

Marthe Béraud (Eva C)

Marthe Béraud (1886–?) was a French materialization medium, the subject of controversial investigations by European psychical researchers over two decades from 1905. Their research describes in-depth scrutiny of the unidentified substance referred to by researchers as ‘ectoplasm’ or ‘teleplasm’, which was said to be involved in the appearance of ‘spirit forms’ in spiritualist séances. Early in her career Béraud adopted the pseudonym ‘Eva Carriere’ and is generally referred to in the research literature as ‘Eva C’.

Summary

Marthe Béraud was born in Algiers in 1886 into a French army family, the eldest of three girls. At a young age she was engaged to be married to the son of a General Noël, who however died of fever in the Congo in 1904. Noël and his wife took to holding regular spiritualist séances, initially with a young female servant, then with Béraud acting as the principal medium. The circle was said to manifest spirits in quasi-physical form; descriptions of the phenomena were published in Gabriel Delanne’s *Revue Scientifique et Morale du Spiritisme*.

The Noël’s subsequently invited Delanne to investigate the phenomena, also [Charles Richet](#), a physiology professor at the Sorbonne in Paris and an active psychical researcher. In 1905, Richet travelled to the Villa Carmen, the Noël’s home in Algiers, and carried out twenty sessions. He reported having seen the materialized phantom of a human being which he was convinced could not be the effect of trickery, either by Béraud – who remained visible at the same time – or an accomplice, since the room was small and well-secured.

Béraud moved to Paris in 1908. There she was taken up by Juliette Bisson and her husband Alexandre, who had observed séance phenomena produced by [Eusapia Palladino](#).¹ She lived with the couple under the pseudonym ‘Eva Carriere’ to escape the notoriety brought by the Villa Carmen affair (see below), and remained with Juliette following Alexandre’s death in 1912. Under Juliette Bisson’s supervision she continued to make herself available as a subject for experiments and demonstrations, some of which were again attended by Richet. Bisson and Béraud also worked with Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, a German hypnosis expert and psychical researcher, in Paris and at his laboratory in Munich. Schrenck-Notzing published a detailed description of experiments carried out between 1909 and 1914, in which an unknown substance – earlier dubbed ‘ectoplasm’ by Richet – appeared from Béraud’s mouth and other parts of her body when she was in a trance state, sometimes seeming to form faces and limbs before disappearing, slowly or suddenly. Many of these observations were witnessed and corroborated by prominent French scientists and intellectuals.

[Gustave Geley](#), a French physician and psychical researcher and director of the [Institut Métapsychique International](#) (IMI) from 1919 to 1924, conducted similar experiments with Béraud in over a period of eighteen months from 1917.²

In 1922, the [Society for Psychical Research](#) published the results of their investigation of Béraud in the previous two years. The investigators noted similar – although seemingly weaker – phenomena to that described by earlier researchers. They were unable to reach a positive conclusion about it, but could find no evidence to substantiate claims of fraud.

The last documented investigation of Béraud was carried out by scientists at the Sorbonne, Paris. As before, the unidentified substance emerged from her orifices and was reabsorbed.

The claims regarding Béraud aroused deep controversy from the outset. Allegations of fraud were made by individuals in Algiers, principally that a disgruntled former servant had carried out a hoax by dressing up to perform the part of the phantom. Suspicion was later aroused by photographs of ectoplasmic ‘faces’ published by Schrenck-Notzing, which looked like crude cut-outs of photographs that had been published in a news magazine. It was commonly asserted that the substance produced by Béraud was material that she had earlier ingested, the result of regurgitation, although this was eliminated by the stringency of the controls in at least some experiments. In 1956, photos were discovered apparently showing the forms linked to Béraud’s body by thin wires, suggesting fakery to some, and the possibility that this had been covered up (see below).

Investigators of Béraud (and their later defenders) resisted claims of fraud on a number of grounds, principally that no conceivable conjuring method could have gone unnoticed, given the stringency of the security controls; that trick methods could not replicate what was observed; and that they could not account for the microscopical and chemical findings concerning the ectoplasm.³

One defender of Beraud was [Hereward Carrington](#), an American psychical researcher associated with the Society for Psychical Research who had been involved in investigations of the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. He stated:

... I personally am quite convinced of the reality of materialization. In saying this, however, it must not be understood that I accept the majority of phenomena which have been adduced in its favor; far from it. With few exceptions, every materializing medium I have ever seen has turned out, upon investigation, to be an arrant fraud. Nevertheless, such phenomena exist, and I believe that, in the presence of Eusapia Palladino, I have seen materializations of an unquestionably genuine character. I have seen, touched, and felt hands and portions of a living body which have occasionally melted in my grasp. It is my belief that similar manifestations have been seen by others, in the presence of such mediums as Home, Eva C., Willi and Rudi Schneider, etc. Genuine phenomena of the sort may be rare, but they are, in my estimation, undoubted.⁴

Charles Richet at the Villa Carmen

Richet’s first investigation of Béraud took place during twenty séances held between 10 August and 10 September 1905, the results of which are given in an article written by him and published in the *Annals of Psychical Science* later the

same year.⁵ Richet begins with a detailed description of the conditions in which the sessions were carried out. Those present included the Noëls, an unidentified woman known to both Richet and the Noëls, the magazine editor Gabriel Delanne, Béraud and her two younger sisters. In almost all the sessions – and those that manifested the most important phenomena – Béraud was concealed behind a curtain that formed a dark recess across one corner. (On a few occasions, one or other of two young women were also present with Béraud behind the curtain: a ‘palm reader’ and a maid, apparently also serving as mediums, although their role was considered insignificant.)

