's *People of Plato: A Prosography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002) for what we know about Socrates' companions.
27. The erotic aspects of Kabbalah are far too detailed and complex for me to entertain here, but those interested should see Elliot R. Wolfson's masterwork, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), particularly chaps. 6 and 7.
28. For an excellent overview of Christian Kabbalah, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005) 70–81. His chapter on the Renaissance also clearly delineates Ficino and Pico's role in shaping the esoteric tradition as well as what was at stake for all three monotheisms in claiming esoteric knowledge as their own.
29. See Wouter Hanegraaff, "Emanuel Swedenborg, the Jews, and Jewish Traditions," in *Reuchlin und Seine Erben* (Ostfildern, Germany: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2005), 135–154.

30. Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harbinger of Health; Containing Medical Prescriptions for the Body and Mind* (Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1909), 41–42.

31. *Ibid.*, 219.

32. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178.

33. While Davis has been lost to the run of general American history, consigned to only those pursuits interested in the American counterculture, he remains a person of interest to the history of medicine. Anthony A. Walsh has published an article naming Davis, rather than the Fox sisters, as the rightful progenitor of Spiritualism and as an innovator on magnetism and related pseudo-medical fields. See his “A Note on the Origin of ‘Modern’ Spiritualism,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 28, 2 (April 1973): 167–171.

34. For a very brief overview of the movement, see Eugene Taylor, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 101–105.

35. Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy* (Chicago: Advanced Thought, n.d. [1911]), 353–354.

36. Cited in Robert W. Delp, “Andrew Jackson Davis and Spiritualism,” *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, Arthur Wrobel, ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 110.

37. Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 353.

38. *Ibid.*, 355–356.

39. Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, sections 59–86.

40. *Ibid.*, sections 90–101.

41. It should be noted that several extremely important Kabbalistic concepts are absent in the Christian and quasi-Christian writings of Swedenborg and later Spiritualists. First, I have not seen any of them dwell on the central theological contradiction of *tsimtsum*, or whether God limited his knowledge to allow man freedom of action; spatially, this is related as the divine encompassing all and drawing into itself for the purposes of creating the world. The exception to this is Mary Ann South Atwood. For an excellent discussion of this theological snarl and its relationship to standard rabbinic thinking, see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, Lenn E. Goodman, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 319–351. Similarly, the Christian Kabbalah does not speculate on matters relating to exile and the eventual gathering of the Jews in the restoration, or *tikkun*. In Lurianic Kabbalism, the “breaking of the vessels,” or the sephirot’s inability to contain the divine emanations from Adam Kadmon, is absolutely central to both the explanatory power of Kabbalism and its prescription for the Jews to achieve in the future. Nearly as I can tell, neither the exilic nor the restorative aspects of Kabbalism played any role in Spiritualist understandings of the primordial man, although both do show up in Joseph Smith’s early theology. For a brief but excellent overview of the Lurianic position, see Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, Ralph Manheim, trans. (New York: Schocken, 1965), 109–117. For a speculative

but brilliant exposition of the probable precursors to Adam Kadmon, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 112–122.

42. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 427–428. The italics are in the original.

43. Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, sections 110–115, and the *Arcana Coelestia* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1941), John Faulkner Potts, trans.

44. Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 267–268.

45. Davis, *Harbinger of Health*, 12.

46. Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 135.

47. *Ibid.*, 121–122.

48. *Ibid.*, 119.

49. Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 130.

50. *Ibid.*, 55.

51. Davis's cosmology (undoubtedly inadvertently) represents a reconciliation between Dante's view of humanity as central to heaven and earth and Copernican notions of astronomy. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 112–114.

52. Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 124.

53. While I acknowledge the evidence to the contrary, overall I am aligned with the pro-body reading of Plato. Even in the *Phaedo*, perhaps his most critical work concerning the place of the body, Plato acknowledges the necessity of the senses to increasingly apprehend the truth. The body is the necessary beginning for experience to become abstracted in philosophy.

54. *Ibid.*, 278–279.

55. Plato, *The Symposium and The Phaedrus: The Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 48.

56. H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1972), 35. All italics are in the original.

57. *Ibid.*, 39.

58. Anonymous [Emma Hardinge Britten], *Art Magic: or, the Mundane, Sub-Mundane, and Supra-Mundane Spiritism* (Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1898 [1876]), 215–216.

59. *Ibid.*, 364.

60. Anonymous, *Ghost Land, or Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism*, Emma Hardinge Britten ed. and trans. (Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1897), 263.

61. *Ibid.*, 262.

62. See Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 165–170, for a concise history of alchemy and the problems associated with dating it.

63. See Lawrence M. Principe and Lloyd De Witt, *Transmutations: Alchemy in Art: Selected Works from the Eddleman and Fisher Collections at the Chemical Heritage Foundation* (N.p.: Chemical Heritage Foundation, 2005).

64. See, for example, Karen-Claire Voss's argument that spiritual alchemy was a purposeful self-designation of practitioners who experimented with all aspects of material alchemy and added a mystical component to their practice. Voss, "Spiritual Alchemy," in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 147–181.

65. Godwin, 236–238.

66. Mary Ann South Atwood, *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, reprinted as *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy* (New York: Julian, 1960 [1850]), 342.

67. *Ibid.*, 344–345.

68. *Ibid.*, 352.

69. Alexander Wilder, "New Platonism and Alchemy" (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons, 1869). Reprinted by the Secret Doctrine Reference Series (Minneapolis: Wizards Bookshelf, 1975), 30.

CHAPTER 6

1. *Harper's Weekly*, April 4, 1857, 210.

2. The nomenclature changes rapidly over the course of a century.

Nineteenth-century "schizophrenia" denoted three or more apparent personalities with inconsistent memory between them. Contemporary schizophrenia bears no relationship to this group of symptoms. Multiple personality disorder has been replaced in the DSM IV by "dissociative identity disorder," but I am retaining the slightly older term to remain consistent with the scholars I cite.

3. Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), 26. "Psychiatry" is a relatively new term that is used to denote a doctor who uses psychotherapy and who also can prescribe drugs. "Psychology" is generally used in the nineteenth-century material but Shorter uses psychiatry to distinguish medical doctors from those whose practices were restricted to counseling.

4. *Ibid.*, 46.

5. For the seminal work in this area, see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

6. *Phaedrus*, 249d, A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, trans.

7. Cited in Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 10.

8. See David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 34–35.

9. Shorter, *History of Psychiatry*, 11–12.

10. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 49.

11. See Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 28.
12. Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad among Us*, 29.
13. See Grob, *The Mad among Us*, 30, for a discussion of millennialism and mental illness.
14. For a discussion of this phenomenon, including how Tuke and others disputed its prime tenets, see Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 113–119.
15. Ellen Dwyer, *Homes for the Mad: Life Inside Two Nineteenth-Century Insane Asylums* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 14.
16. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
17. See Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 130–131.
18. See the appendices of Grob's *Mental Institutions*, 371.
19. *Ibid.*, 116.
20. Grob, 182.
21. *Ibid.*, 124.
22. *Ibid.*, 232.
23. *Ibid.*, 233.
24. R. L. Parsons, "Nomenclature in Psychiatry. Monomania or Oligomania, which? Paranoia, what?" *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* (April 1887): 248.
25. Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard, excerpted in *Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls, 1840–1945*, Jeffrey L. Geller and Maxine Harris, eds. (New York: Anchor, 1994), 58–59.
26. Elizabeth P. W. Packard, *Modern Persecutions, or Married Woman's Liabilities*, Vol. 2 (N.p., 1873), 9.
27. *Ibid.*, 80.
28. *Ibid.*, 81.
29. See, for example, William A. Hammond, *In Certain Conditions of Nervous Derangement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881), 59–66.
30. *Ibid.*, 59.
31. William Sims Bainbridge, "Religious Insanity in America: The Official Nineteenth-Century Theory," *Sociological Analysis* 45, 3 (Autumn 1984): 237.
32. *Ibid.*, 232. He infers this conclusion from the unusually low rate of cure attributed to the category of masturbation. I am omitting his data gathered from Bloomington, Illinois, from this discussion as it was collected prior to the advent of Spiritualism. The rate of insanity attributed to religion at large, however, remains constant in that pool as well.
33. Anonymous, "Case of Mania with the Delusions and Phenomena of Spiritualism" *Journal of Insanity* 16, 3 (January 1860): 337.
34. For the best discussion of Puységur and this moment in the evolution of understanding the self, see Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 38–47.
35. Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 11. For the record, I do object to Fuller,

following Ellenberger, characterizing Puységur's achievement as the "discovery" of the unconscious, by which he means a quasi-Freudian psychic state that manifests certain predilections across time and space. I prefer the more circumspect construction of the unconscious or even its creation.

36. Ibid., 18.

37. See *ibid.*, 22–26.

38. For more details, see Alan Gauld's magnum opus, *A History of Hypnotism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), particularly chaps. 8 and 9.

39. James M. Braid, *Braid on Hypnotism*, reprinted in a revised edition by Arthur Edward Waite (New York: Julian, 1960), 86. This work was originally titled *Neurypnology; or, the Rationale of Nervous Sleep* and was renamed in subsequent printings.

40. Edward M. Brown, "Neurology and Spiritualism in the 1870s," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 57, 4 (Winter 1983): 567.

41. For a recent and very extensive discussion of the influence of Universalism in general and John Bovee Dods in particular on Davis and Spiritualism writ large, see John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House, 2004).

42. See Gauld, *History of Hypnotism*, 188, for a discussion of Dods's and Grimes's influence on American conceptions of hypnosis.

43. Ibid., 188.

44. Brown, "Neurology and Spiritualism in the 1870s," 567.

45. See William Hammond, *Spiritualism and Allied Causes and Conditions of Nervous Derangement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1876) for these and more diagnoses. As an interesting case study in the battle of naming, Spiritualists as well saw the Salem girls as precursors to their movement but of course in a positive light: they were untrained mediums who lacked guidance in their craft. See Allen Putnam, *Witchcraft of New England Explained by Modern Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1888).

46. Cited in Brown, "Neurology and Spiritualism in the 1870s," 572.

47. Robert Hare, *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations Demonstrating the Existence of Spirits and Their Communion with Mortals* (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1856), 390–91.

48. Ibid., 395.

49. Ibid., 395.

50. Parts of this section were previously published in my article "From Electricity to Ectoplasm: Hysteria in American Spiritualism," *Aries: A Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 3, 1 (2003): 55–81.

51. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Mental Disorders; or Diseases of the Brain and Nerves, Developing the Origin and Philosophy of Mania, Insanity, and Crime, with Full Directions for their Treatment and Cure* (Boston: William White, 1871), 224.

52. Davis, *Mental Disorders*, 262–263.

53. A student of mine has written compellingly on this issue, arguing that the sorts of spirits one encountered were predicated on the moral fortitude of

the medium. See Christa Shusko, “Active Mediums in American Spiritualism,” unpublished paper.

54. For an excellent treatment of the changing definitions of hysteria, see Elizabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 105–118. Bronfen agrees with Edward Shorter’s assessment that “the unconscious, ‘not wishing to make itself ridiculous, brings itself medically up to date’” (115). The implication here is that hysteria itself is a floating signifier of interest predominantly for what cultural mores it is reflecting at any historical moment.

55. The association of hysteria and what we now call hypnotism was made as early as 1787, nearly a century before its more famous articulations by Jean Charcot and later Sigmund Freud. See Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 127.

