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THE SPIRIT IN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES:
HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL NOTES

Frank C. Tribbe Memorial Lecture

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Abstract

This paper focuses on selected aspects of the history of out-of-body experiences (OBEs), namely case work and discussions published between 1860 and 1956 in which its authors defended concepts such as the spirit and subtle bodies capable of going out of the physical body. The discussion centers on the writings of Scottish social reformer Robert Dale Owen's (1801-1877), English reverend and medium's William Stainton Moses (1839-1892), English journalist William H. Harrison, English classical scholar and psychical researcher Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901), French engineer Gabriel Delanne (1857-1926), Italian psychical researcher Ernesto Bozzano (1862-1943), and American sociologist Hornell Hart (1888-1967). All the discussions included veridical phenomena such as obtaining information about events taking place at a distance from the physical body, and being seen as an apparition in the location where the OBEs felt they were visiting while having the OBE. Some of these writings are evidentially problematic and suffer from lack of precise definition of the nature of the principle believed to be behind the phenomena. But regardless of conceptual problems the above mentioned OBE-related phenomena need to be considered by those who adhere to purely hallucinatory explanations of the phenomenon.

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As I have argued before the study of out-of-body experiences has a fascinating history (Alvarado, 1989, 1992, 2005, 2009). This paper is to some extent an extension of my previous outlines of OBE history. In keeping with Frank C. Tribbe's interests, and with the overall theme of this conference, I will discuss some attempts from the old spiritualistic and psychical research literatures to establish the reality of the spirit, or of some other nonphysical principle, through the study of OBEs and related phenomena. My purpose here is not to convince my readers of the validity of the observations recorded or of the ideas presented. While I believe much of what I will discuss needs to be taken seriously when we theorize about OBEs, I present this material with the following purposes in mind. First, to rescue from oblivion selected aspects of OBE research history that are sometimes forgotten and that represent

examples of the attempts to defend the reality of what has been variously referred to as a non-material, nonphysical, or non-local mind. Second, to remind those currently interested in OBEs of selected aspects of a literature that suggests that OBEs are more than a psychological experience.

Recent Trends in the Conceptualization of OBEs: Hallucinations of Disembodiment

While there have been some modern discussions of ideas that take seriously the possibility that OBEs represent an experience transcending the body (e.g., Becker, 1993; Kelly et al., 2007; Tart, 1978; Woodhouse, 1994), which is also relevant to the study of near-death experiences (NDEs, e.g., Van Lommel, 2006), today OBEs tend to be “explained” by postulating that the experience is hallucinatory. During the 1980s such a position was represented by psychologists Susan J. Blackmore (1982) and Harvey J. Irwin (1985). The concept also appears in more recent times (e.g., Blanke, Landis, Spinelli, & Seeck, 2004; Brugger, Regard, & Landis, 1997; Irwin, 2000; McCreery, 1997; Murray & Fox, 2005). Modern discussions characterize the OBE as “illusory,” as stated in a paper published in 2007 in the prestigious journal *Science* (Ehrsson, 2007).²

All this modern interest in the reduction of OBEs to various psychological and psychophysiological processes should not obscure the fact that a previous conceptual tradition existed, the one that is the topic of the current paper.

In Search of the Wandering Spirit

The idea of the existence of subtle bodies comes from antiquity (Mead, 1919; Poortman, 1954/1978; for aspects from the nineteenth-century see Deveney, 1997). Such a concept has been supported by reports of OBEs and apparitions of the living that did not necessarily involve the out-of-body sensation, but that were assumed by many to illustrate the projection of some spiritual or vital principle from the body (Alvarado, 2009). My review will be limited to selected publications that appeared between the nineteenth century and the 1950s. I will discuss the writings of Robert Dale Owen, William Stainton Moses, William H. Harrison, Frederic W.H. Myers, Gabriel Delanne, Ernesto Bozzano, and Hornell Hart.

Case Collection Studies of OBEs and Related Phenomena

Robert Dale Owen (1801-1877)

Following previous writers defending the existence of a spiritual principle through accounts of apparitions and other phenomena (e.g., Crowe, 1848; Jung-Stilling, 1808/1851), social reformer Robert Dale Owen explored similar grounds in his book *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860). For the purposes of this paper I will focus on a chapter of the book devoted to apparitions of the living in which the author presented several cases originally reported to him.

Owen started his discussion with a case of an apparition seen six weeks before the death of the appearer (pp. 327-328). This was followed by cases such as the following. A woman referred to as Mrs. E. was dying at a place distant from her residence, unaware her little daughter had died at home. A Miss. H., who was visiting the family

and who had a history of seeing apparitions, entered the room where the body of the little girl was lying in a coffin. She saw the little girl's mother in the room. As Owen wrote:

Standing within three or four feet of the figure for several minutes, she assured herself of its identity. It did not speak, but, raising one arm, it first pointed to the body of the infant, and then signed upward ... This was a few minutes after four o'clock in the afternoon ... Next day she received ... a letter [from the lady's husband] informing her that his wife had died the preceding day ... at half past four. And when, a few days later, that gentleman himself arrived, he stated that Mrs. E -'s mind had evidently wandered before her death; for, but a little time previous to that event, seeming to revive as from a swoon, she had asked her husband "why he had not told her that her baby was in heaven." When he replied evasively, still wishing to conceal from her the fact of her child's death ... she said to him, "It is useless to deny it ...; *for I have just been home, and have seen her in her little coffin ...*" (pp. 343-344).