Richet describes the séance room as a detached ‘pavilion’ built over a stable and coach house and accessed through single entrance by a stone staircase leading from the garden. The room’s two windows were blocked by canvas and thick tapestry curtain nailed to the wall. The floor consisted of flagstones cemented together and covered with linoleum, which in turn was covered by a thin felt carpet. A séance ‘cabinet’ was formed by a thick tapestry curtain across a corner of the room forming a triangle. There was no trapdoor in the floor. The sitters sat around a round table in front of the curtain. With regards to security, Richet writes:

Before every sitting, I examined the room minutely and thoroughly – the canopy, the curtains, the chairs (lifting them up), a bath and an old trunk which were in a corner of the room – and I am able to *certify* that no one was hidden in the room when the séance began. Moreover, as the curtains over the windows were securely nailed to the wall, as there was no trap nor secret panel in the walls, I am in all certitude able to *affirm* that no one could enter the room during the séance.⁶

Light was provided by a candle within a lantern with red glass. The light in the space behind the curtain was dim but just visible; outside it was sufficient for the various sitters to be easily recognized. Sittings began at either 4 pm or 8 pm and lasted from two to three hours. At the close, Richet again examined the room ‘thoroughly and minutely’. He notes that Béraud was not tied, nor were her hands held, but nevertheless maintains that the control was strict enough to allow a definite opinion to be formed.

Richet describes the materialization of an apparently human form that had powers of speech and identified itself by the name ‘Bien Boa’. It appeared more or less routinely during séances, with Béraud and the ostensible phantom being visible at the same time. Photographs, taken simultaneously by himself and two other sitters, show a quasi-human figure covered in a substantial quality of white drapes, and featuring a bearded face topped with a helmet, described by Richet as follows:

He has his head covered by a sort of casque with some metallic ornamentation, and over this casque a turban, and falling over the ears a sort of chin-piece, which is only well seen to the right, and which covers the right cheek and ear, and seems to be applied to the cheek under the casque. From the turban the drapery descends, floating and forming a sort of pendentive. The left arm, of which nothing can be distinguished, is enveloped in a thick drapery extending towards Marthe [Béraud] and completely hiding her ...

As to the face itself of B.B., it is rather indistinct, *flou*, when compared with the, accentuated face of Aischa [the maid seated next to Béraud behind the curtain]. The nose is long; the eyes are open, as it seems, and a very thick black moustache, which appears as though glued on to the upper lip, forms the base of the face. This moustache, as it falls, masks the chin.⁷

Richet comments that in photographs ‘the outlines of the drapery are *flou*, cloudy, vapoury’, contrasting with the clarity of a sitter’s headscarf and the clear outlines of the curtain. He insists that it was not an image reflected on a mirror, nor a puppet, but rather ‘possesses all the attributes of life’:

I have seen it leave the séance-cabinet, walk about, go and come. I have heard its breathing and its voice; I have touched its hand several times: that hand was warm and jointed. I have been able, through the drapery with which the hand was covered, to feel the wrist, the bones of the wrist and of the metacarpus, which yielded to the pressure of my hand-clasp.⁸

Richet says he was able to confirm on different occasions that the form could not be a performance by Béraud, since she was discerned by himself and by other sitters in the dim light behind the curtain while ‘Bien Boa’ was standing in front of it. The figure was also prevailed upon to blow into a bottle containing clear baryta water, which after some difficulty it succeeded in doing, causing the sound of the gurgling liquid to be heard, while the liquid itself became cloudy, indicating the presence of carbon dioxide.

The form typically appeared from behind the curtain, where the medium was sitting, and departed by retiring behind it. However, Richet describes an occasion when, it having retired behind the curtain on one side, a white light at the opposite end of the curtain was almost immediately observed on the floor. This excerpt from his session notes describes what follows:

I saw as it were a white luminous ball floating over the ground; then, rising straight upwards, very rapidly, as though issuing from a trap-door, appeared B.B. He appeared to me to be of no great height; he had a drapery, and, I think, something like a *caftan* with a girdle at the waist. He was then placed between the table and the curtain, being *born*, so to speak, out of the flooring outside the curtain (*which had not stirred*) ... the coming out was sudden, and the luminous spot on the floor preceded the appearance of B.B. outside the curtain, and he raised himself straight up (*developing his form rapidly in a straight line*). Then B.B. tries, as it seems to me, to come among us, but he has a limping, hesitating gait. I could not say whether he walks or glides. At one moment he reels, as though about to fall, limping with one leg, which seems unable to support him ... Then he goes towards the opening of the curtains. Then, without, as far as I believe, opening the curtains, he suddenly sinks down, disappears into the ground, and at the same time a sound of *clac, clac*, is heard, like the noise of a body thrown on to the ground. A very little time afterwards (*two, three, or four minutes*), at the very feet of the General, in the opening of the curtains, we again seem the same white ball (his head?) on the ground; it mounts rapidly, quite straight, *rises to the height of a man*, then suddenly sinks down to the ground, with the same noise, *clac, clac*, of a body falling on to the

ground. The General felt the shock of the limbs, which, in falling, struck his leg with some violence.⁹

The remainder of Richet's article is mainly taken up with a discussion of the possibilities for a fraudulent performance. Richet begins by declaring the honesty of Marthe Béraud to be beyond question, and points out in any case that materialization phenomena had been witnessed in previous séances at the Villa Carmen with two other mediums. He dismisses as 'absurd' the notion that the girl could have mounted this complex performance, which at least four other people would necessarily have known about – her two sisters, the palm reader and the maid – or that she could have consistently 'simulated the loyalty, purity, and simplicity of mind' that she showed.¹⁰

But since Richet can identify no plausible normal alternative to fraud by the medium – the room having been too secure and the control too certain to allow the activity of an accomplice – he returns to this in more detail, speculating how she might have disguised herself as the figure, concealing the costume (helmet, draperies, false beard, ornaments) under her dress. However, he goes on to point out that Béraud was physically frail, with small arms and a very slender waist, and habitually wore dresses that were short and close fitting, which offered little opportunity for concealing such things. Also, she was physically active, mounting the staircase quickly before and after each session, which would have been difficult had she been heavily encumbered. With regard to the costume changes behind the curtain, these would not only have to be carried out very rapidly, to cover her absence (while performing the part of the phantom) she would have had to substitute some kind of mannequin on her chair sufficiently like herself to fool the sitters into thinking she remained present there. Richet adds that one or other of the sitters often entered the cabinet without warning, and never observed anything suspicious.