56. E. W. Sprague, *Spirit Mediumship* (Detroit, Mich.: published by the author, 1912). Reprinted in Gary Ward, ed., *Spiritualism*, Vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1990), 33.

57. Hudson Tuttle, *The Arcana of Spiritualism* (Manchester, England: Two Worlds, 1900), 10–11.

58. Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 135–136.

59. Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 83.

60. Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, 209.

61. See Showalter, *Female Malady*, 148, for Freud’s discussion of Charcot and 147–154 for his use of photography.

62. Janet was invited to deliver a series of lectures on hysteria at Harvard, which were published in 1907. Freud’s work on hysteria was also translated speedily and brought to America. See Pierre Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), particularly chapter 4, for a discussion of multiple personalities in hysterics.

63. Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. A. A. Brill (Boston: Beacon, 1937), 1–13. I use the outdated translation on purpose, since the Brill version was circulated at a very early date among American Spiritualists, and this is the version they were reacting to.

64. *Ibid.*, 10.

65. S. E. D. Shortt, “Physicians and Psychics: The Anglo-American Medical Response to Spiritualism, 1870–1890,” *Journal of the History of Medicine* 39 (July 1984): 354–355.

66. F. W. H. Myers, “The Subliminal Consciousness,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 2 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), 305.

67. Frederic W. H. Myers, “Multiplex Personality,” *Nineteenth Century* 20 (November 1886), excerpted in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830–1890*, Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 137. All italics are in the original.

68. F. W. H. Myers, “The Daemon of Socrates,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (London: Trübner, 1889), 538.

69. *Ibid.*, 543.

This page intentionally left blank

Source Materials

- Anonymous [Emma Hardinge Britten]. *Art Magic, or the Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism*. Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1898 [1876].
- Anonymous. "Case of Mania with the Delusions and Phenomena of Spiritualism." *Journal of Insanity* 16, 3 (January 1860): 321–340.
- Anonymous. *Ghost Land, or Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism*. Ed. and Trans. Emma Hardinge Britten. Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1897.
- Atwood, Mary Ann. *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*. Reprinted as *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*. New York: Julian Press, 1960 [1850].
- Barret, Harrison D., ed. *Life Work of Mrs. Cora L. V. Richmond*. Chicago: Hack and Anderson, 1895.
- Blavatsky, H. P. *Isis Unveiled: A Master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. 2 vols. Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1972.
- Braid, James M. *Braid on Hypnotism*. Reprinted by Arthur Edward Waite. New York: Julian Press, 1960 [1843].
- Breuer, Joseph and Sigmund Freud. *Studies in Hysteria*. Trans. A. A. Brill. Boston: Beacon, 1937.
- Carpenter, Edward. *The Drama of Love and Death*. New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1912.
- Coates, James. *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare but Allied Phenomena*. New York: Arno, 1973 [1911].
- Davis, Andrew Jackson. *Death and the Afterlife*. Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1911.

- Davis, Andrew Jackson. *The Harbinger of Health: Containing Medical Prescriptions for the Body and Mind*. Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1909.
- . *The Harmonial Philosophy*. Chicago: Advanced Thought, n.d. [1910].
- . *Mental Disorders; or Diseases of the Brain and Nerves, Developing the Origin and Philosophy of Mania, Insanity, and Crime, with Full Directions for Their Treatment and Cure*. Boston: William White, 1871.
- . *A Sacred Book Containing Old and New Gospels Derived and Translated from the Inspirations of Original Saints*. Boston: William White, 1873.
- . *A Stellar Key to the Summerland*. Rochester, N.Y.: Austin, 1910.
- Edmonds, John W., and George T. Dexter. *Spiritualism*. 2 vols. New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1855.
- Emerson, R. W. *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*. London: John Chapman, 1850.
- Fletcher, James H. *Letters from Astrea*. New York: Published by the author, 1908.
Reprinted in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*. Ed. Gary L. Ward. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Hammond, William A. *In Certain Conditions of Nervous Derangement*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881.
- Hardinge, Emma [Britten]. *Modern American Spiritualism*. New York: Published by the author, 1870.
- . *Six Lectures on Theology and Nature*. N.p.: R. R. Hitt, 1860.
- Hare, Robert. *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations: Demonstrating the Existence of Spirits and their Communion with Mortals*. New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1856.
- Hatch, Cora L.V. *Discourses on Religion, Morals, Philosophy, and Metaphysics*. New York: B. F. Hatch, 1858.
- Janet, Pierre. *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.
- Kent, Austin. *Free Love: Or, a Philosophical Demonstration of the Non-Exclusive Nature of Connubial Love*. Hopkington, New York: Published by the author, 1857.
- Lawton, George. *The Drama of Life after Death: A Study of the Spiritualist Religion*. New York: Henry Holt, 1932.
- Longley, Mary T. *Teachings and Illustrations as They Emanate from the Spirit World*. Chicago: Progressive Thinker, 1908.
- Marryat, Florence. *The Spirit World*. New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894.
- . "The Subliminal Consciousness." *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. Vol. 2. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892.
- Miller, Tirzah. *Desire and Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*. Robert S. Fogarty, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Mumler, William H. *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography*. Boston: Colby and Rich, 1875.
- Myers, F. W. H. "The Daemon of Socrates." *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. London: Trübner, 1889.
- Noyes, John Humphrey. "Essay on Scientific Propagation." Pamphlet. (Oneida, N.Y.: Oneida Community, n.d.), 1–2.
- Olcott, Henry. "People from the Other World." *The Daily Graphic: An Illustrated Evening Newspaper* 6, 536 (1874).