From this case, Owen went on to discuss what he called the "visionary excursion." This was an experience taking place in 1857 in which a woman woke from sleep to find herself "as if standing by the bedside and looking upon her own body ..." (p. 345). During the experience she traveled and visited a friend, who later verified she had seen the experiencer and had conversed with her. Owen was told of the vision by the experiencer, and later talked with the person who perceived her. In his view, this phenomenon suggested that her physical body "parted with what we may call a spiritual portion of itself; ... which portion, moving off without the usual means of locomotion, might make itself perceptible, at a certain distance, to another person" (pp. 347-348).

This idea seemed to Owen to account for other cases of apparitions of the living he presented in the chapter. He also seemed to include within this explanation cases of recurrent apparitions taking place around an individual who had no awareness of the phenomenon. This was the case of Emélie Sagée, a French teacher whose double was repeatedly seen by her students, sometimes collectively (pp. 348-357). This remarkable, but evidentially weak case, has been cited repeatedly by many authors both in the old (e.g., Aksakof, n.d./1890), and modern literatures (Evans, 2004). In Owen's description of some interesting incidents:

One day the governess was giving a lesson to a class of thirteen ... and was demonstrating, with eagerness, some proposition, to illustrate which she had occasion to write with chalk on a blackboard. While she was doing so, and the young ladies were looking at her, ... they suddenly saw *two* Mademoiselle Sagées, the one by the side of the other. They were exactly alike; and they used the same gestures, that the real person held a bit of chalk in her hand, and did actually write, while the double had no chalk, and only imitated the motion ... Sometimes, at dinner, the double appeared standing behind the teacher's chair and imitating her her motions as she ate, — only that its hands held no knife and fork, and that there was no appearance of food ... All the pupils and the servants waiting on the table witnessed this

(pp. 349-350).

Owen commented that while some cases of apparitions of the living coincided with death, others did not. In fact he pointed out that some cases (such as Sagée's) did not seem to involve any special state or condition. Owen believed that the cases he presented showed that the

spiritual body ... may, during life, occasionally detach itself, to some extent or other and for a time, from the material flesh and blood which for a few years it pervades in intimate association; and if death be but the issuing forth of the spiritual body from its temporary associate; then, at the moment of its exit, it is that spirit body which through life may have been occasionally and partially detached from the natural body, and which at last is thus entirely and forever divorced from it, that passes into another state of existence (pp. 360-361).

William Stainton Moses (1839-1892)

Writing under the pseudonym of M.A. Oxon (1876), English reverend and medium William Stainton Moses reviewed the evidence for what he referred to in his title as the "trans-corporeal action of spirit," or the "action of the ego outside of its bodily tenement" (p. 100). In his view:

The testimony of all sensitives, psychics, or mediums, *i.e.*, persons in whom the spirit is not so closely bound to the body as in the majority of individuals, agrees in the consciousness they all have of standing in places, and observing people, and scenes from a spot removed from that which they know their bodies to be. Whilst employed in some occupation compatible with quietness and passivity, *e.g.*, reading, meditating, or quiet conversation, they feel frequently a strange second consciousness, as though the *ego* had moved away through space and were busied with other scenes (p. 102).

Moses classified the cases he compiled into two major groups, and several subgroups. Not all of these cases involved what we would refer to as OBEs or NDEs because there was no evidence that consciousness was experienced outside of the physical body. The first group consisted of cases in which no volition was involved. These included: (1) cases in which the person saw themselves as an apparition from the perspective of the physical body (autoscopy), and apparent unconscious apparitions of the living; (2) apparitions as a death-warning; (3) appearances when the physical body was inactive or in abnormal conditions (spontaneous experiences, materializations produced by mediums), and; (4) conscious apparitions of the living, and apparitions without consciousness under conditions of mental anxiety.

The second group was of manifestations accompanied by volition. This general group included apparitions: (1) influenced by strong emotion (apparitions of persons who were close to death), (2) influenced by factors other than the previous group, and (3) influenced by the will of the person seen as an apparition.

William H. Harrison

In his book *Spirits Before Our Eyes* (1879), English spiritualist and publisher

William H. Harrison compiled many interesting experiences interpreted in some cases as the traveling of the spirit. His work starts affirming the existence of the “occasional appearance of the spirit of a person in one place, at about the time that his body is dying in another place ...” (p. 24). These apparitions, Harrison stated, suggest that “when the bodily vitality is at a low ebb, the human spirit may temporarily leave its earthly tenement” (p. 144).