On the other hand, the scientist points out certain features likely to raise suspicions, for instance that Béraud's face is not clearly visible in the photographs; that, during the form's presence, the sleeve of her arm appears sometimes to be empty; and that the form's face appears similar to what hers might look like if she had stuck a coarse black moustache on to her upper lip. He also regrets that the figure did not allow him to hold its hand, or touch it, which for him would have been more decisive.

Juliette Bisson

Béraud moved to Paris aged 23 in 1908, sitting for séances with Alexandre and Juliette Bisson in their home from February 1909. Some eighteen months later she moved in with the couple, and remained with Juliette following the death of Alexandre in 1912. According to Delanne, she was always treated as one of the family, though she was constantly controlled.¹¹ In the research literature from this period she is referred to as Eva Carriere, or 'Eva C.', although it soon became known that she was Marthe Béraud. The extent of Juliette Bisson's relationship with Béraud is not known, although a subject of some conjecture;¹² it is certain,

however, that Bisson maintained a major role in investigations of Béraud throughout.

Charles Richet reported a result from Bisson, occurring after the majority of investigations of Béraud:

At the Copenhagen Congress (vide *Revue Métapsychique*, p. 364) Mme. Bisson read a report of some astounding facts that must be admitted in despite of their wild improbability, because of the known exactitude of Mme. Bisson's experimental methods. The events narrated took place on May 25, 1921, before six persons in full daylight. The ectoplasm, called "the substance" by Mme. Bisson, was transformed into a tiny nude woman, beautifully formed, apparently alive and who moved her limbs. Her size changed rapidly. Eva took her and placed her on the hands of Mme. Bisson where she remained about ten seconds, long enough for those present to verify that she seemed alive. Comment is needless.[13](#)

Experiments by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing

Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929), a fellow-student of Sigmund Freud, trained in the therapeutic use of hypnosis in a Munich hospital and set up a practice specializing in nervous disorders. Having become financially independent through marriage, he devoted the remainder of his career to psychical research, specializing in the physical phenomena of the séance room. He was introduced to Béraud by Delanne, a regular sitter at the Villa Carmen,[14](#) and published detailed descriptions of experiments he carried out with her as a subject between 1909 and 1913, in Paris, Biarritz and in his laboratory in Munich.

By this time, the phenomenon of full forms appeared to have subsided, but the material of which it formed still appeared, exuding principally from her mouth, sometimes from other body parts, and forming shapes of faces and limbs. Richet overviewed the experiments:

At each séance the cabinet was closely searched, Eva was completely undressed and in presence of the experimenters clothed in a close-fitting garment covering her from head to foot. Her head was covered by a veil of tulle sewn to the other garment. Her hair, armpits, nose, mouth, and knees were examined; in some cases even examination *per rectum et vaginam* was resorted to. As the materialized substance frequently comes from her mouth, syrup of bilberries was administered, whose deep colouring powers are well known, but notwithstanding this the extruded forms were absolutely white. Experimental rigour was even pushed to the point of giving her an emetic before a séance.

The light in front of the curtain was sufficient to allow large print to be read. Behind the curtain were a red and a white light that could be put on at will. Three cameras, one being stereoscopic, were focused on the cabinet ready to be worked at a signal; sometimes there were as many as nine. Eva, having been undressed in full light and clothed as described above, was brought into the cabinet and the curtains were drawn, the light reduced, and the experiments began.[15](#)

Richet described an 'emanation' coming usually from her mouth, otherwise variously her navel, breasts and armpits: 'a whitish substance that creeps as if alive, with damp, cold, protoplasmic extensions that are transformed under the eyes of the experimenters into a hand, fingers, a head, or even into an entire figure'.¹⁶

Previously, Richet had observed similar phenomena. His notes of a sitting, at the house of a Mme. de S., extracted from notes describing a series of sittings in September, October, and November 1906, that he found particularly significant, are as follows:

On the ground a small white tract which grows, makes an ovoid mass, and puts forth a prolongation. This mounts on the arm of the chair. At this moment there are visible two horns like those of a snail which seem to direct the movements. A lower mass, X, on the ground; and an upper mass, B, united to the former, which has climbed over the arm of the chair. I can look at this formation from a very short distance. The stem is greyish white, with swellings like an empty snakeskin. The mass X is on Marthe's knees, while the mass B spreads itself on the floor like an amoeba. The mass X is greyish, gelatinous, and barely visible. It is then on Marthe's knees. Little by little it seems to split into digits at its end. It is like the embryo of a hand, ill-formed but clear enough to enable me to say that it is a left hand seen from the back. Fresh progress: the little finger separates almost completely: then the following changes, very quick but very clear: a hand with closed fingers, seen from the back, with a little finger extended, an ill-formed thumb, and higher up a swelling that resembles the carpal bones. I think I see the creases in the skin.¹⁷

Excerpts from Reports of Sittings

Excerpts from reports written by Schrenk-Notzing follow (*note: ellipses not in the original text*):

25 November 1909:

[W]e saw first at the medium's left side, above her left hand, an illumination of the curtain at the height of about a foot and a half. This resembled a bright phosphorescent strip, which, however, was odourless. Then out of this there appeared, at about the level of Eva's head, a formless mass of a light grey colour, about a foot in vertical height, which disappeared and reappeared without a change in the position of the curtains or the hands. The shape appeared at first vague and indefinite, with a fluctuating motion, then it became visibly brighter and more solid, until it changed into a white luminous material, like a heap of the finest white chiffon veiling, apparently stretched out beyond the curtain by a hand and again withdrawn ...

