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Occultism and Avantgarde around 1900

To approach at first very carefully what occultism is about in the late nineteenth century let us start with this electrical kiss of 1780. What the young man on the right will get on his lips in a few seconds from his highly charged lady on the left, will be caused by the friction machine of the man on her left. A very exciting thing for the contemporaries.

Even more so did the astonishing effect, Galvani discovered six years later, excite his contemporaries. Now there was something going on in the nerves without any friction, showing electrolyte voltage working in frog’s leg’s, as we would call it today. Galvani’s discovery turned out to be the key-effect for the chemical production of electric current, in which Alessandro Volta succeeded in the year 1800.

Even Napoleon didn’t miss the importance of that new voltaic matter of command, praised the italian Volta personally for his discovery, that was supposed to work better than signs of light from tower to tower of his military semaphors.

A veritable napolonean fluidum, of which his mathematicians once again were at a loss how to explain.

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1 Berlin, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, The Organization of Visibility, Photography in Science, Technology and Art, Friday, January 15, 1999
Fully in the state of affairs of EighteenHundred and foreshadowing some first faint tones of occultistic discourses we now read in a paper written by the three students of Tübingen: Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin:

“I want to put wings on our physics which is slowly striding within it’s experiments. And so – if lately philosophy is setting the ideas, if experience is dating the data, we will get physics in a greater dimension, which I expect from the forthcoming ages.”

Schelling wrote after that, even before the turn of the century, his transcendental program of physics under the title of "Von der Weltseele" (Of the Worldsoul) and Hegel announced in front of his students in Jena 1805:

“The idea as the entity going back in its concept can be called the absolute matter or the ether. The ether itself is all; because the ether is the being.”

In the ether, and more so in that "World-Soul" - concept of Schelling, in pure philosophical speculation, electricity and magnetism are dialectically unified, both of which in physical sciences had been seperated systematically from the beginnings of electricity as a science with Gilbert in 1600. To reunify this complete seperation of magnetism and electricity, prooves the remarkable scientific role of German Romanticism, which shouldn’t be underrated.

So this way the romanticistic natural science reopened the door for a lot of old magnetic procedures as well, as for example for the french Mesmerism, which had been defamed by Benjamin Franklin and the french revolutionaries before. In Eightteensixteen however the prussian government set up two professorships for the exploration of that power of magnetization, which could probably very well be founded in Schellings higher physics.

Between Eighteenhundred and Eighteentwenty the romantic speculation was swelling about the dialectical interconnections of these chemo-physical fluidal effects called Magnetism and Electricity, forced among others by a friend of Goethe’s, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, who ended up walking around with divining rods.

A close friend of his, the romanticistic professor of philosophy named Hans Christian Oerstedt, indeed found the crucial evidence. In summer Eighteenhundredeztywenty he observed the deflection of a magnetic needle caused by electric current, a very simple effect, which was nevertheless never seen before. Oerstedt and his audacious romanticistic philosophy made possible the most simply but crucial experiment, which marked for the first time the fundamental coherence and unity of these two all-decisive
powers of modern times. They could lately be fully understood only with the help of Post-
Newtonian-theories of relativity and quantum physics.

Even before the french revolution most of Mesmers disciples had emigrated to
Northern America.

Following the next step of our path into modern occultism we have to turn over to the New World. Since Eighteentwenty hundreds of exiled magnetizers had been practicing in Boston and New York under
the name of "sykologists", putting to trance the middle classes as they had done previously in France. These events were supported by a boom of daily gazettes, which at the same time spread all over the new World.

For the freelanced and often unemployed casual poets and journalists, who had to provide sensational stories for the growing "dailies", these trance-events and seances were the best material to look for. And even more so, because the sykologic trance-seances delt with nothing less spectacular but fundamental questions of cosmos, death, god and matter itself.

"M. Is not God immaterial?
P. There is no immateriality- it is a mere word. That which is not matter, is not at all-unless qualities are things.

M. Is God, then, material?
P. No. [This reply startled me very much.]
M. What, then, is he?
P. [After a long pause, and mutteringly.]
I see- but it is a thing difficult to tell.
[Another long pause.]

He is not spirit, for he exists. Nor is he matter, as you understand it. But there are gradations of matter of which man knows nothing; the grosser impelling the finer, the finer pervading the grosser. The atmosphere, for example, impels the electric principle, while the electric principle permeates the atmosphere. These gradations of matter increase in rarity or fineness until we arrive at a matter unparticled- without particles - indivisible-one, and here the law of impulsion and permeation is modified. The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things, but impels all things; and thus is all things within itself. This matter is God. What men attempt to embody in the word "thought," is this matter in motion.
Here is to see, how occultism is deeply mingled with physics. And more than that: What we get in these lines is natural philosophy as affected by itself getting into the state of delirium, because to find the real truth that is a thing only for the one's not being awake. That also is an romantical blue-print for all upcoming occultistic proceedings."