Harrison noticed from the cases he discussed that some apparitions were perceived by a single individual while others were collectively perceived. In his view, these and other apparitions could be interpreted as physical or as psychical phenomena. The first, presenting phenomena such as opening of doors, suggested the appearances were “objectively and palpably materialized” (p. 55). Other cases were interpreted as clairvoyance by the dying person or as mental influences from spirits. In veridical dreams, he thought, instead of travels of the spirit the dreamer may be “seeing that which a spirit or mortal *en rapport* with him thought” (p. 146).

Such difficulty in explaining veridical phenomena was seen in a case Harrison included in his book in which a person who was unconscious later remembered veridical details of a funeral he could not attend (p. 148). In Harrison’s view: “He might have seen the funeral by being present at it in the spirit; he might have seen it by clairvoyance; or he might have seen that which was in the mind of a departed spirit who was present at the funeral of his own body” (p. 148). For other cases Harrison also considered as an explanation a mental influence from a distant person, that which later became called telepathy between living individuals.

States like trance and sleep, Harrison believed, could be helpful in releasing the spirit from the physical body, but such experiences were not usually remembered (p. 201). This was also the case of the invocation of living spirits through mediums, a topic discussed with several examples presented to illustrate the traveling of the human spirit (pp. 170-180).³

Harrison also briefly discussed other types of apparitions of the living, such as arrival and recurrent apparitions. This led him to speculate that there are a few persons that “are so physiologically constituted, that their spirits are not unfrequently seen in the place to which their thoughts are directed” (p. 161).

Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901)

In the first major work produced by the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), *Phantasms of the Living*, Edmund Gurney expounded on a telepathic explanation of apparitions of the living (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886). But English classical scholar Frederic W. H. Myers (1886) speculated along different lines in a section of this study entitled “Note on a Suggested Mode of Psychical Interaction.” Myers, however, was skeptical about the existence of a double “capable ... of detaching itself from the solid flesh and producing measurable effects on the material world” (p. 279). Among other arguments, he postulated that such an idea had difficulty explaining the clothing of apparitions.

Contrary to Gurney, Myers argued that collectively perceived apparitions, and other apparitions, were not easily explained by telepathy. He emphasized in his “Note” the importance of cases of distant clairvoyance that included descriptions of

the experience “as something unlike either dream-presence or waking presence in the suddenly-revealed locality, as giving a sense of translation of the centre of consciousness, of a psychical excursion into a definite region of space” (pp. 288-289). Evidence for such experience, he pointed out, could be found in some reciprocal apparitions, or those cases in which Gurney considered that “each of the parties might receive a telepathic impulse from the other, and so each be at once agent and percipient” (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, p. 153).

Myers classified phantasms of the living in two classes. Those in which there was an externalization of imagery from the percipient’s mind, and those “corresponding to the conception in the mind of a clairvoyant percipient, — who is thus also an agent, — of his own presence and action in a scene which he shares with the persons who are corporeally present therein” (p. 289). The issue of the location of consciousness was very important for Myers, who believed that collective percipience need not be a telepathic process, but could be instead perception of “something” else.

This something else was not the objective double discussed by previous writers, but something non-physical. Some of the cases showed selective percipience, that is, they were perceived, Myers believed, by some persons present but not by others, an observation that did not support an objective apparition in physical terms. As Myers wrote:

I treat the respective hallucinations of each member of the affected group as each and all directly generated by a conception in a distant mind — a conception which presents itself to that mind as though its centre of activity were translated to the scene where the group are sitting, and which presents itself to each member of that group as though their hallucinations ... were diffused from a “radiant point,” or phantasmogenetic focus, corresponding with that region of space where the distant agent conceives himself to be exercising his supernormal perception (p. 291).

If that reasoning was valid, Myers argued further, it should apply as well to experiences other than those involving collective percipience, such as reciprocal cases. The latter cases were recognized by Myers to be rare. In his view, part of this could be due to the fact that, because some experiencers died just after the experience, the testimony of people who felt they were out of their bodies was lost. Consequently, Myers called for studies of the experiences of the dying, and briefly mentioned relevant cases from *Phantasms of the Living*. But it was important to keep in mind that a “dying person’s object is not to collect evidence, and that it must be a mere chance whether he mentions any incident which can vouch to others for the genuineness of his clairvoyant perceptions” (p. 303).

Myers discussed the evidence for “invasion,” or localization in a place, in reciprocal cases and in cases in which the appearance occurred in a waking state and had little to offer in terms of a sensation of transfer to a different locality. Myers noticed this sensation was more frequent in cases of people sleeping, and even more when the appearer was in a trance or in a state of delirium.