The mass dissolved before our eyes, losing first its solid shape. Finally we only saw a light strip, which ascended from the quiescent hand and gave the impression as if a column of luminous smoke were ascending from it. The total duration of this remarkable process may have been thirty to sixty seconds. After a short pause some indefinite structures of various shapes were seen,

which condensed to luminous strips and balls, moved about and changed their shapes, ascended and descended, disappeared and reappeared.

The strongest impression was obtained by the observers when the luminous smoke, proceeding from the region of the upper part of the body of the medium, changed into a long white band ... we might compare the optical impression of this structure with the shape of a bleached human thigh-bone. In this apparently solid form, which ascended and descended in the air as a broad white strip, there hung a bright white veil-like material about 16 inches square, so that the whole apparition resembled a small flag held horizontally. Without changing the position, this form ascended to a height of about 6 feet, then descended, and remained twenty seconds before it disappeared ... The medium's hands lay as before motionless and visible on her knees.

It is impossible to describe this process as it was shown to our eyes.

While the white column, condensed from amorphous material, sometimes gave the impression of a solid body, it usually appeared to stream through the cabinet in strips like a white creamy substance, sometimes proceeding in a straight line, sometimes breaking into zigzags or serpentine waves. Before its dissolution it became thinner, more colourless, resembling smoke, and then disappeared, usually in the direction of the body of the medium. The reddish light in the séance room increased the attractiveness of this interesting play of colours, bathing the nebulous and half-liquid or solid structures in a pale rose colour. The development of these creations took the form of an emanation of rays and streaks from the body of the medium as from a material radiation of energy, which however, probably influenced by unconscious volitional impulses tended in its form towards definite representations, finally flowing back into the organism (like the rigid organic rays described by Professor Ochorowicz).

In the last successful sitting one could already recognize distinct attempts to produce human forms. Thus, in this sitting, the grey material repeatedly assumed a spherical shape, a more solid white nucleus formed within it, in size and shape like a human head, while the outer parts appeared to change themselves into veils and textile fabrics.[18](#)

Schrenck-Notzing goes on to discuss factors that he believes preclude fraud in this sitting.

25 October 1910:

[T]he independent mobility of the aggregate, termed teleplasm, the clear endeavour to carry out our suggestion, and the production of a white form in the rough outline of a left hand, i.e., without any recognizable aid of the medium's hands, which are always visible – in a word, under careful control, are the elements constituting the value of this observation ...

How should Eva be able to introduce a spherical solid body, which, according to the picture, must be at least 6 inches across, into the sitting, in spite of our rigorous examination? ...

When Eva was to be awakened, about twenty minutes ensued before she regained consciousness. Pulse 100, small, and barely perceptible. Violent hysterical tremor in arms and legs, which only ceased after soothing suggestion. Traces of blood in mouth and nose. Tendency towards contraction of the voluntary muscles.

The structures and shapes produced by the medium were exposed to the light and to our observation, rather shyly and tentatively, and with evident reluctance. A fright, or a feeling of repugnance, even a fluctuation in the emotional state of the medium, seems to be able to destroy the teleplastic structures as if by magic, and to make them invisible. This was also the inducement never to interfere, or to disturb her, but our endeavours, on the other hand, were directed towards strengthening the courage and confidence of the medium, so that a gradual training and adaptation to our wishes should enable her better to differentiate her products, to make them sharper and more plastic, and to expose them longer to the light. On the other hand, a brusque procedure could entirely destroy any possibility of observation. That is why we had to resist the temptation to seize the white mass and to hold it in our hands. The following night Eva slept badly and felt out of sorts on the following day. As a rule, she requires two days to overcome the nervous exhaustion resulting from a sitting.[19](#)

6 January 1911:

While Eva held both curtains and moved them to and fro, a narrow bright band developed between her hands, and increased to a width of 3 inches and a length of 12 to 14 inches. The material appeared to be elastic, viscous, and endowed with a mobility of its own. Before our eyes it transformed itself into the shape of a human forearm, which was rather long and provided with a hand. The latter lay across the right hand of the medium, while the elbow portion lay on the base of the thumb of the medium's left hand and vanished behind the curtain. The strip then became thinner again. Eva closed the curtain for a moment, and when she opened it again the same play of a more or less liquid, variable form recommenced. This time it corresponded to a human lower leg, the sole of the foot touching the medium's right, and the toes being directed upwards. The knee portion disappeared above her left hand behind the curtain.[20](#)

8 & 18 April 1911:

An unusually interesting photograph (Fig. 28) was taken by M. de Fontenay at the sitting of the 8th April 1911, in the author's absence. Eva sits on the chair, both her hands being held by two gentlemen present. A broad scarf-shaped band, with a distinctly parallel striping, runs across her head, entirely covering it nearly down to the forehead. The left portion falls over the breast in the shape of two long fibrous fragments, while the other end of the shawl, lying more in the shade on the right, or darker in colour, also consists of parallel stripes, and allows two white rounded ends, of a plastic appearance, to emerge below, producing the distinct impression of plastically modelled fingers. The photograph (Fig. 29) taken by De Fontenay on the 18th April is also instructive

when the stereoscopic transparency is examined. While Eva's hands are being held and the curtain is wide open, the medium is seen on her chair with her head bent forward. Over the back of it there is something like a broad cloth, adhering to the hair like soft and yielding material, and extended like a shawl. The two ends hang down on both sides to the middle of Eva's chest, the left portion ending in a leaf-shaped branch, turning and widening upwards. The whole appears to consist of one piece, as shown in the photograph. This photograph is remarkable by the fact of the fabric being thick, soft, and yielding at the top, like a woollen material, while the two extremities, hanging down, give the appearance of a thin, sharply bordered, flat structure, resembling paper. This clearly marked contrast in the consistency of the same piece of material is remarkable.