- Owen, Robert Dale. *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1882.
- Packard, Elizabeth P. W. *Modern Persecutions, or Married Woman's Liabilities*. Vol. 2. (N.p., 1873).
- Parsons, R. L. "Nomenclature in Psychiatry. Monomania or Oligomania, which? Paranoia, what?" *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* (April 1887): 247–255.
- Peebles, J. M. *What Is Spiritualism? Who Are These Spiritualists? And What Can Spiritualism Do for the World?* Battle Creek, Mich.: Peebles, 1910.
- Petersilea, Carlyle. *Letters of the Spirit World. Written through the mediumship of C. P., by his father Franz P., and other spirit celebrities*. Chicago: Progressive Thinkers, 1905.
- Putnam, Allen. *Witchcraft of New England Explained by Modern Spiritualism*. Boston: Colby and Rich, 1888.
- Randolph, Paschal Beverly. *Pre-Adamite Man: Demonstrating the Existence of the Human race upon this Earth 100,000 Years Ago!* Toledo, Ohio: Randolph, 1889 [1863]. Reprinted by Health Research Books, 1970.
- Robbins, Ann Manning. *Both Sides of the Veil*. Boston: Sherman, French, 1909.
- Ruedebusch, Emil F. *The Old and the New Ideal: A Solution to That Part of the Social Question which Pertains to Love, Marriage, and Sexual Intercourse*. Mayville, Wis.: Published by the author, 1896.
- Shindler, Mary Dana. *A Southerner among the Spirits*. Memphis, Tenn.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1877.
- Sizer, Nelson. *Forty Years in Phrenology: Embracing Recollections of History, Anecdote, and Experience*. New York: Fowler and Wells, 1888.
- Sprague, E. W. *Spirit Mediumship*. Detroit, Mich.: Published by author, 1912. Reprinted in *Spiritualism*. Vol. 1. Ed. Gary Ward. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. Trans. John Faulkner Potts. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1941 [1756].
- . *A Compendium of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*. Ed. Samuel M. Warren. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1974.
- . *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Seen and Heard*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1876 [1758].
- . *Love in Marriage: A Translation of Emanuel Swedenborg's "The Sensible Joy in Married Love; and the Foolish Pleasures of Illicit Love."* New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992 [1768].
- Tuttle, Hudson. *Arcana of Spiritualism: A Manual of Spiritual Science and Philosophy*. Manchester, England: Two Worlds, 1900.
- Wilder, Alexander. *New Platonism and Alchemy*. Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons, 1869. Reprinted by the Wizards Bookshelf, Secret Doctrine Reference Series, 1975.
- Woodhull, Victoria. *The Elixir of Life; or, Why Do We Die?* New York: Woodhull and Claflin, 1873.
- . *Tried as By Fire; or, The True and the False, Socially*. New York: Woodhull and Claflin, 1874.

This page intentionally left blank

Bibliography

- Abzug, R. H. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Albanese, Catherine L. *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Anderson, Paul R. *Platonism in the Midwest*. Philadelphia: Temple University Publications, 1963.
- Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.
- Bainbridge, William Sims. "Religious Insanity in America: The Official Nineteenth-Century Theory." *Sociological Analysis* 45, 3 (Autumn 1984): 223–239.
- Barkun, Michael. *Disaster and the Millennium*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- Blaise, Clark. *Time Lord: Sir Sanford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.
- Bloch, George J. *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Medical and Scientific Writing of F. A. Mesmer, M.D.* Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufman, 1980.
- Boyarín, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Brandon, Ruth. *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Knopf, 1983.
- Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: Beacon, 1989.

- Bronfen, Elisabeth. *The Knotted Subject*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Brown, Edward M. "Neurology and Spiritualism in the 1870s." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 57, 4 (Winter 1983): 563–577.
- Brown, Slater. *The Heyday of Spiritualism*. New York: Hawthorn, 1970.
- Buescher, John B. *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience*. Boston: Skinner House, 2004.
- Carroll, Bret. *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Casey, Edward S. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Cassedy, James H. *Medicine and American Growth, 1800–1860*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986.
- . *Medicine in America: A Short History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Ch  roux, Cl  ment. "Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment and Belief." In *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*. Eds. Cl  ment Ch  roux and Andreas Fischer. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Christ, Carol. "Painting the Dead: Portraiture and Necrophilia in Victorian Art and Poetry." *Death and Representation*. Eds. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Cloutier, Crista. "Mumler's Ghosts." In *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*. Eds. Cl  ment Ch  roux and Andreas Fischer. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Coffin, Margaret M. *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1976.
- Cook, James W. *The Arts of Deception*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Coul  ano, Ioan. *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Cox, Robert S. *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.
- . "The Transportation of American Spirits: Gender, Spirit Photography, and American Culture, 1861–1880." *Ephemera Journal* 7 (1994): 94.
- Crabtree, Adam. *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Delp, Robert W. "Andrew Jackson Davis and Spiritualism." In *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*. Ed. Arthur Wrobel. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987.
- Deveney, John Patrick. *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

- Douglas, Ann. "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830–1880." In *Death in America*. Ed. David Stannard. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975.
- Dwyer, Ellen. *Homes for the Mad: Life Inside Two Nineteenth-Century Insane Asylums*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Farrell, James J. *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Fisher, David Hackett. *Growing Old in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Fornell, Earl Wesley. *The Unhappy Medium: Spiritualism and the Life of Margaret Fox*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964.
- Foster, Lawrence. *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
- Friskin, Amanda. "Sex in Politics: Victoria Woodhull as an American Public Woman, 1870–1876." *Journal of Women's History* 12, 1 (2000): 89–111.
- . *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Fuller, Robert C. *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- Gabay, Alfred J. *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath*. West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2005.
- Gauld, Alan. *A History of Hypnotism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Geller, Jeffrey L., and Maxine Harris, eds. In *Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls, 1840–1945*. New York: Anchor, 1994.
- Gilman, Sander. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Godwin, Joscelyn. *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. "The Esoteric Uses of Electricity." *Aries: A Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 4, 1 (2004): 69–90.
- Grafton, Anthony. *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Grob, Gerald N. *The Mad among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- . *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*. New York: Free Press, 1973.
- Gross, David. *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.
- Gutierrez, Cathy. "From Electricity to Ectoplasm: Hysteria in American Spiritualism." *Aries: A Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 3, 1 (2003): 55–81.
- . "Sex in the City of God: Free Love and the American Millennium." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15, 2 (2005): 187–208.
- Hacking, Ian. *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995.