These lines are written by Edgar Allan Poe, entitled "the mesmeric revelation", published 1844 in at least seven periodicals at the same time. This queer text and no other made Poe originally known in europe, since it was the first ever translated Poe-text into french by Charles Baudelaire.

In publishing these lines Poe left totally open, whether the story was a true report or pure fiction. Poe's text did blure the boundaries between reality and fiction not for the first time. In any case one can say, it could have been a true report.

Because, in 1844, which was the year of publication of the "mesmeric revelation", a professional trance-medium with the name Andrew Jackson Davis had appeared on the stage of the dailies. Seventeen years old he was called "Seer of Poughkeepsie", a young man, who was said to be unable to speak one unbroken sentence, when he was awake, but shifted into trance he could hold lectures about the romanticistic natural science in the style of Swedenborg, Schelling and Humboldt. In exactly this style Poe is writing these lines of the "mesmeric revelation".

With Andrew Jackson Davis in EighteenHundredAndFourtyFour in New York, the movement of the organized american spiritism vehemently startet out. And there is no doubt, that the young man Davis was part of a smart conspired gang of sykologists, publishing a news magazine under his name, an undertaking, in which Poe had never succeeded in his whole life. Davis was trained by two older sykologists the whole day. Although Andrew Jackson Davis is the role model in Poe's "mesmeric revelation", in his works Poe almost kept secret about him. For more than fifteen month Davis submitted publicly well-paid trance-lectures every week later testified by subscription of twohundredandsixtyseven citizens of New York, providing evidence, that Davis did all that purely in trance.

1847, when Poe was writing his last work called " Eureka, A Prose Poem: Or the Physical and Metaphysical Universe" the New York lectures of Andrew Jackson Davis were published under the title: "The principles of nature, her divine revelations and a voice to mankind", in two volumes. One could say, Poe was late for a second time. The library of congress catalog contains two editions of Davis' book in the same year and another printed in London.

Poe, who was very envious of Davis, avoided to preserve evidence of any personal contact. So only in Davis' autobiography we get the hint of a real conversation between Poe and the much more famous young man. Poe, as Davis is telling us, visited him to ask for an assessment of the "mesmeric revelation". As far as we can imagine Andrew
Jackson Davis, who’s more than sixty books sold not under at least ten editions per book, was in his lifetime not only the most important promotor of american spiritism but presumably one of the most successful american authors in the Nineteenth century as well.

Anyhow, - in the last works of the grotesk-romanticistic faking journalist Poe the discourse and the climate is being depicted very precisely, in which the following lines of patent specification were written. It is a patent specification, which ought to become extremely decisive for the further development of modern technical media.

“...a new and usefull machine and systems of signs for transmitting intelligence between distant points ... any signs thus produced and representing intelligence, transmitted as before named between distant points.”

So we understand, these words of Samuel B. Morse must have sound very suspiciously in the ears of the Members of Congress. In EighteenHundredAndThirtyEight they had to decide on the pilot track of the first american lines of telegraphy.

The transmission of dots and dashes had already been tested under the eyes of president van Buren successfully. So everything seemed to be fine, but nevertheless the American Congress refused to permit any public subsidy to the painter of historic scenes named Samuel B. Morse, because, as they argued,

if a painter was allowed to play telegraphist on earth one could likewise build a railway on the moon. The subsidy of thirty thousand dollars for setting up the first Baltimore-Washington telegraph-line the American Congress granted only five years later, but even then numerous members of congress demanded,

to spend the money on better purposes, as for instance the exploration of Mesmerism or Millerism, which they simply equated with the invention of Morse.

These dissenting Congress members were not completely wrong, because indeed the spiritistic answer, the occultification of the new medium
telegraphy didn't keep waiting for very long. Morse himself challenged the following, because he, even less than the physical scientists of his time, could not answer the question, what kind of power it was, taking effect in telegraphy and transmitting, what he called "intelligence" instantaneously. Needless to say, that the first vague considerations of Ohm, Ampere, Faraday or Wheatstone concerning the nature of electricity had been rather unknown to Morse.

The spiritistic answer to electrical telegraphy came up with the so-called "Fox Rappings" of EighteenHundredFourlyEight, published on the first pages of some dailies with the affidavit of Margret Fox, swearing that a ghost of a dead man buried five years ago in her house had given answers by knocking.

Knocking two time means "yes", no knocking means "No". The spirit is answering by telegraphing hammer blows counting the ages of Margrets children. As far as the history of occultism is concerned this is the first time, that a real two way communication of Ghosts is reported, which was reported never before.

The quick and intensive propagation of this Fox-Story all over North-America promoted by fake-journalists and mesmerists more clever and successful than Poe ever was during his lifetime, is not so astonishing as it may seem on first sight. Finally telegraphy itself (physically) could help to transport telegraphy (of intelligence) and it's spiritism in the place of congressional suspicions and non-answered questions.