In the rest of the “Note,” Myers discussed cases in terms of gradations of features, an approach he developed further in a later publication reviewed below. First were

cases of transfer of impressions generally related to a dying person with “no illusion of space-relations” (p. 310). After some intermediate cases such as those of “visions in the mind’s eye” (p. 310), there were cases with some spatial features such as perceptions of scenes or persons at a distance. The person perceiving at a distance was called a “clairvoyant invader” (p. 311) by Myers. These perceptions may “generate in the denizens of that scene a hallucinatory perception of a supernormal invader ... (p. 311). However, in such cases the person seldom remembered his or her “invasion.” The “invasion” was perceived by a person in the other location, directed in some unknown way by the invader. As to the nature of these invasions and reciprocal contacts, Myers admitted ignorance.

In a section of a later paper Myers (1892) briefly returned to the experiences of the dying. “It is possible that we may learn much,” he wrote, “were we to question dying persons, on their awakening from some comatose condition, as to their memory of any dream or vision during that state” (p. 180). Furthermore, he asked: “Why should not every death-bed be made the starting point of a long experiment?” (p. 252).

In his 1892 paper Myers discussed the Wiltse (1889) case that consisted of the sensation of leaving the body while the person was very ill with high fever. Myers also discussed the case of the Reverend L.J. Bertrand who described his experience in a letter to William James. Sitting in the heights of a mountain Bertrand was climbing, he felt an attack of apoplexy and started losing sensibility on his body. He felt himself floating and saw his physical body. He also saw things that he was able to verify later. Among them, he saw his wife going to Lucerne when she had said she would leave the next day to stay and stayed at the Lungern Hotel.

Some years later Myers returned to the topics discussed here in his well known classic book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). Continuing on his previous ideas published in 1886 Myers stated that he was even more convinced about the concept of psychical invasions in which a phantasmogenetic center was “established in the percipient’s surroundings; that some movement bearing some relation to space as we know it is actually accomplished; and some presence is transferred, and may or may not be discerned by the invaded person; some perception of the distant scene in itself is acquired, and may or may not be remembered by the invader” (Vol. 1, p. 247).

Myers argued that some rare people had a particular facility to make their phantasms visible to others. He called this hypothetical process psychorrhagy, and the tendency for such phenomena psychorrhagic diathesis. The concept implied something breaking loose from a person, a “psychical element ... definable mainly by its power of producing a phantasm, perceptible by one or more persons, in some portion or other of space” (Vol. 1, p. 264).

Psychical invasions and self-projection in which consciousness was in locations other than the physical body were seen by Myers to be part of a chain or series of phenomena. Cases of telepathy, Myers argued, provided evidence for a psychical agency, or an element of personality capable of functioning beyond the physical body. Other apparitional manifestations indicating this extracorporeal action were illustrated by Myers through cases drawn from *Phantasms of the Living* and other SPR publications. This included arrival apparitions in which a “man’s mind may be fixed on his return home, so that his phantasm is seen in what might seem both to himself

and to others the most probable place” (Vol. 1, p. 257). Myers also discussed other phenomena such as: (1) recurrent apparitions of the same person; (2) collectively perceived apparitions; (3) apparitions perceived by bystanders not connected to the appearer; (4) cases of “clairvoyant excursion” including “memory of of the scene [the person] has psychically visited” (Vol. 1, p. 270); (5) apparitions in which the appearer had no recollection of the experience but had some fixed thoughts or anxiety’s connected to the percipient; (6) reciprocal apparitions, and (7) experimental apparitions, or those induced through the intention of a person. Although not every apparition carried the consciousness of the person represented by it, Myers saw a connection between all of these manifestations in that they presented different aspects of psychical invasions. The next manifestation in the chain were cases of apparitions of the deceased, in which it was assumed that consciousness continued after death.

This last reference to survival of death was very important to Myers, who considered as many others before him had suggested, that death was a permanent self-projection of the spirit (Vol. 2, pp. 524-525). It was, in fact, “the one definite act which it seems as though a man might perform equally well before and after bodily death” (Vol. 1, p. 297).

Gabriel Delanne (1857-1926)

The French engineer and spiritist leader Gabriel Delanne discussed the existence of the double in a chapter in his book *Evidence for a Future Life* (1899/1904). Following Kardec, and others before him, he believed the double was an objective body, and the principle behind a variety of apparitional phenomena. Delanne criticized the telepathic interpretation of apparitions of the living offered in *Phantasms of the Living*, arguing that some apparitions were best explained through recourse to the concept of an objective double.

Many cases of apparitions of the living were included in the chapter, but most of them were not conscious apparitions. Nonetheless, in some cases the appearer retained recollection of being in a different place. Delanne argued that “in some cases the mind is not able to retain when acting on the physical plane the memory of what occurred when it was acting ... upon the psychic plane” (p. 82).

Among the few cases cited to show conscious journeys out of the body, Delanne reviewed that of Cromwell Varley (pp. 83-84). Varley was inhaling chloroform for medical reasons and fell asleep with a sponge on his mouth. As cited by Delanne, Varley stated: “I saw myself lying on my back, with the sponge on my mouth, quite unable to make any movement” (p. 83; the case was originally published in *Report on Spiritualism*, 1871, pp. 162-163).