- Haller, John S. Jr. *Kindly Medicine: Physio-Medicalism in America, 1836–1911*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter. "Emanuel Swedenborg, the Jews, and Jewish Traditions." *Reuchlin und Seine Erben*. Ostfildern, Germany: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2005.
- . *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Hankins, Thomas L., and Robert J. Silverman. *Instruments and the Imagination*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hawke, David Freeman. *Nuts and Bolts of the Past: A History of American Technology, 1776–1860*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Hazen, Craig James. *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Idel, Moshe. "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance." In *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*. Ed. Lenn E. Goodman. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- . *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Kerr, Howard. *Mediums, Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850–1900*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.
- Klaw, Spencer. *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community*. New York: Penguin, 1993.
- Kuhn, Thomas. *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992 [1957].
- Laderman, Gary. "A History of Death in Antebellum, Anglo-Protestant Communities of the Northeast." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, 1 (1995): 36–37.
- . *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799–1883*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Legan, Marshall Scott. "Hydropathy, or the Water-Cure." In *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*. Ed. Arthur Wrobel. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987.
- Leventhal, Herbert. *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America*. New York: New York University Press, 1976.
- Lystra, Karen. *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Matsuda, Matt K. *The Memory of the Modern*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Meyer, [sic] Frederick W. H. "Multiplex Personality." In *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830–1890*. Eds. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Moore, R. Lawrence. *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- . *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Nails, Debra. *People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.
- Nadis, Fred. *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.
- . *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*. Trans. William Cobb. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Principe, Lawrence M., and Lloyd De Witt. *Transmutations: Alchemy in Art: Selected Works from the Eddleman and Fisher Collections at the Chemical Heritage Foundation*. N.p.: Chemical Heritage Foundation, 2005.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. 2 vols. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Rorabaugh, W. J. *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Rossum, Gerhard Dohrn-Van. *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*. Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Rothman, David J. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.
- Ryan, Mary. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790–1865*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Schacter, Daniel L. *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Scholem, Gershom. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken, 1965.
- Sears, Hal D. *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977.
- Seidman, Steven. *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830–1980*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Shortt, S. E. D. "Physicians and Psychics: The Anglo-American Medical Response to Spiritualism, 1870–1890." *Journal of the History of Medicine* 39 (July 1984): 339–355.
- Shorter, Edward. *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
- Shumaker, Wayne. *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

- Shyrock, Richard Harrison. *Medicine in America: Historical Essays*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966.
- Spanos, Nicholas P. *Multiple Identities and False Memories: A Sociocognitive Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1996.
- Spurlock, John C. *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825–1860*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.
- [Stainton, Moses], M. A. Oxun. *Human Nature: A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science*.
- Starr, Paul. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. N.p.: Basic Books, 1982.
- Stuckrad, Kocku von. *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*. London: Equinox, 2005.
- Taussig, Michael. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: Studies in Healing and Terror*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Taves, Ann. *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Taylor, Eugene. *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999.
- Taylor, Jenny Bourne, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds. *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830–1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Urban, Hugh. *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- . *The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Secrets in the Bush Administration*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.
- Versluis, Arthur. *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- . *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.
- Voss, Karen-Claire. "Spiritual Alchemy." In *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*. Eds. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Walsh, Anthony A. "A Note on the Origin of 'Modern' Spiritualism." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 28, 2 (April 1973): 167–171.
- Warner, John Harley. *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820–1885*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Waquet, Francoise. *Latin: Or the Empire of a Sign*. London: Verso, 2001.
- Wessinger, Catherine Lowman. *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism*. N.p.: Edwin Mellen, 1988.
- West, Nancy M. "Camera Fiends: Early Photography, Death, and the Supernatural," *Centennial Review* 40, 1 (1996): 171–172.
- White, Mary Blount. *Letters from the Other Side: With Love, Harry and Helen*. Hinesburg, Vt.: Upper Access, 1987.
- Whitrow, G. J. *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day*. New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1988.
- Williams, Michael. *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

- Wolfson, Elliot R. *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- Wrobel, Arthur, "Phrenology as Political Science." In *Pseudo-Science in Nineteenth-Century America*. Ed. Arthur Wrobel. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987.
- Yates, Frances A. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- . *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

This page intentionally left blank

Index

- Adam Kadmon, 122, 124, 128–129,
137–138 (*see also* Grand Man)
- Agrippa, Cornelius, 120
- alchemy, 6, 136, 138–141
- Alcott, William, 86
- allopathy, 113
- American Renaissance, 3, 40,
132, 168
- androgyny, 82–86
in Aristophanes, 82–83, 84, 85,
90, 109
Biblical, 83
- angels, 89, 138
sex life of, 77
- animal magnetism, 50–51, 53,
108, 127, 157–158, 174
esoteric uses of, 51, 158–159
healing properties of, 115–116,
125
See also mesmerism; trance
states
- apocalypticism, 4–6, 102, 175–177
- Aristophanes, 82–86, 109
- Aristotle, 50
- Astrea (spirit), 37, 88–90
- astrology, 6, 51
- asylums, 143–146, 148–157
and ethnic groups, 152
and religions, 152
and Spiritualists, 155, 156–157
treatments of women in, 150,
153–155, 166
See also insanity
- Atwood, Mary Ann South, 139–140
- automata, 47, 61
- Bacon, Francis, 59
- Barnum, P.T., 47, 66
- Beecher, Henry Ward, 154
- Benjamin, Walter, 73
- Blaise, Clark, 45–46
- Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna, 34,
136–137
- Blount, Harry (spirit), 11, 24
- body
cosmological significance
of, 105–106, 111, 120–124,
126, 128–129, 131–132, 135,
138, 141 (*see also* doctrine of
correspondences)
harmony of, 51, 114–115
in heaven, 89–90
in Plato, 120–121, 131–135, 141
in relation to the soul, 124–126,
141, 177
- Braid, James, 159–160
- Braude, Ann, 92
- Breuer, Josef, 167–168
- Britten, Emma Hardinge, 62–63,
104–105, 106–107, 138, 141