1848 already six thousand miles of transmission lines had been drawn all through the United States and even directly through the editorial offices of the expanding daily press. Hundreds of the dailies got therefore their names from that neighbourhood, like the "Daily Telegraph", the "Georgia Telegraph", the "Pittsburgh Telegraph" or the "Sunday Telegraph" and all the other of "telegraphs". In that climate of telegraphism many farmers of the south went almost crazy, and destroyed the telegraph-lines crossing their farmland, because, as they said, the wires would detract moisture out of the air effecting the terrible dryness they had to bare.
The question around the implementation of the first electrical medium was: What is electricity? And Morse couldn’t answer that question. His devices worked very well but he couldn’t answer that question either. So Morse decided to see himself guided by god and not by chance chose the famous words for the very first public transmission between Baltimore and Washington in May EighteenFourtyFour. They read: "What has God wrought". Here you see the the original telegraphic-strip. It was a huge success.

Seven days after Morse wrote to his brother Sidney: "Even the most inveterate opposers have changed to admire and one of them, Honorable Cave Johnson, who ridiculed my system last session by associating it with the tricks of animal magnetism, came to me and said: 'Sir, I give in. It is an astonishing invention.' "It is his work", Morse goes on writing, "and he [God] alone could have carried me thus far through all my trials, and enabled me to triumph over the obstacles physical and moral which opposed me." "What has God wrought?" The first telegraphic message questions God for the message as all following messages always refer to the medium itself, which is, according to McLuhan, the message. But what message is electricity? The spiritistic discourse gets it’s power out of this unanswered question, locating it’s birthplace in Rochester, where the Fox-Sister’s house was to be found and, as you can see, three early telegraphlines crossed each other.

Everywhere in the United States we’re going to see people now sitting around dancing and hovering tables, where there is a lot of knocking, thundering and popping going on. Alphabetically or numerically, as one likes. It is always a play of communication, and there are answering the ghosts. But because with telegraphy, as Morse had defined it, intelligence is revealing itself in a way of
engraving paper stripes, now the 'psycho-engravings' and 'psycho-graphias' were coming up. This is where the history of 'automatic writing' began, first of all writing with the help of "oui-ja-boards' planchettes or 'slates' of every kind, which obviously later on is leading into the surrealistic art of the same name. Thereafter the movement of "modern spiritism" as it was called by their promotors, hooked up everything, like it was written in a storyboard invented after the effects of Franklin's electricity. There were "materialisations", table rapping, household appliances flowing through the air, as it might happen after a lightning stroke, a tradition Hollywoods Poltergeist-Films are proceeding and preserving until today. And eventually, the luminous hovering hands.
Nothing else than the elements of electrical telegraphy are mapped and reproduced piece by piece in the phantasms of the spiritistical discourse:

- the "knocking", which is the hammering of the telegraphic device;
- the "materializations" or "telekinesis", table-hopping and so forth, which are representing the material effects of Franklin's electricity, and I forgot to mention: Benjamin Franklin, one of the founders of the United States, is one the most important researchers in the field of electricity as well. He at first scientifically proofed the identity of lightning and electricity.
- the "automatic writing" or "Scriptoskopy", which resembles the endless strips of telegraphy;
- the "speaking in trance", wherein the mesmeristic prehistory of the spiritistic discourse is updated;
- and the hovering hands and arms, which are imagining the interface of telegraphic input, separated phantasmatically from the body and sometimes located, as you can see, in someone's lap.

The history of "modern spiritism" as it is called in the spiritistic histories of spiritism, - "modern spiritism" in its development from the Fifties on will offer no more facts than these few forms of appearance. Ten years after the Fox-Raps already thousands of professional and semi-professional Seance-organizers travelled around the USA, probably hypnotized by their own achievements, or being mentally disturbed in anycase, or simply working as liars, all featured by at least onehundredandtwenty spiritistic or semi-spiritistic periodicals, hundreds of spiritistic circles in New York, Boston, Memphis or Philadelphia. After EighteenSixty a whole bunch of mediumistic trance-agents spread over England and France, all of a sudden unemployed in the States because of the civil war, entering Italy and Germany from EighteenSeventy on, and thereby building the spiritistic capital of Leipzig.

In EighteenSeventyFive the ukrainian knocking-Ghost-medium named Helena Petrovna Blavatsky founded her Theosophical Society in New York, in presence of some MIT-professors and Thomas Alva Edison himself. Her first book was naturally written in full trance in behalf of Andrew Jackson Davis, as Blavatsky wants to make us believe. It sold more than thousand copies in two days.

The socalled Ghost-Photography, of which I showed you some examples already, arose finally in the early Sixties and not much earlier, because that photography required the availability of collodium-plates as the exposurable medium.
And again, the origins of Ghost-Photography in "modern spiritism" are to be found in the simple and traceable effects of technical failures in handling these new collodium-plates. The earliest Ghost-photographies were made by William H. Mumler, who had been a professional engraver before.

He tells us quite frankly, what happened in October 1861.