If the teleplasma can undergo such changes, this picture may be regarded as an instructive preparation for the flat, sharply bordered materials, resembling paper, occurring so often at later sittings, as, for instance, in the portraits of heads.[21](#)

Excerpts from the report by Juliette Bisson of a sitting on 2 July 1911:

At nine o'clock last night (2nd July 1911) I hypnotized Eva, as usual, in the cabinet. I had hardly approached her when she threw herself on one side, with her mouth open, and with that stertorous breathing that you are familiar with ... I saw, descending from her left shoulder, masses of material, which fell over her chest down on the right side ... I then asked that the mass should come to me. Almost immediately after I had uttered this wish, a large packet was thrown on my head from behind. It glided over my face and eyes, moving independently like an animal with a moist skin ... The living material glided along down my back, hanging over from one shoulder to the other, and entirely enveloping me ...

The whole mass dissolved quite suddenly and disappeared, while I still held the medium's hand. After a pause of several minutes, Eva said to me, 'It will now come into your hand. Stretch out your hand as flat as possible, and bring it near my left side.'

She then took, my right arm in both her hands, and in this position I stretched forward my right hand. Immediately afterwards I felt, in the hollow of my hand, something resembling a pigeon's egg, which, however, was connected with Eva's left shoulder by a broad band of the substance ... The material has an ash-grey aspect, and is traversed by threads like a delicate skin ... Suddenly the material was withdrawn from my right hand, and I felt that it receded towards Eva's left shoulder, escaping from under my hand ...

In her somnambulistic [trance] condition, Eva says : 'It is not I who produce or create. It is an entity independent of me, which borrows material from me, and can go out beyond my body. That cannot take place in the light and in the daytime.' This is also corroborated by the circumstance that she has produced phenomena at moments unexpected by herself or by me. She claims to submit

to an unknown power, which directs her. She, therefore, never knows whether she can produce or not. She looks upon herself simply as a machine.[22](#)

Results of Analysis

Results of microscopic examinations of ectoplasmic residue from the Schrenck-Notzing sittings revealed the following:

As regards the structure of the teleplasm, we only know this: that within it, or about it, we find conglomerates of bodies resembling epithelium, real plate epithelium with nuclei, veil-like filmy structures, coherent lamellar bodies without structure, as well as fat globules and mucus. If we abstain from any detailed indications concerning the composition and function of teleplasma, we may yet assert two definite facts:

(1) In teleplasm, or associated with it, we find substances of organic origin, various cell forms, which leave behind cell detritus.

(2) The mobile material observed, which seems to represent the fundamental substance of the phenomena, does not consist of india rubber or any other artificial product by which its existence could be fraudulently represented. For substances of this kind can never decompose into cell detritus, or leave a residue of such.[23](#)

Precautions Taken to Prevent Fraud by Regurgitation

Schrenck-Notzing's report of a sitting of 26 November 1913 gives details about the precautions taken to ensure that the material produced by Béraud from the mouth could not have been ingested by her earlier.

The initial and final examination of the medium (mouth, nose, and hair, as well as a gynaecological examination), of the séance costume and the cabinet, conducted by the Paris physician, Dr Bourbon, and the author, were negative. M Bourdet and Mme Bisson were also present. Eva C dined at seven o'clock. The sitting commenced at 8.45 P.M. in a feeble white light. Hands and knees were visibly inactive during the whole sitting. The medium did not leave her chair in the cabinet for a moment. The curtains were open while the phenomenon took place.

Between 9 p.m. and 9.10 p.m., without the help of the hands or knees, a flowing white substance emerged from the medium's mouth, which was inclined towards the left. It was about 20 inches long and 8 inches broad. It lay on the breast of the dress, spread out, and formed a white head-like disk, with a face profile turned to the right, and of life size. Even after the flash-light was ignited the curtain remained wide open. At the same moment the author illuminated the structure with an electric torch, and found that it formed a folded strip, which receded slowly into the medium's mouth, and remained visible until the sitting closed at 9.20 p.m.

While in the state of hypnosis, the medium rose from her chair and took an emetic tendered to her by the author (1 gramme ipecacuanha and 1 gramme tartar emetic), was completely undressed while standing half in and half out of the cabinet, and examined in detail by the author and Dr Bourbon, who took charge of the séance costume, and also examined it carefully. The final examination of the cabinet and chair gave no result. Dressed in a dressing-gown, Eva C was then laid on a couch in the room, and was not left unobserved for a moment.

After two further doses of the same strength, vomiting set in at 9.30 p.m., which brought up the contents of the stomach. The quantity was about a pint, and was taken charge of by the author, who did not give it out of his hands until he handed it over to the Masselin Laboratory in Paris for analysis. The vomit was brown in colour, and besides the wafers taken with the powders there was no trace of any white substance such as observed by us. The detailed report of the Laboratory in question, dated 29th November 1913, closes with the words: 'The final result of the examination shows that the vomit consisted exclusively of food products and the emetics, and contained fragments of meat, fruit, and vegetables, probably mushrooms, which were found in pieces of considerable size. The rest of the contents consisted of food in an advanced state of digestion. There was not the slightest trace of a body whose appearance or histological structure gave the impression of a foreign body, or of a substance not used for nutrition, and, in particular, there was no trace of paper or chiffon.'[24](#)

Psychological Characteristics of Béraud

Schrenck-Notzing assessed Béraud's personality as follows:

She has a vivid imagination, which is sometimes so exaggerated that truth and fiction can no longer be distinguished. She has a high suggestibility, especially for momentary impressions. She gives no coherent answers to abstract questions, such as: What is the difference between a storm and a hurricane; why a stone falls to the ground and does not ascend towards the sky ; or how the political parties of her country are composed ? She obviously regards such questions as distasteful. There is very imperfect development of the logical faculty. Instead, there is a mechanical reproduction of opinions overheard, without the consciousness that these are taken from memory. and are not the result of her own thought. Her mood is unstable, and easily excitable. The momentary emotion dominates her mental life. She greatly depends upon her emotional state, and is quite inaccessible to any educational influences during her intermittent fits of temper. In such cases one must either await the subsidence of the crisis, which may last for days, or try to eliminate it by hypnotism and suggestion.