- Britten, William, 105
 Brown, Charlotte (spirit), 72
 Brown, Slater, 62
 Bruno, Giordano, 39, 120
 Buchan, William, 113
 Buguet, Édouard, 69–71
- Calvinism, 13–15, 29, 141
 Carpenter, Edward, 36, 83
 Cartesian worldview, 77
 and dualism, 21, 23–24, 128–130, 141
 cemeteries, 18
 Charcot, Jean-Martin, 166–167
 Chéroux, Clément, 68–69
 children, 16, 78, 79, 90, 97, 101, 109
 death of, 13–15, 65, 155–156
 in heaven, 27
 Christian Science, 116–117
 Christianity, 60, 99, 102, 117, 136, 150, 154, 164
 as compatible with Spiritualism, 30
 Spiritualist critique of, 29, 101, 141
 Cicero, 29, 38–39
 Claflin, Tennessee, 98
 classical world
 imagination of, 3, 175
 as legitimization, 114, 118–119, 136, 173
 Coates, James, 69–70
 commemoration, 13, 15
 conspiracy
 and Christianity, 136–137
 theorists, 9, 136–137
 Cook, James, 47–48
 cosmology, 53, 104, 111, 120
 Renaissance, 6, 21, 53, 104, 120, 132, 137–138, 177
 Couliano, Ioan, 131–132
 Cox, Robert, 49
 cremation, 11
 crime in heaven, 29, 31
 criminals, 32, 34, 99–100
 in heaven, 27, 31–33, 41–42
- Davis, Andrew Jackson, 20, 24, 39, 44, 61, 63, 86–87, 94, 98, 107, 111, 117–118, 120, 124–127, 130–135, 160
 dead, 61, 98
 communication with, 7, 25, 68, 171, 177
 memory of the living, 11, 17
 not perfected, 7, 23–24, 98
 See also spirits of the dead, communication with
 death, 65, 103, 176
 of children, 13, 65, 155–156
 commemoration of, 13
 democratization, 6, 59
 of medicine, 113
 of Protestantism, 14
 Deveney, John Patrick, 63, 106–107
 Dexter, George, 25–28
 disease
 as caused by ignorance, 119, 124, 130, 133 (*see also* sin)
 mental versus physical, 119–120
 spiritual, 126–127, 130
 divorce
 law, 90–92
 reform of, 90–92
 Dix, Dorothea, 151
 doctrine of correspondences, 20–21, 87, 126–129, 136, 141
 Dodds, John Bovee, 160
 Douglass, Frederick, 61, 98
 Dowling, [Hon. Justice], 66
- Eddy, Mary Baker, 116–117
 Edmonds, [Judge] John, 25–28, 31–33
 Egypt, 136–137, 140
 electricity, 4, 50, 52–53, 56, 60
 Eliade, Mircea, 139
 elixir of life, 140 (*see also* alchemy)
 emanations, 137–138
 embalming, 11
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 8, 34
 empiricism, 7, 46, 59–60, 65, 68, 114, 166, 168
 Enlightenment, 21, 48, 59, 114, 149
 esotericism, 6, 20–21, 53, 61, 104, 120, 124, 127, 136, 139, 141, 170
 Esquirol, Jean-Etienne, 153
 ethics, 34, 171, 177
 of the dead, 25, 28–34
 eugenics, 96–97
 Ezekiel, book of, 122, 138
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 139
 Ficino, Marsilio, 120, 123
 forgetting, 24, 28, 37, 43–44

- Forms, Platonic, 40–44, 94
 Fornell, Earl, 54
 Foster, Lawrence, 96
 Foucault, Michel, 144–145
 Fox, Margaret, 54
 Fox sisters, 8, 126
 Franklin, Benjamin, 53, 60, 62
 free love, 86, 91–98, 103
 as marriage reform, 92
 Freemasons, 126, 136
 Freud, Sigmund, 33, 166–168, 169
 Frisken, Amanda, 99–101
 funerals, commercialization of, 17–18
 future, 75, 81
 as perfect, 6, 159

 Galen, 114
 Gall, Franz Josef, 116
 Geldern, [Dr.] Charles von, 117–118
 Gilman, Sander, 33, 144
 Gnostics, 140
 Godwin, Joscelyn, 104–106, 124, 139
 Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, 53
 Grand Man, 124, 127–130, 138, 175
 (see also Adam Kadmon)
 Greeley, Horace, 154
 Griffing, Jane R., 90–91
 Grimke, Angelina, 81–82
 Grob, Gerald, 147, 152
 Gross, David, 33