When I was ... alone in the Galery, I tried to take a picture of myself. Developing the plate I discovered for the first time, that a second figure had appeared on the plate. At that time I hadn’t heard anything about ghost-photography, although I had read in the newspapers that the ghost would have been well dressed in proper clothes and therefore difficult to have been caused by such a failure. At that time I didn’t think much about it, but when I had a closer look at the picture and the plate, I noticed that the figure was not only dressed in proper clothing, but that it seemed to have a very strong expression. I was very sure that the plate was not cleaned up properly enough so that a figure might have remained on the plate from an earlier exposure; and that’s what I actually told those who asked me about the picture and others. However later attempts, done under circumstances, which excluded such a possibility, made me believe very strongly, that the power produced by those figures is going far beyond the human abilities, and even experts, who were asked to make a picture this way, didn’t succeed at all.

This in fact is the report of a true autosuggestion, of being certain of simple technical facts in the beginning and ending up in a pure, but probably honest state of hallucinatory perceptions.

This mechanism was intensified by another medial feature of those times, (35) because for decades even the spiritistic magazines couldn’t print the pictures, because they had no technique to print photographs, so they had to redraw them. The effects of Ghost-Photography in a spiritistic sense could spread only by this interchange of media. This interchange of media will happen again in the end of the story, where Kandinsky gets into the game.

As a result we have action pictures produced by chemical remains arising either accidentally or deliberately, but very well received in the context of spiritistic seances. Random bobbles on photographs, combined with double exposures, or hidden and fraudulently prepared projector lenses,
all that technical stuff acted as an extension of the psychotic Media-Apriori of the telegraphic occultism.

Now we can follow the work of the sensitives, looking at spiritual ghosts consisting of ether, as they appeared in the so-called seances of Mr Beattie.

“There is in nature a fluid or an ether, which is condensing itself under certain circumstances and in that state becomes visible for the sensitives; and if it’s emanation or radiation alights upon a sensitive plate, the oscillation of its vibration is as such, that a forceful chemical activity is provoked as it can otherwise only be ascribed to the strongest influence of the sun. ... This substance is recorded by invisible intelligent beings and formed as clay in the hand of an artist, whose figures can be photographed if received through a lens, may they be images of human beings or images of something else. They can be describes by persons, whose retina is impressed by these figures, before they can be seen with normal eyes by developing.”
Beyond that almost uncommentable photo-techno-lunacy let’s summarize with Nietzsche the state of affairs in EighteenEightyTwo. Lou Andreas Salome is asking Fredrick Nietzsche to go with her to a seance with Elisabeth Hope, who called herself Madame de Esperance, what seems to fit for the feelings of Nietzsche in this last month with his one and only Lou. As a preparation for that important event Nietzsche wrote the following note:

“A part of the intellectual functions of the medium comes to himself unconsciously: his state therein is hypnotic ... - There has to happen an electrical conduction between the persons connected with their hands and the medium, by way of which thoughts of every person pass on to the medium. This kind of conduction of thoughts is no more miraculous than a conduction from brain to the foot..., whilst the memory provides and offers something, which often appears to be forgotten: there is no forgotten. – Even unconscious fraud is possible: I mean, a fraudulent medium is acting with all kinds of fraudulent manipulations not being aware of it: ... occurances of electricity, cold currents, sparks are possible thereby. Sensations, to be touched, could be cases of deception, hallucinations of senses: while it is possible, that for several persons there occurs a unity of hallucinations as it happens in old orgiastic cults.” (KSA 10, 17)

Nietzsche shows exemplarily, how far that organized movement of jugglers and prestidigitators was already accepted in Westen Europe and America. For Nietzsche the strange spritistic phenomena are concerned with the new great central concept of the late Nineteenth Century, called the unconciousness. "Even unconscious fraud is possible".
But on the other hand, as to be continued by the avantgarde of the turn of the century, a psychotic and blind trace is written into Nietzsche’s text as well. Because the unconsciousness, as Nietzsche said, will not take it’s effect somehow imaginary or philosophically as preceding philosophers like von Hartmann or Schopenhauer said. With Nietzsche the unconsciousness is supposed to work in an almost concrete and even electrophysiological way getting a connection physically to the other. According to Nietzsche physics and psyche are always building a physiological, psychological and moral unity, not only in the note we just read. Therefore one shouldn’t wonder about the amount of carefulness Nietzsche was taking preparing the possible success of the seance with Madame de Esperance. But in vain.

Nietzsche writes to Köselitz, October the third, EighteenHundredEightyTwo:

"Dear friend, spiritism is a pitiful fraudulence, which is boring after the first half hour. No word about it anymore. I awaited something different and made myself sure with three beautiful physiological-psychological-moral theories: but I didn’t need my theories at all."

Only few contemporary scientists could resist of taking part in a seance: Helmholtz could, also Virchow, but already the old Wilhelm Weber couldn’t, nor could Henri Bergson or Wilhelm Wundt; and especially some of the victorian physicists were almost enflamed by that matter.

William Crookes in the first instance. He was chemist and discoverer of the element thalium, at times president of the Royal Society, further very well known for his socalled Crookes-tube. For some time he had gotten completely under the spell of his medium Florence King.