Her sympathy and antipathy towards people are very vivid. But her ethical feelings are purely egocentric. She has a lack of sincerity towards herself; but in social intercourse she usually gives a friendly, serene and amiable impression, though she knows how to hide her feelings in order afterwards to

give way to them with an hysterical exaggeration. She is easily influenced and impulsive, and is readily led to make unfounded accusations, and to fall into fits of rage. The emotions are subject to sudden changes, so that depressions may follow a happy mood without any apparent reason. It is clear that in the crises above mentioned, in which Eva C. must not be regarded as responsible, nervous and other constitutional excitations play a part. Her sense of sex is feebly developed, but she has a vivid erotic imagination. No mania or compulsory ideas. Tendency towards bodily depression and self-pity. Exaggerated notions concerning her feminine charms and her influence over the male sex.

The great weakness of will in the character of the medium is explained by the prevalence of her emotional character, and by the lack of independence. She has a great faculty of adaptation to persons, and one might compare her relation to Mme. Bisson with that of a faithful dog to its master. But, in these circumstances, one can understand that Mme. Bisson cannot surrender her medium into other hands for the sake of experiments, since Eva would be equally accessible to the new influences as soon as she was accustomed to them.

This passivity is accompanied by great susceptibility to hypnotisation, as well as the faculty of accepting the ideas and intentions of the persons present at the sittings, and of realising these suggestively, or of allowing herself to be dominated by states of consciousness involving strong emotion.

At the same time, we can also understand the danger which the suggestive idea of fraud, in the minds of the persons present at the sittings, might imply for the medium.

Under such an influence she might be led to fraudulent manipulation, unconsciously suggested, because distinctly expected by such a person. The hysterical disposition, indicated by some of the abnormalities above specified, is placed beyond doubt by her general psychological condition. It is, however, not a case of an actual disease, which would imply hysterical fits and paralyses, but a constitutional peculiarity, which may facilitate the comprehension of the occurrences to be described in this book, in so far as they are affected by the personality of the medium.²⁵

Among intellectuals who corroborated the work of Schrenck-Notzing were Caesar de Vesme, Gabriel Delanne, L Chevreuil, Dr Burbon, Dr Harter, the editors of the journal *Opinion* Ginies and Guasco, the author M. Faral, and a number of others. Schrenck-Notzing named sixteen senior academics and six journalists who expressed belief in the reality of the phenomena, which he considered more conclusive than the contrary judgements of a 'few persons, some of whom did not attend a single sitting, while others, after a very few sittings (two to five) converted their originally favourable judgment afterwards into an unfavourable one.'²⁶

Schrenck-Notzing's experiments were replicated by French investigators in 1916,²⁷ and subsequently by Gustav Geley.

Gustave Geley

The French physician and psychical researcher [Gustave Geley](#) carried out a series of experiments with Béraud over a period of eighteen months from 1917 with the participation of Juliette Bisson, in fortnightly sessions, first in Bisson's house then exclusively in his laboratory.²⁸ These were witnessed by a total of around 150 observers, including many scientists. The results were the subject of a conference at the College of France, later reported under the title 'La Physiologie dite Supranormale'.²⁹

Describing conditions of control, Geley noted that the room in which the tests took place was searched before and after use and always kept locked during experimentation.³⁰ As before, Béraud retired into a curtained recess, while still controlled by having her hands held by both Geley and Bisson, or by Geley on his own. The curtains remained partially open at all times, so that the visibility was 'perfect'.

For other precautions, Béraud was completely undressed and reclined in a black tight-fitting robe, sewn at the back and at the wrists. Her hair, mouth, throat and vagina were examined. Her hands were held as she exited the changing room and entered the experiment room. The experiments were routinely carried out in good light – frequently reflected white light, by which observers could read large type or tell time by a watch. When photography was intended, red electric lights were used.³¹

Geley extracted the following from his notebook to indicate the typical phenomena he witnessed in tests:

From the mouth of Eva there descends to her knees a cord of white substance of the thickness of two fingers; this ribbon takes under our eyes varying forms, that of a large perforated membrane, with swellings and vacant spaces; it gathers itself together, retracts, swells, and narrows again. Here and there from the mass appear temporary protrusions, and these for a few seconds assume the form of fingers, the outline of hands, and then re-enter the mass. Finally the cord retracts on itself, lengthens to the knees, its end rises, detaches itself from the medium, and moves towards me. I then see the extremity thicken like a swelling, and this terminal swelling expands into a perfectly modelled hand. I touch it; it gives a normal sensation; I feel the bones, and the fingers with their nails. Then the hand contracts, diminishes, and disappears in the end of the cord. The cord makes a few movements, retracts, and returns into the medium's mouth.'³²

Excerpts from records of some of Geley's sittings follow:

1 March 1918:

The apparition sometimes showed itself at the opening between the curtains, was sometimes condensed from a mist, and sometimes seemed to form at the end of an ectoplasmic cord issuing from Eva's mouth.³³

5 March 1918:

Eva's moaning increased, and I soon saw ectoplasmic substance, dazzlingly white, issue from the fingers of her left hand and link them to those of her right hand. She separated her hands, and everything went as on January 11. The band spread, thickened and grew, and formed a large epiploic fringe. The ectoplasmic mass mounted on Eva's chest up to her mouth, into which it disappeared. Five minutes' wait.

Eva's moaning increased. We then saw a mass of white substance exude from her nose and eyes. It descended to her knees, thickening as it went, giving the impression of a fimbriated skein.