 Hacking, Ian, 165, 166
 Haller, John S., 113
 Hammond, [Dr.] William, 156, 161
 Hanegraaff, Wouter, 4, 20, 124, 128–129
 Hankins, Thomas, 57, 73
 Hare, Robert, 56–61, 162–163
 harmonial philosophy, 130–135
 Hatch, Cora, 14, 28–29, 53–54
 Hazen, Craig James, 59–60
 heaven, 7, 11, 20–24, 60, 75, 78, 89–90, 128, 141, 174
 all-inclusive, 4, 98, 171, 176
 multiple, 21–22, 119, 133, 163
 social life of, 23, 175
 hell, 23, 29, 78, 141
 as destination for children, 14–15
 nonexistence of, 4, 9, 29, 98, 104, 119, 175

 hermeticism, 6, 38, 53, 82, 120, 124–127, 132, 135–136, 140–141 (see also esotericism)
 Hicks, John, 54–55
 history, 12, 28, 75
 as legitimizing, 19, 118–119
 homeopathy, 113, 116, 118, 126
 hydropathy, 116, 118
 hypnosis, 159–160, 162, 164, 168
 as medicalization of animal magnetism, 51, 159
 hysteria, 144, 156, 162–164, 166–168

 Idel, Moshe, 124
 insanity, 146–150, 170
 escalation of, 145–146, 151–152
 and law, 153–155
 and religion, 146, 154–157, 161
Ion, 52–53

 Janet, Pierre, 167
 Judaism, 121, 123, 132, 137, 140
 Jung, C.G., 139

 Kabbalah, 120–124, 135–141
 Christian Kabbalah, 123–124, 132
 influence on Swedenborg, 128–130
 in the *Zohar*, 122
 Kant, Immanuel, 139
 Kardec, Allen, 34–35, 74
 Kent, Austin, 94
 Kepler, Johannes, 50
 Kern, Stephen, 60
 Klaw, Spencer, 97

 ladders, 6, 21, 87, 98
 of love, 133
 Masonic, 88
 Neoplatonic, 88, 122, 132–135, 174, 175
 language, 168
 in heaven, 22, 23, 40
 use of Greek and Latin, 8, 57, 59
 use of Hebrew, 22
 Lawton, George, 84
 Lee, [Mother] Ann, 95–96, 155
 Legan, Marshall Scott, 116
 Lincoln, Abraham, 26, 105
 literacy, 6
 Longley, Mary T., 37, 88

- Louis (pseudonym), 105, 106–107, 138, 141
- love, 77–109, 175
as mediator, 131–135
medical benefits of, 111
- Love in Marriage*, 77–78
- Lystra, Karen, 81
- machines, 46, 49–50, 56, 64, 68, 73–75
Spiritualist machines, 48, 57–58, 62–65
- madness. *See* insanity
- Maelzel, Johann Nepomul, 47
- magic, 68, 74, 138, 141
as erotic, 131
ritual magic, 104
sex magic, 107–108
- magicians, 120, 131–132, 136
- magnetism, 5, 51–53, 62, 66, 89, 101, 119
in Plato, 52
- marriage, 77–84, 86–97, 99–103, 108–109
eternal, 77–78, 83–87, 90–91, 109
as legal prostitution, 99–102
- Marryat, Florence, 29–31
- Marx, Karl, 98
- Mather, Cotton, 147
- Matsuda, Matt, 28
- medicine, 33, 51, 112–141
botanical, 114
faith as, 116–117 (*see also* Christian Science)
literature on, 111, 113, 125–126
practitioners, 111–115, 127
and Spiritualists, 111–112, 115–120, 124–127, 160, 170
theories of, 113–117, 124–126
See also democratization; love
- mediums, 7, 49–50, 52–59, 61–63, 65, 68–69, 71–72, 75, 88–89, 92, 101–102, 104–105, 125, 136
- mediumship, 51, 56, 69, 102, 125
and insanity, 143–144, 161, 163–168
- Melville, Herman, 45
- memory, 11, 28, 166, 168–169
of the dead, 18, 73
as dual, 22–23, 36, 37
in heaven, 20–24
as instrument of judgment, 23, 30–32, 40
memory theaters, 38–44
as traumatic, 33, 167–168
- Mesmer, Franz Anton, 7, 50–51, 108, 115, 130, 157–158, 159, 174
- mesmerism, 51, 68, 114–115, 118, 124–126, 136, 159, 161, 164–165
- middle class, 4, 14, 19, 47, 79–80, 91, 98, 109, 112, 146
morality of, 115, 149
- millennialism, 5, 19, 101, 150, 176
- Mirandola, Pico della, 123
- monomania, 144, 153, 154–157
- Moore, R. Lawrence, 46
- moral management, 149, 151
and health, 115, 119
- mourning. *See* Victorian mores
- multiple personality syndrome, 144
- Mumler, William H., 65–66, 69
- Murray, John, 45
- Myers, Frederic W.H., 169–171
- mysticism, 20, 108, 175
Jewish, 121, 132 (*see also* Kabbalah)
Pythagorean, 122
- myth, in Plato, 8, 83
- Nadis, Fred, 46–47, 68
- National Association of American Spiritualists, 98
- Neoplatonism, 7, 50, 82, 120–124, 128, 131–133, 136, 139, 141, 171
- neurasthenia, 144
- novels, 122
- Noyes, John Humphrey, 95–97
- Oneida Community, 95–96, 103, 150
male continence, 96
stirpiculture, 97
- otherness, 4, 33–34, 175
- Packard, Elizabeth, 153–155, 157
- Parsons, R.L., 153
- Petersilea, Franz (spirit), 90
- Phaedo*, 35, 50
- Phaedrus*, 8, 35, 43, 147
- philosophy, 35, 37, 125, 126
Neoplatonic, 6, 50, 174, 176 (*see also* Neoplatonism)
Platonic, 35, 174
- photography, 65, 166
of the dead, 13, 64
fraud, 66, 69
spirit photography, 64–75