William Crookes vacuum-tubes for producing cathode-rays have been of course his greatest legacy to the history of physics. These tubes had been so perfectly constructed and depicted, that Heinrich Hertz and Philipp Lenard could tell their glassblowers to make tubes after the instructions Crookes gave in his short lecture "Radiating matter and the forth aggregate state".

With a tube of this type no one else than Conrad Röntgen discovered, presumably by chance, his famous rays,
which should become of great importance not only for the further development of spiritism but for the art of the growing avantgarde as well. In Nineteen Ninety Five Röntgen discovered his rays with the aid of a photo plate lying around. But his rays remained unexplainable for him during his whole further lifetime.

No more could he say then, that the exposure of the plate was set off by oscillations of high frequency discharges in a Crookes tube. Röntgen only reproduced the phenomenon to back it up scientifically taking pictures of the hand of his wife at first, as you can see above left.

Almost without any knowledge of the physical qualities of the rays now everyone began to work with that relatively simple device, which was soon rebuilted in almost every laboratory in Europe, where it became almost usual to let exposurable plates lying around and so it became usual with artists as you can see in the case of August Strindberg:

Now in these days of the X-Rays one became used to linger on the great wonder, that neither a camera nor a lens is neccessary. With explicit regards to the Röntgen rays in Eighteen Ninety Six Strindberg starts to write his occult diary listing a random sequence of experiences, dreams, observations, written down as they would represent data of a plate exposed to rays. Strindberg is intending to demonstrate, "that the universe is concealing mysteries for us". And again in research of the physical mechanism of Röntgen rays Antoine Henri Becquerel discovered the radioactive radiation of uranium, by having left lying around an exposurable plate near a phosphorescent material just as Röntgen has left his plate, and as Strindberg let the moonlight expose his plates.

One year after that, in Eighteen Ninety Seven, Joseph John Thomson discovered the electron, and he did so again with the help of the High-Vacuum-tube, which originally was designed by William Crookes.

With the electron coming out of the lap of an – in the sense of his constructor – para-occultistic device, the first particle of the atomic structure was found, by way
of which in the end Ernest Rutherford, a disciple of Thomson, could rebuild the victorian ethermodel into the early atom-model. He, Rutherford, found the evidence of the proton in NineteenTen.

Crookes seemed to be quite acknowledged by these fundamental discoveries which were made so to say in his element or at least with the device he had designed originally. He was affirmed in his believe of the identity of these rays and the powers which appeared in the occulistic circumstances of the seances he had described with the same accuracy as he depicted his tubes for the physicians.

"It seems to me that in these rays we may have a possible mode of transmitting intelligence. With a few reasonable postulates, they may supply a key to many things which are obscure in psychical research. Let it be assumed that these rays ... can pass into the brain and act on some nervous centre there. Let it be conceived that the brain contains a centre which uses these rays as the vocal cords use sound vibrations ... and send them out, with the velocity of light, to impinge on the receiving ganglion of another brain. In this way some, at least, of the phenomena of telepathy, and the transmission of intelligence from one sensitive to another through long distances, seem to come into the domain of law, and can be grasped."

In that kind of a fourth aggregate state now also radiates Katie King.

Here you can see Crookes very happy in devotion. As you can see, mostly woman or female media took aim of the professors, as it happened to William Crookes, one of the best experimental physicist in the Nineteenth century. What we see is a double exposure or a fraud in the dark, suddenly brightened per flashlight. Whatever it was, Crookes later has claimed to have destroyed all fourtyfour photographies of his sessions with Katie King and Florence Cook of the early seventies, but four of these pictures survived somehow.

Let’s pause for a second considering the facts for a better understanding of the following increase of fluidal photography from the midnineties of the Nineteenth century on. First of all we have to recognize the widespread and nearly worldwide movement of those well organized spiritists and jugglers, who blinded people with astonishing and wondrous communication effects. This movement could retrace it’s roots back to the telegraphic phantasms of the not understood phenomenon of electricity in the fifties. In no way better understood now was the phenomenon of electromagnetic rays of Röntgen's kind in the nineties. Whilst a medium is already working with the effect in question, we have to consider the temporary inability of serious physics, to assign those Röntgen rays to known facts and theories without any scientific doubts, casting a long shadow of growing occultist and para-psychological speculations about theses rays due to William Crookes and others, like Russel Wallace, Oliver Lodge and many more. More generally spoken one can say that the occultist movement of the nineteenth century can be conceived as a generic disturbance at the place of an inaccessible epistemological
object called electricity. Electricity is the basic power, which was on one hand increasingly accessible as technical and medial effect but on the other hand epistemologically incomprehensible both mathematically and physically on a theoretical basis. The thing in question is not a concrete one, but again an epistemic one, so to say with Hans Jörg Rheinberger. We are talking about electrical effects, which as epistemical objects reambered unaccessible for the contemporary science of physics and this blankspace ought to be considered as superimposed, overlayed so to say, by occultistic fraud.