Delanne argued from his cases that: “It seems ... that it is necessary that the body should be either asleep, or that the soul should be moved by some strong emotion, or that the bodily constitution should be weakened by ill-health in order to produce this condition of detachment. Similar conditions are produced by anesthetics” (p. 99-100). The lack of activity of the physical body suggested to Delanne a redirection of bodily forces: “If the entire nervous energy is employed in producing a visible manifestation exterior to the physical body, during the operation, the latter is reduced to live in the condition of a vegetative organism ... In certain cases it is even possible to recognise a direct connection between the intensity of the psychic action and the state of

postration of the physical body” (pp. 99-100).⁴ Delanne, like others before him, connected the concept of the double to the phenomena of materialization.

In a different work, *Les apparitions matérialisées des vivants & des morts*, Delanne (1909) examined the topic of apparitions and mediumistic materializations. This work is one of the most comprehensive studies on record of apparitions of the living and doubles. Its main purpose, as stated by the author in the first page, was to “demonstrate through observation and experience that the human soul exists during life and after death” (p. 1; this, and other translations, are mine). Delanne also attempted to make a case for the idea that human beings have an intelligent principle capable of action out of the physical body.

Delanne discussed a variety of well-known cases of apparitions of the living drawing heavily on SPR publications, as well as on the spiritualist literature. The author accepted the existence of apparitions of the living caused by telepathy, but, once again, he disagreed with Gurney’s views that telepathy could explain all those appearances. In some cases there was no evidence of emotion in the agent typical of telepathic cases (p. 180). It was also argued that some cases presented physical phenomena such as opening of doors, and that it was unlikely that collectively perceived apparitions involved telepathic messages to different individuals.

The soul, he wrote, “possesses an ethereal body by which it affirms its presence through the phenomenon of apparitions” (p. 16). This body was the perispirit of the spiritists, a semiphysical body that he believed accompanied the soul in its excursions out of the body. Such “fluidic” body, Delanne believed, could cause physical phenomena, and was the principle behind many visible apparitions as well as the phenomena of mediumistic materializations, spirit photography, and the photography of “doubles.”⁵

Delanne discussed crises, experimental, voluntary, reciprocal, and recurrent apparitions. In many of these cases the phantom could go through obstacles, move close to the speed of light, reproduce the cases of the physical body, and show clothing. The author also paid attention to OBEs, what he called doubling (“dédoublement”). In some of these cases, the “soul of the traveler ... acquires knowledge of the exterior world ... though an extra-corporeal action; afterwards the apparition is optically visible, by several persons ...” (p. 91). These two aspects of change of bodily location and being perceived as an apparition suggested to Delanne that the “hypothesis of a reciprocal hallucination, in which one is the cause of the other, is not ... a sufficient explanation for all cases” (p. 140).⁶

Cases of recurrent apparitions such as the Sagée case discussed in several pages of the book (pp. 175-180) suggested to Delanne that there were not clear reasons for telepathy to take place. Instead he proposed that there was a “physiological idiosyncrasy of agents,” or “sort of a particular biological anomaly, that allows the agent to *unconsciously* project a concrete view of itself to the place where his thought is directed” (p. 197). These apparitions, he noticed, lacked consciousness. In other words, even if apparitions of the living were physically real they were not necessarily intelligent nor conscious.

As Delanne further wrote about these mindless apparitions: “It is a simple fluidic effigy, an image that may be compared to those produced in the focus of a concave

mirror ...” (p. 495). Following this, Delanne accepted aspects of Myers’s idea of a phantasmogenetic center, but only in the sense of some type of modification of space. But, unlike Myers, Delanne believed in a physical double, in the exteriorization of a “fluidic image without interior organization, without intelligence ...” (p. 495). Delanne was also critical of Myers’s idea that the phenomena discussed here were purely psychical and related to fragments of the personality. The latter view seemed improbable to him because in his conception the soul could not be divided as a material substance can.

In addition to the production of a physical double and the exteriorization of consciousness, Delanne believed there were ambiguous and intermediate cases “that show the continuity of this genre of phenomena and the great difficulty that exists in clearly separating one from the other” (p. 496).

Ernesto Bozzano (1862-1943)

Italian student of psychic phenomena Ernesto Bozzano, a strong defender of survival of bodily death, discussed the subject in a multi-part paper (Bozzano, 1911) that was later considerably expanded in book form (Bozzano, 1934/1937; see also Alvarado, 2005). In this book Bozzano presented a variety of phenomena he grouped under the term “bilocation” that he believed showed the existence of an “etheric” body inside the physical body.