phrenology, 114–116, 160
 Pierpont, Father (spirit), 84–85
 Pinel, Phillippe, 148–149, 153, 166
 Plato, 7–9, 29, 35, 37, 40, 43, 84, 86, 88, 96–97, 106, 109, 123, 136–137, 174–175
 on the body, 82, 120–121, 126–127, 132–135, 141
 and eugenics, 96–97
 on love, 82, 109, 133, 147
 and madness, 52, 147
 and magnetism, 50
 theory of recollection, 13, 23, 35–36, 43–44, 134–135, 147, 170, 174
 See also Forms, Platonic; memory
 Plotinus, 140
 postmillennialism, 12
 Poyen, Charles, 158–159
 premillennialism, 12
 progress, 9, 36, 48–49, 60, 64, 73, 131, 175
 in heaven, 11, 19
 Spiritualist ideal of, 5, 7, 174
 psychiatry
 as constructed, 144–146, 149
 history of, 145, 148
 psychical research, 168–169
 psychology, 144, 158, 163–165, 168
 Spiritualism as predecessor of, 9, 67, 125
 Puysegur, marquis de, 51, 157–158, 165–166, 168–169
 Pythagoras, 106, 140
 Quimby, Phineas Parkhurst, 116
 Randolph, Paschal Beverly, 106–108
 reincarnation, 34–38
 Eastern, 34
 Platonic, 35, 37
 Renaissance, 4, 9, 39, 77, 120, 123–124, 131–132, 135–136, 141, 174
 Republic, 60, 148, 159, 173
 ideals of, 4, 14, 160
 Root, Marcus, 64
 Rosenroth, Knorr von, 124
 Ruedebusch, Emil, 93–94
 Ryan, Mary, 79–80
 Rynders, [Capt.] Isaiah, 54–55
 salvation, 4–6, 14, 103, 130, 141
 universal, 9, 97

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph
 von, 139
 schizophrenia, 144, 146, 165, 166
 science, 15, 53, 57, 59–60, 65, 66, 68, 74, 143, 162–163
 in relation to religion, 4, 54, 59–60, 117–118, 161, 174
 séances, 68, 75, 102–104, 126
 Sears, Hal, 91–92
 Second Great Awakening, 14, 150
 Seidman, Steven, 81
 self, 144
 as multiple, 146, 159, 162, 166, 174
 second, 51, 158, 165, 168–169, 174
 sephirot, 122–123, 128
 sex, 78, 81, 86, 92–97, 99–109
 in heaven, 77, 84–85, 89, 103
 Shakers, 95–96, 155–156
 Shedd, Tirzah F., 155, 157
 Shelley, Percy, 52
 Shorter, Edward, 144–145, 149
 Showalter, Elaine, 144, 149
 Silverman, Robert, 57, 73
 sin, as product of ignorance, 6, 119, 121, 175
 Society for Psychical Research, 169
 Socrates, 8, 40, 52, 120, 140, 170
 Sontag, Susan, 73
 souls, 36, 71, 120, 124–125, 141, 162
 immortality of, 8, 121, 175
 Kabbalistic production of, 122
 as multiple, 131
 Platonic, 35, 43, 120–121, 130–135
 Spear, [Rev.] John Murray, 45, 61–64
 spirits of the dead, 162, 164, 173
 communication with, 45, 49–50, 53–54, 57–59, 66, 68, 71–72, 75, 84–85, 88–90, 102
 and photography. *See* photography
 unconventional views of, 11, 30
 See also dead, communication with
 spiritual affinity, 86–94
 Sprague, [Rev.] E.W., 164
 Spurlock, John, 86, 92
 Spurzheim, Johann Gaspar, 116
 Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 98
 Starr, Paul, 115
 steam engine, 49, 59, 64

- Swedenborg, Emanuel, 7, 39, 50, 77–78, 83–84, 86, 94, 125, 127–130, 133, 175
 and Kabbalism, 124, 130
 and memory, 20–24
Symposium, 8, 82–86, 88, 133–134
 system of correspondences. *See* doctrine of correspondences
- talking cure, 167–168
- Tallmadge, [Senator] Nathaniel P., 25
- Taves, Ann, 125
- telegraph, 49–50, 59, 65, 173
- theory of correspondences. *See* doctrine of correspondences
- Theosophy, 34, 136–137, 141
- Thomsonians, 114
- Thoreau, Henry David, 45–46, 49
- Timaeus*, 8, 35, 50, 108, 120–122, 124, 128, 131, 137–138, 141
- time, 19, 45–46, 49, 56, 65, 73, 80, 86, 103, 176
 as bidirectional, 3, 6, 12, 18, 34, 43, 112, 119, 173
- trance states, 7, 33, 37, 51, 54, 56, 65, 101, 119, 124–125, 157, 163, 170, 174
 and ethics, 158, 165–166
 self-induced, 52, 143, 160
- Transcendentalism, 175
- truth
 as hidden, 137
 as unifying, 136, 138
- Tuke, William, 148–149
- Tuttle, Hudson, 35, 164–165
- unconscious, construction of, 161, 164, 166, 167, 169–171
- Underground Railroad, Boston, 61
- Universalism, 45, 175
- Urban, Hugh, 108
- utopia, 5, 8, 63, 93–97, 103
 experiments with, 6
- Versluis, Arthur, 6, 104, 126
- Victorian mores, 81, 85
 love, 108
 mourning, 13, 15–17
 sentimentalism, 13
- Virgil, 57
- Vivekananda [Swami], 34
- Warner, John Harley, 114–115
- Weber, Max, 7
- Weld, Theodore, 81–82
- West, Nancy, 64
- Whitrow, G.J., 49
- Wilder, Alexander, 140
- wisdom, 84, 88, 106, 131
 as hidden, 9, 137
- women, 53, 65–66, 79–81, 92, 99–102, 104, 113
 as equals of men, 9, 89–108, 141, 177
 and healing, 112–113
 and mourning, 15–18
- wonder shows, 46–47
- Woodhull, Victoria, 98–103, 108
- Yates, Frances, 38