The foundation of experimental psychology and psychoanalysis have had some roots in the analysis of the occultistic too. These occultistic phenomena we can consider as being interlaced with elementary properties of technical media, first of telegraphy and then of photography, superimposing the blankspace of the scientifical inaccessibility of those media. One can say, that old traditions of obsessions and spiritisms have been refracted on the technical basis of two completely new media. And saying so, describing human lunacies, obsessions and deviations as reassembled on the stage of a new media, that is like, of course, to announce the program of Charcot's iconographic psychiatry. Obviously it was one of the open secrets of Charcot's work at the Salpetriere, to reveal a kind of ontological reality of the human psyche in the frame of the stills of photographic images. As Charcot said: "In truth I am only a photographer; I'm writing down, what I see." Or as Albert Londe said, as often quoted already on this workshop: "The photographic plate is the true retina of the savant." And there again we face a fact of superimposition and of overdetermination, in this case concerning photography, which as medium had to sustain impossible answers to impossible questions, one of which is: "What is the effect of a technical medium?", covered and enwrapped in questions like: "Is there a vital being beyond the vital being?"

Out of Charcot's School comes Hyppolyte Baraduc, at his time a very famous neurologist and gynaecologist working at Charcot's Salpetriere, who published at his lifetime at least two dozen books on medical issues. He is one of the most effective founders of what we may call thought-photography. With Baraduc we will take our path straight and directly into Kandinsky's work.

But again, it would be too easy to say, that Baraduc got deluded with the traces of streaks left by the development of a plate, or that he had been struck blind of those faint white shadows resulting from overexposure. That's obviously what we see, showing his photographs, without any doubt, but it is not, what Baraduc saw, without any doubt either. He saw "vibrations de la vitalité humaine", that means he saw sign's of a vital fluid named Od, or Psychod, which in the Sixties an obscur author named Karl von
Reichenbach had already expounded on, somehow supported by Theodor Fechner. The "Od" a la Reichenbach had never been accepted by serious scientists, but where are we now? We are now in the somehow revolutionary electro-neurological forge of Charcots psychiatry, where, as you might remember, even Freud had truly to confess, that he, Charcot, "knocked out my views and purposes" at once.

From the MidEighties on Baraduc had been engaged in electro-physical experiments, like galvanisizing stomachs, or washing them out with the aid of electric discharges against any kind of stomach-dilatations.

Or, as you can see here, he constructed instruments to de-electricise the brain, called "le decondensateur cerebral". In a time, when electrocardiography was discovered and has been set in practise until the present day, Baraduc stated, that there are different electrical currents flowing in different parts of the body, being exactly measurable. This in principle is exactly true. But his system went far beyond. Here you can see the skeleton diagramm of the ‘biometer’ built by Baraduc, made for measuring so-called ‘vital forces’ in units of electric charges or magnetic powers. He assumed, that the psychical fluid, or the psykonic od, could be a kind of an atmosspherical ethereal fluid surrounding us in kind of clouds. Those clouds of fluids we are inhaling with the right side of our body and breathe out the inhaled with our left. This, according to Baraduc, is a measurable process. Comparing the measurable quantities of ‘aspiration’ and ‘expiration’ he found out, that a normal rate of "force vitale" amounts to let’s say ten units, which provides us with our special kind of psychical energy. To his order we are in this vibrating and pulsating manner always connected with our enviroment.

The concept of thought-photography lies herein. There are Baraduc’s "mouvements de l’âme vital humaine" which are to be visualized with the aid of the "iconographie", that is, in his sense, a photography mainly without camera or lenses,
again in fact an original concept of Charcot’s. Baraduc also maintained, that psychical obsessions are caused by specific disturbances in the exchange of the ‘psyconical’ fluida. For instance when there is too much fluidal charge accumulated in the head, this according to Baraduc would provoke the state of obsession curable by means of his "decondensateur cerebral". And one can easily imagine, as an inducement of some kind of smooth electrotherapie, this might have helped one or the other woman in the salpetriere.

Baraduc’s work resumes everything in the history of the so-called ‘modern spiritism’, which is combined with fluidal photography from the beginning on, starting with Karl von Reichenbachs Od-Pictures in the late fifties, over Mumler’s and Beatties Seances-Sessions to Louis Dargets thought-photography in the seventies, with whom Baraduc later on worked together very closely.

Wassily Kandinsky knew at least both Baraduc and Darget very well as one can gather from his marks in some essays of the "Übersinnliche Welt", a german spiritistic organ. Since Kandinsky’s estate of the Munich years 1896-1913 is accessible we know, that Kandinsky was not only very familiar with some outspoken spiritistic collegs of his, but first of all very familiar with the wide range of occultistic literature in his time.
I already told you about the "theosophic society", the active medium and professional deceiver Helena Blavatsky had founded in New York in the seventies. The german department of that society was lead by Rudolf Steiner, who resided in Munich as well. During Kandinsky’s time in Munich Steiner split off from Blavatsky in NineteenEighty by calling out himself as the leader of the new society of "Anthroposophy".