Most of the phenomena discussed in the book did not involve the conscious experience of being out-of-the body. These consisted of: (1) the phantom limb sensations of amputees and sensations of “doubling” of the physical body in hemiplegics; (2) cases of autoscopy; (3) cases in which the “double phantom is perceived only by a third party” (p. 12; including the testimony of deathbed bystanders of subtle bodies and luminous and misty manifestations presumably coming out from the body of the dying individual); ⁷ and (4) cases difficult to classify as doubling or as telepathic, such as many apparitions of the living.

Another group of cases consisted of those “in which the personal consciousness is transferred to the phantom” (p. 41). Such exteriorized consciousness, Bozzano believed, resided in the etheric body, which “constitutes the supreme, immaterial envelope of the discarnate spirit” (p. 8).

Bozzano presented 20 OBE and NDE cases taken from published sources, all of which were articles or books about psychic phenomena. For example, four of the cases were taken from Osty’s (1930) article. These projections of consciousness, Bozzano pointed out, rarely occurred in the waking state. Many cases were said to take place “during absolute rest of the body” (p. 41). My analysis of the 20 cases cited by Bozzano shows that five of them took place during anesthesia, two during illness, and two under hypnosis, while the rest (one each) took place under the following circumstances: giving birth, exhaustion and stress, being shot, depression, smoke inhalation, asphyxia, a fall, coma, sleep, during automatic writing, and falling asleep.

Cases in which the person out of her or his body had veridical perceptions, or those cases in which the experiencer brought back information that could be verified after the person had returned to their bodies were considered very important by Bozzano. In his view, without such cases it was hard to defend the idea that the

phenomena were different from “oniric or hallucinatory romances, that is, completely subjective phenomena” (p. 42).

The experience of being out of the body, Bozzano argued, induced the belief that the spirit could leave the physical body and, consequently, that it could survive bodily death. Like Tweedale (1925) before him, Bozzano defended the importance of cases in which lights and other visible phenomena were seen around or emanating from a dying individual. He considered these cases examples of “embryonary and rudimentary” doubling, being the initial stage of deathbed bilocation phenomena. Such phenomena showed the projection of a fluidic substance from the physical body consisting of “repeated fluctuations determined by the partial reabsorption of the part of the organism (corresponding to the growing and decreasing vitality of the patient), ending with the formation of an ‘etheric body’ ...” (pp. 120-121).

Bozzano insisted on the importance of considering all the different bilocation phenomena together, as opposed to individually. Such ensemble of facts indicated to him convincing evidence for the existence of the etheric body. But Bozzano also felt the phenomena suggested the existence of an etheric brain, which in turn indicated the existence of a spirit ruling the mind though the body, but independent of it.

Hornell Hart (1888-1967)

Sociologist Hornell Hart (1954) studied cases of what he called “ESP projection,” that were published in the spiritualist and psychical research literature. He defined this term as experiences that combined veridical perceptions, the feeling of being located out of the physical body, and “consistent orientation to the out-of-body location” (p. 121). He located 288 ESP projection cases in the literature, but ended analyzing 99 cases in which the experience had been reported before the person obtained verifications of his or her observations.

Some of the cases considered were classified by the way in which they were induced. This included projections induced through hypnosis (20 cases), concentration (15), and methods other than concentration (12). There were also apparitions of the living corresponding to concentration by a person, and to dreams or visions experienced by that person suggestive of projection (30). In addition, there were 22 cases of spontaneous ESP projections. Hart noted that “neither the concentration method nor the hypnotic method usually produce full-fledged ESP projection” (p. 128). However, I would argue that some cases included by Hart do not qualify to be included in his paper because it is not clear from the original accounts (most of which are not presented) that the person in question had actually experienced the sensation of being out of the body.

According to Hart full-fledged ESP projections had different features. The evidential cases had both veridical perceptions on the part of the projector as well as the experience of being seen by someone else at the place where they projected. The non-evidential cases included features such as seeing the physical body, awareness of having a different body, floating sensations, passing through matter, and awareness of moving. Hart also pointed out that features were related to induction circumstances. The hypnotic cases had veridical perceptions, but very few additional features. Similarly, projections induced by concentration were generally seen as apparitions, but as a rule did not show other features. The projections by ways other than

concentration showed more features than the previous cases. Finally, spontaneous projections seemed to show more incidents of contacts with spirit entities and other regions or dimensions than the other cases. Hart further stated that the individual's experiences during ESP projection "are reported to be continuous: the observer-operator moves from point to point within the places to which he is projected, and perceives people, objects, and events as if he were physically present" (p. 141).

Hart developed a scale, used by three independent judges to rate the cases for evidentiality, producing scores ranging from .00 to 1.00. With the exception of considering testimony about veridical details before confirmation was received, Hart did not present the criteria used to rate the cases. The rest of the criteria were mentioned in a later paper (Hart and collaborators, 1956), in which it was explained that, in addition to the above, the scale considered evidence of: (1) confirmation obtained about correctness of evidential claims; (2) investigation by an independent and competent researcher; (3) fullness of documentation of the case; (4) time interval between evidential events and the written report.