After a short time, this fimbriated skein vanished instantly. The substance then reappeared between her hands, and in it a very small hand; but the phenomena ceased almost at once, for the medium was exhausted. Resorption into the fingers was instantaneous.[34](#)

8 March 1918:

After an hour's wait Eva began her moaning, which became more pronounced. A white spot appeared on her left shoulder. This spread and thickened, and in the middle of it we could see a small face like that of previous sittings. At the same time the greater part of the amorphous substance disappeared; only a small mass was perceptible, which moved to Eva's chest and there remained fixed as by a kind of stalk proceeding from the right side of the mouth of materialized face.

This constituted, the face developed, moved from place to place, disappeared and reappeared; it was seen on Eva's chest, by the side of her head, under her chin, on her knees, and between her hands.

It disappeared, whether instantaneously or by resorption, into the mouth.

After a while I saw the right-hand curtain of the cabinet shake as if moved from the inside. At this time Eva was motionless on her chair and could be seen in the space between the half-drawn curtains. Her hands were on her knees, and I was holding her right hand.[35](#)

11 March 1918:

After waiting three-quarters of an hour the trance began. I saw a small mist, about the size of a large orange, floating on the medium's left; it went to Eva's chest, high up and on the right side. It was at first a vaporous spot, not very clear. The spot grew slowly, spread, and thickened. Its visibility increased, diminished, and increased again. Then under direct observation, we saw the features and the reliefs of a small face growing. It soon became a well-formed head surrounded by a kind of white veil. This head resembled that of preceding experiments. It often moved about; I saw it to the right, to the left, above and below Eva's head, on her knees, and between her hands. It appeared and

disappeared suddenly several times. Finally it was resorbed into her mouth. Eva then cried out: 'It changes. It is the power!'³⁶

Society for Psychical Research

In 1920, the Society for Psychical Research embarked on its own investigation of Béraud, by a committee composed of [Everard Feilding](#), [Whately Smith](#) (Carington), [Helen Verall](#) (Salter), VJ Woolley, [WW Baggally](#) and [Eric Dingwall](#). In its 1922 report, the committee approved Béraud's willingness to submit to invasive examination: prior to the tests she was stripped and examined in the oral cavity, ears, and hair. On occasion she was required to wear a veil, and investigators sat on each side of her, holding each wrist. The room was illuminated by faint electric light. Photographs were taken.³⁷

Sitters witnessed what appeared to be saliva issuing from her mouth and solidifying into ectoplasm, the substance undergoing minor permutations. Baggally, observed her pulling a grey substance from her mouth which he then saw permutate, until it vanished.³⁸ An amateur conjurer, he initially favoured the hypothesis that she ingested material which she subsequently regurgitated (the rumination hypothesis), but realized that this was impossible in the circumstances.

The most detailed analysis was given by Eric Dingwall, who concluded by summarizing the case for and against:

The Case Against the Phenomena

It is always open to doubt whether controllers untrained in methods of trickery can prevent prepared objects from being brought into the séance room.

A certain number of the 'heads' appear as if made of paper. Actual paper has been found upon five separate occasions.

Without being able definitely to say that the medium employed deceptive methods for the production and disappearance of the phenomena, it is noteworthy that the manipulations in question are by no means inconsistent with those which would have been necessary if normal methods had been employed.

The SPR Committee never observed anything which led them to suppose that materializations do actually originate elsewhere than from the mouth. The single example in Séance 38 might be explained by the medium having produced the membrane from her mouth previously to its exhibition.

The nature of the materializations is such that an enormous weight of evidence would have to be adduced before their reality became a matter of certainty.

The Case for the Phenomena.

There is no proof whatever that the medium possesses the power of regurgitation or has any acquaintance whatever with deceptive methods or contrivances. The 'tricks' suspected by Dr von Schrenck-Notzing and the SPR

Committee may be merely subconscious attempts to increase the effect of the phenomena.

The materializations are clearly often not made of paper, chiffon, or any similar substance. This is evident from photographic enlargements, besides being excluded by the fact that on certain occasions they changed their shape whilst under direct observation.

The medium has never been detected in the preparation or secretion of any article likely to be of service in the séances.

If Mme Bisson and Dr von Schrenck-Notzing be accepted as even moderately good observers, no amount of fraud could explain certain phenomena that they say that they have observed.

Comparative studies show that Eva C. is not the only medium producing these manifestations. Accounts of the phenomena with other mediums are remarkably similar to those occurring with her.

The appearance of the cold breeze rather leads one to suppose that mediumistic phenomena do occur in Eva's presence.

Dingwall further stated the committee had found 'not a shred of evidence' that might implicate Bisson in any way with fraudulent activity.³⁹

Experiences with the Sorbonne Committee

In 1922, Paul Heuzé convened an investigative committee in the Sorbonne, Paris. This consisted of scientists Louis Lapique, Georges Dumas, Henri Pieron and Dr. Henri Laugier.⁴⁰ Fifteen sittings were carried out, of which thirteen were negative. In two, ostensible ectoplasm emerged from her mouth was reabsorbed.⁴¹ Gustav Geley argued that the relative failure of the sittings was a consequence of the experimenters sceptical state of mind, and could not nullify the positive results gained by himself and others; he pointed out that the controls were identical, and that the examination of the medium, which included X-rays, precluded fraud.⁴²

Criticism and Controversy

Villa Carmen

Polemics began soon after the publication of Richet's report of the investigation in Algiers (described in the *Annals of Psychical Science* 1906).