As we know from the thoroughly deep investigations Sixten Ringbohm took of the Kandinsky-notes, more than Steiner another closed assistant of Blavatsky’s impressed Kandinsky very much, named Charles Webster Leadbeater.(74a,b,c) Leadbeater was and is really one of the most shady and dubious figures in the history of the Theosophical Society, because of his doubtful procedure he brought into action in trance-seances under his guidance. In Nineteenhundredsix he already was once bannished from the society being convicted of sexual abuse of young boys in trance. But Annie Besant, who had worked with him for years, fetched him back into the Theosophical Society two years later. Theses both, Besant and Leadbeater, became the very famous bishops and celebrated experts of some secret indian practices like the "siddhi"-trance-sessions and so forth.

Maybe Annie Besant tried to cleanse Leadbeater from the criminal abuse-affair not at least because she had written a very important book together with Leadbeater one year ago, entitled "Thought Forms". This book was translated into german in Nineteenhundredeight and again was found in Kandinsky’s estate thoroughly marked and underlined. If Kandinsky shouldn’t have heard nothing about Baraduc until then, now with Leadbeater and Besant he would be informed deeply and explicitly about the impact of thought-photography, or iconography, as Leadbeater pointed out emphasising the difference. Kandinsky read, what Leadbeater wrote:

Dr. Baraduc took different pictures whilst thinking continuously of one certain object making visible the effect of that forms of thought on a light-sensitive plate. So he tried to project the image of a deceased woman well-known to him, or he brought out a picture thinking of a drawing he made on her deathbed. Baraduc says quite correctly, that an object is produced by emanating out of man’s spirit materializing itself. Without any doubt this summary of Baraduc's work done by Leadbeater is made with fraudulent intentions explicitly excluding all the biometrique purposes of Baraduc's photographs, let alone other systemical aspects of his theories. Leadbeater reduces Baraduc to the simple spiritistic practices his antecedent Darget took presumably out of Crookes photographs. But what still remained in the pictures of Baraduc were the confusing effects of the medium, those material streaks and suspicious technical shadows of overexposure and double-development.
So the next step of Leadbeater and Besant is to get rid of these material and telltaling traces too. Leadbeater does it like that:

These results [of Baraduc's work] can naturally not be perfect, because the physical photographic devices and its light-sensitve plates are not the ideal instruments to go into astral investigations.

Therefore Leadbeater and Besant instructed some befriended painters to take Baraduc's pictures as drafts for repainting them in colour and complete purity. That's what their book contains: about fifties pieces of fine and clean coloured drawings combined with a lot of almost crazy and spooky interpretations of what might the colours stand for mentally and spiritually, which, in my opinion, cannot be taken seriously for one single moment.

Leadbeater repaints Baraduc's Psychophotography and says so. He uses Baraduc's occultistically uploaded techno-medial effects of exposure and simple goes on redrawing, stylizing and rounding them up. Engraved in oval forms, into the auras of that soul-photography now we see thin outlines of bodies as a kind of grid, apparently to give us a concrete impage of the un-concrete astrally and auratical dimensions.

Kandinsky, as Ringbohm shows us, has developped his own painting of spirit forms out of these samples, colours and configurations of Leadbeater. So I will point out quite clearly: What we call nowadays "pure abstract" and nonrepresentational painting is not at all derivable from a pure immanent foundation in the ideas of art-history. Sometimes and even much later Kandinsky is still framing the already abstract non-concrete into an oval aura of Leadbeater.

In short, the observation we can make is, that Kandinsky's socalled abstract painting allegedly grew out of a free play of ideal geometrical interactions between form and plane, as he told us, owes in fact very much to the shady theosophical impulses of Leadbeater. And in Leadbeaters work, as I could hopefully have shown you, is condensed almost half a century of occultism-history. This I would call a media-genealogical condensation, which almost step by step is based on technical effects of technical media, which in the end, as you can see with Leadbeater,
are knowingly suppressed, consciously downtrodden and deliberately excluded, although even Kandinsky knew very well not only about the roots of the thoughtforms of Leadbeater, but owned books containing descriptions and pictures of the declared spiritistical antecedents of his new technique.

You probably know, that Kadinsky who used to be a jurisprudent, has had his artistic "coming out", as he had told us, due to a Wagner-opera he visited in Moskow. There, as he told us, for the first time he faced – inmidst of "Lohengrin" - visions of colour combined and seemingly growing out of the music. But on the other hand it is much more evident, that he had worked on the so-called "Wagner-Psychikone" of Charles Leadbeater.

This belongs to the so-called Murnau-phase of the group, shortly before Kandinsky started his pure abstract phase.

Here Ringbohm has pursued the development of a Leadbeater-motive through the years up to Nineteenthirteen.

Now let's go back to Leadbeater, who assigned, as simple as that, forms of thought, as they were repainted after Baraduc, to some expressions of feelings quite arbitrary.

This is not Hermann Rorschach in Zürich of Nineteentwentyone, but Leadbeater of Nineteen-O-five.
At last here is to see, what the make of Leadbeaters tables is about. He uses stylized motives out of the history of fluidal or spiritistic photography, which by themselves are traces of material sedimentations of the technical medium itself. Leadbeater disguised the material origin of those effects and stylized them as such, asserting their roots being effects of some physical properties emanated from spirituality. That, in a way, ironically is true and false at the same time. Tracing that method as Kandinsky did we get the real origins of abstract painting.