In a later paper (Hart & Collaborators, 1956), Hart returned to the topic but this time he focused on OBE apparitions, or conscious apparitions of the living. One-hundred and sixty-five apparitions were selected from the spiritualist and psychical research literature. Twenty-five consisted of OBE apparitions. Analyses of features of these cases showed some features similar to those of ordinary people. These included seeing full figures (100%), as opposed to such parts as faces; adjustment to physical surroundings, such as passing through doorways (80%); adjustments to persons, such as looking or avoiding them (72%); normal limb movements (28%); characterization of the details of the experience as vivid (24%); and descriptions of the apparitions as solid, real or the like (12%). Other features different from those of normal individuals included disappearance of the apparition within 30 minutes or less (100%), sudden appearances or disappearances (24%), the conveyance of veridical information other than own death (21%), and invisibility to one or more persons present (12%).

A further analysis of 41 cases, including the previously mentioned 25 conscious apparitions of the living, showed a variety of features and circumstances of occurrence such as being seen in another location (62%), awareness of having a body (43%), seeing the physical body (31%), and rising or floating (14%).

In Hart's view conscious ESP projections "provide internal views of the phenomena observed externally in connection with apparition of the living" (p. 177). Consequently, Hart argued, similarities with apparitions of the dying (not conscious) and of the dead would indicate "something of the nature of the experiences undergone at and (to a limited extent) after death" (p. 177). Hart conducted statistical comparisons between the features of the different types of apparitions and found that they were similar overall. In doing this, Hart was extending the work of previous researchers into the topic of survival of death.

Discussion

Most of the publications discussed in this paper are not cited often by those contemporary individuals who investigate or write about OBEs and NDEs. Of all of these, the writings of Myers and Hart are better known, but even they are largely neglected today. To some extent this may be due to the usual practice of ignoring the

old literature prevalent in most research fields, which unfortunately means that many contemporary writers are simply unaware of the existence of these writings, or consider them irrelevant to current concerns.

Trends

The writings summarized here did much to put the existence of OBEs and NDEs on record. Until the dawn of modern research after the work of Hart, the efforts of the individuals I have reviewed here showed the existence of these phenomena, as well as their associated conditions and features (Alvarado, 1989).⁸

Many of the case collectors believed in the existence of some principle that left the physical body. Owen, Moses, and Harrison referred to the spirit, while Bozzano mentioned the etheric body. Myers did not believe in a particular body, but in a more general psychical and spiritual action at a distance, an action that admitted the manifestation of the spirit. Furthermore, the literature described here tended to mix a variety of apparitional manifestations among the living, such as arrival, experimental, and recurrent apparitions, with the idea of the exteriorization of consciousness from the physical body.

All the case collectors believed that projections of different sorts supported the idea of survival of death. The most direct test of this idea were Hart's analyses comparing apparitions of the dying and the dead to conscious apparitions of the living. Closely related to this was Bozzano's interest in the observations of bystanders around a deathbed. He believed that mists, clouds and observations of subtle bodies leaving the dying supported the idea that consciousness left the body at death, as other modern writers such as Becker (1993), Crookall (1967), and Rogo (1973) have believed.

Critique

Many of the above mentioned authors have weak cases in terms of evidence for action or effects at a distance. Several of the cases are second hand in the sense of having summaries instead of descriptions by the witnesses. In fact, regardless of evidential considerations, some of the older writings — by Owen and Harrison, for example — do not cite the testimony of the experiencer, and depend on case summaries. This is problematic at best. An exception to this was Myers' work, who represented the evidential approach of the Society for Psychical Research.⁹

Hart introduced an important methodological advance when he rated the cases he used for different aspects of evidentiality. His work provides us with a guide by which to follow up his efforts using new cases.

The concepts of subtle bodies postulated by most of the writers, while interesting and thought-provoking, are problematic. For all the discussions of subtle bodies there is little evidence for ideas about the nature of this construct. We are basically left with vague allusions to the existence of a virtually unknown principle based on certain phenomena such as OBEs and apparitions of the living. Myers did not propose a double but argued that something broke loose from the body, a nonphysical part of the person's spiritual constitution capable of modifying space in some vague way that he called a phantasmogenetic center. But the description of such modification in space is so vague that it does not seem to be better conceptually than the notion of the double,

or of nonphysical dimensions.

One hopes that these ideas will be able to be tested in the future in ways going beyond the interpretation of old cases, that is, by generating testable hypotheses. Osiris (1981) has suggested that we should test different models of apparitions with specific predictions consistent with the model, but he also has reminded us that there may be different types of apparitions. Perhaps this approach may be applied to OBE apparitions and to NDE cases. But scientifically speaking the important issue here is the possibility of testing for these concepts. While currently such testability seems dubious, the situation may change in the future.