Here you get the summary. Now Kandinsky’s ‘conversion’ of it:

My book "Concerning the spiritual in art" of Nineteeneleven and also ‘The blue rider’ had the specific aim, to awake the ability of experiencing the spiritual in the material and abstract things, an ability which is absolutely necessary and allows endless experiences. The wish to evoke these happy making abilities by those men who didn’t have them yet, was the main aim of my books.

There is the thoughtform "gambler". And now I’m showing you, how this gambler-icon is brought back to life in Kandinsky’s work.

And here are some other thoughtforms of Leadbeater, you can identify in the same painting.

Leadbeater’s simplifications are grotesque enough, but they work with Kandinsky as the effects of an undisturbed disturbance, which can be superimposed by a spiritual
revelation of human abilities, while Kandinsky is keeping secret, that the original effects are coming into being through simple damage or abnormal effects of the material of a technical medium. Here you will find some Leadbeater-motives again.

Here are the thoughtforms of Leadbeater again, now for example a Kandinsky ‘conversion’ from the end of the twenties. And again,
Now at last we see the greatly valued "composition roman six" from Nineteenthirteen, which does show you now probably more than before. You’ll find in every handbook of applied art, how from this picture on, Kandinsky’s influence reaches into the Bauhaus-tradition, into Malevitsch, the suprematists and by this means into the history of design and architecture in our century.

Let us resume. Concerning the development of modern physics (I told you already about the important role of the tubes of William Crookes) there can be found some braces native to occultism. The deep layer of modern science, I name: the non-euclidian geometries, the mathematization of physics, the Theory of relativity, Quantum-physics, the theory of the unconsciousness and linguistics, all these had to come out in a counter-draft, in a kind of partly scientifical transit through occultistic concepts, as there were lots of fluidal theories, fourth dimension theories and the major concepts of ether. Again, only Einstein’s theory of relativity could finish the discussions about the ether, a concept prevailing in physics for hundreds of years. But that means in reverse: Without these ceaseless efforts of proofing the existence of an impossible, diamond-hard, totally inflexible, universe-filling but nevertheless atmosphere-like, complex-paradoxical matter called ether, the theory of relativity never could have come to existence.

I would like to claim the same structure of genealogy for the upcoming of the pure abstract painting with Kandinsky. But now it is art, not science. There are pictures, images concerned, not physical concepts or scientific discourses. Kandinsky’s work is dealing with some very new effects in painting, which he obviously had taken out of non-painting. Or being more precisely: which he had taken out of photography, or more precisely: out of the material defects of photography. But these defects already had been discarded by a movement of fraud, a movement of deception called occultism. Occultistic thought photography had made these photographic defects unvisible as defects, for getting a visibility of the beyond, even knowing, as it was always conceded, that the basis of these visibility could always have been a defect of the material, could always have been frauds, but never were.

To get rid of this ambivalency, Charles Leadbeater repainted the tracks of Baraduc, blurring the tracks which had led him to his arbitrary definitions. Already Leadbeater is hiding the sources, upon which he’s based his fraud. So he as the hidden man is the first who actually made the first abstraction, by getting "ab" of the "tracks". Kandinsky is hiding this source, which is Leadbeater. too. In his book "Das Geistige in der Kunst" "On the Spiritual in Art" he mentions Blavatsky and Steiner and even William Crookes, but you’ll find no word about Baraduc or Charles Leadbeater. So to get to the free and open world of abstract painting, liberating people of the restrictive of the past, freeing their minds, we got a chain of defects, of hiding, of hiding the hidden and hiding the hidden hidden. That is, what I would suggest to call the epistemical tracing of technical media, which, as far as the optical media are concerned, provides a process of visualisation and visibility based on an historical process of making the unvisible unvisible. Not one single step of this process can be separated from the technical medium which is concerned.

If one doesn’t take concern in a historical theory of photography, if one does not see, how abstract painting is remanipulating an already medially manipulated painting based
on occultistic concepts, then one could be taken into Kandinsky’s self-concept of the pure spiritual in the art. One could be misled to say, Kandinsky’s painting is a painting of ideas, how strange they might be. But no, although Kandinsky is hiding the techno-medial roots of his painting, he is not painting ideas in a platonic sense. The so-called avantgarde after the turn of the century remains blind and sightless facing the new technical media, but one can say, nothing but this blindness and sightlessness was their impact on abstract painting. Kandinsky didn’t want to see anything anymore, one can say, not one single representable known real thing, because in the technical media there is nothing to be seen like that. The most deceptive effects of the new media, which are arising from their own blind spot, became the especial subject of Kandinsky’s Avantgarde, configuring and hiding these roots in the same draught of painting. So the Munich Avantgarde after 1900 starts by virtue of an error, which – lets' say it freely adapted from Lacan – could not be deceived.