We must also be critical of the attempts to postulate connections between all kinds of apparitions of the living and OBEs. While such authors as Owen, Harrison, Myers, Bozzano, Hart, and others believed that an analysis of cases connected OBE phenomena to apparitional happenings, their conclusions cannot be said to be solidly established. While I find attractive the concept of a continuum of experiences, such interpretations of the varieties of apparitions do not assure us that these experiences are necessarily connected. It is tempting to follow some authors in arguing that the cases form a natural gradation, going from non-conscious apparitions such as crises apparitions and arrival cases, to cases in which consciousness seems to be functioning out of the body, but this is far from saying that they are related or that they are of the same nature. We need to be careful to group OBEs with non-conscious apparitions of the living. This is the case even if we consider, as Hart did, that they have similar features. While there may be similarities in terms of specific features we cannot be sure that these cases do not have different explanations such as telepathic hallucinations or other unknown processes. Muldoon and Carrington (1951) cautioned us about confusing OBE apparitions with other apparitions of the living. In the latter, they said, "there is usually no evidence of an active self-consciousness, but in genuine projection experiences the subject not only 'appears' but is conscious of the fact that he is appearing ..." (p. 217).

Authors such as Myers have written about collectively perceived and reciprocal apparition cases. While Myers' idea of a phantasmogenetic center is interesting, he was aware he was speculating and that the concept was imprecise. Similarly, when authors such as Bozzano defended the action of subtle bodies, the criteria used to adopt such an idea was vaguely presented and we cannot take their assertions for granted.

While there has been much in the way of descriptions of experiences, there has been a lack of rigorous and detailed studies of the features of the cases beyond presenting narratives and pointing out some commonalities. We need more work similar to that done by Hart in which case features are analyzed and quantified to present a more specific phenomenological profile of the experiences in question.

Concluding Remarks

These criticisms do not mean that we should neglect the works summarized here. After all many modern psychological ideas about OBEs can also be criticized. While I have argued that we need to be critical about the above-mentioned theoretical notions, I am not saying that we should abandon the concept of a non-material principle, that is, what I have referred in the title of this paper as the spirit in OBEs. The problem is

that such ideas tend to be vague and speculative. Instead of using them as explanations, they need to be further developed empirically if they are going to represent more than a label for unknown processes.

The studies I have reviewed are valuable for many reasons. In addition to reminding us of past work that should not have been forgotten, they remind us of the existence of many OBE and NDE features, such as the perception of veridical events and OBE apparitions. Regardless of the above mentioned problems, much of the veridical phenomena gathered provides evidence for action at a distance from the body, something inconsistent with the idea that OBEs are solely hallucinatory processes. Whatever the nature of the phenomena, its veridical features suggest that consciousness can transcend the body. Regardless of alternate explanations such as ESP processes, this suggestion is no small accomplishment because it points towards features inconsistent with a purely hallucinatory view of the OBE.

Furthermore, while we may question, or remain agnostic about, the speculations in the old studies about a possible relationships between OBEs and apparitional phenomena, they remind us of the importance of further research on the topic. Do individuals around whom arrival and other recurrent apparitions occur also have the experience of being out of their bodies? Can we follow up Hart's comparisons of conscious apparitions of the living and other apparitions such as those representing the dead? If Bozzano was right we may expect a relationship between OBEs, NDEs and autoscopy, particularly in those individuals who have had repeated experiences. Can we do better than Gurney and Myers to test today their respective explanations of reciprocal apparitions? If we follow these leads, the material discussed here can do more than show us what was studied in the past, it may indeed inspire our future investigations.

In the meantime, we need to recognize the contributions the persons I discussed here have made. More than early workers in the conceptualization and study of OBEs, they were mappers of the mind and its "wandering" capabilities. They were pioneers in the understanding of what in many quarters still remain unrecognized human faculties.

Notes

1. The writing of this paper was supported by a grant from the Society for Psychical Research. I am grateful to Nancy L. Zingrone for useful editorial suggestions.
2. For an overview of psychological ideas about OBEs up to the 1980s see Alvarado (1992).
3. This topic was discussed by others during the nineteenth-century (e.g., Nehrer, 1874). For a later discussion see Bozzano (n.d.).
4. Previous authors had argued similarly, as seen in D'Assier's (1884/1887) affirmation that "life [was] withdrawn from the body, which then exhibits cadaverous rigidity, and transfer itself entirely to the phantom, which acquires consistency ..." (p. 69).
5. On the perispirit see Alvarado (2008).

6. This refers to Gurney's model in which reciprocal apparitions were seen as a telepathic interaction whereby an agent influenced a percipient, and the percipient influenced the agent, so that both parties played both roles (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886).
7. I have discussed these cases in several other papers (Alvarado, 1987, 2005, 2006).
8. There are, of course, many other examples of discussions I have not included in this paper for lack of space (e.g., Mattiesen, 1931; Muldoon & Carrington, 1951).
9. For a brief discussion of the Society's approach see Alvarado (1996).

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