In a public lecture there, reported in a local newspaper, a 'Dr Z' made a variety of assertions, the principal of which was that a former coachman of the Noëls named Areski, whom they had dismissed for theft, had hoaxed them by entering the séance room unobserved, slipping behind the curtain and performing the phenomena. For the benefit of the audience he also gave a staged demonstration of a 'phantom' in semi-darkness; an attempt to create 'luminous phenomena' failed, however. He

further claimed that Béraud had confessed to her father that the fraud was accomplished by means of a trap door in the floor of the séance room.[43](#)

Rebutting these charges, Richet said he knew about Areski (who at the time appears to have still been in the Noëls's employ) but as the man was considered unreliable he was kept well away from the proceedings and never allowed to enter the séance room. Richet further insisted that Béraud had made no 'confession' (although she told him she had received a letter from Dr Z begging her to send him a written 'confession of trickery', to which she did not reply). Finally, he asserted there was no trapdoor in the séance room, and, in order to remove all doubt about this, appended a letter from the architect of the building, who had recently revisited it and could confirm, along with the particulars of its construction, the fact that there was 'no opening or trapdoor whatever'.[44](#)

Joseph Maxwell, a senior French judge and psychical researcher, gave a detailed rebuttal of the charges of fraud, pointing to the inconsistency of Areski's testimony and the fact that the fraudulent methods that had been displayed were entirely at variance with the phenomena described by Richet and the conditions in which these were observed.[45](#)

In 1915 Helen Verrall, a researcher at the Society for Psychical Research, published a review of Béraud in which among other things she gave more details of the charges relating to the Villa Carmen investigation and criticized Richet for, in her view, failing to address them sufficiently seriously.[46](#)

Harry Houdini

The American stage magician [Harry Houdini](#) attended some SPR test sittings. He later reported that he was unconvinced by the demonstrations, stating his belief that Béraud's feats were accomplished by regurgitation. He doubted Béraud's honesty, also that of Bisson, who he said 'kept up a quasi-hypnotic work full of gestures and suggestions as to what could be seen, putting into the minds of those present shadowy forms and faces'.[47](#)

[Arthur Conan Doyle](#) disputed that this was what Houdini actually thought, quoting from a letter he said Houdini wrote to him on 22 June 1920, the morning after the session on which these comments were based:

They made Eva drink a cup of coffee and eat some cake (I presume to fill her up with some food-stuff), and after she had been sewn into the tights, and a net over her face, she manifested. 1. 'Some froth-like substance, inside of net, 'twas long, about five inches, she said it was elevated, but none of us four watchers saw it 'elevate.' 2. 'A white plaster-looking affair over her right eye.' 3. 'Something that looked like a small face, say four inches in circumference. Was terra-cotta coloured, and Dingwall, who held her hands, had the best look at the 'object.' 4. 'Some substance, froth-like, exuding from her nose, and Baggeley and Feilding say it protrudes from her nose, but Dingwall and I are positive that it was inside of net and was not extending from her nose, as I had the best view from two different places I deliberately took advantage to see just what it was.' 5. 'Medium asked permission to remove something in her mouth,

show her hands empty, and took out what appeared to be a rubberish substance, which she disengaged, showed us plainly, we held the electric torch, all saw it plainly, when presto! it vanished. It was a surprise effect indeed! The séance started at 7.30 and lasted past midnight. 'We went over the notes, and no doubt you will get a full report. I found it highly interesting.'[48](#)

'Inadequate Controls'

The British independent psychical researcher and amateur conjuror [Harry Price](#) expressed doubt about the genuineness of the phenomena. He claimed that certain photographs made in Schrenck-Notzing's laboratory in Munich and at the Institut Métapsychique in Paris indicated her hands were sometimes uncontrolled.[49](#)

Gustav Geley denied this, asserting that in all sittings she had her hands held by both Geley and Bisson, or completely by Geley.[50](#) Schrenck-Notzing stated that a large instances of phenomena occurred after the possibility of her using her hands had been eliminated, since these were either held by the observers while it occurred, or remained visible grasping the curtain.[51](#)

Hereward Carrington expressed a different opinion concerning the controls present in sittings with Eva C.:

Certain it is that these results are of extreme interest, and many of them seem beyond any possibility of fraudulent duplication. Thus, in several séances given by Eva C., the head of the medium was completely covered with fine netting, which was sewed to the black tights she was wearing. Her hands were enclosed in similar netting, and (of course) securely held. Under these conditions, the ectoplasm was seen to issue from the medium's mouth, penetratethe openings in the netting, and form into hands on the other side of it. It would be difficult indeed to think of any substance, or any process of fraudulent manipulation, by which this could be accomplished, under the circumstances![52](#)

In the 1990s, a sceptical SPR member reviewing materialization evidence cast doubt on the accuracy of Geley's reporting, pointing to instances where his insistence that Béraud's hands were controlled was contradicted by photographs showing them unheld.[53](#) Another SPR member pointed out that the photographs might have been taken after the phenomena had been produced, when the curtains had been drawn back and there was no need at this time for her hands to be controlled.[54](#)

'Artificial Materializations'

In 1954, psychical researcher Rudolf Lambert drew attention to a note written by [Eugene Osty](#) when he was director of the Institut Métapsychique International,[55](#) referring to negatives taken by Bisson and appearing to show various 'materializations' artificially attached to Béraud's hair, partly by means of threads or wires.[56](#) Lambert argued that this could be clearly distinguished only because the negatives were stereoscopic, unlike those taken by researchers, and that their existence had never been disclosed by Geley, suggesting that they were deliberately suppressed.[57](#)

According to Lambert, Osty had wished to publish details of this discovery, but Jean Meyer, an ardent Spiritualist who financed the IMI, demanded that the scandal be concealed. Lambert alleged that Albert von Schrenck-Notzing and Charles Richet were complicit in the concealment.⁵⁸ However, Schrenck-Notzing discussed the incident in a publicly available letter that he printed from Richet in 1928, where Richet admitted that his 'friend Osty' told him that he had found negatives of photographs (taken by Geley and Mme Bisson) that seemed to indicate fraud. Richet adds that as these photographs had already been published by Schrenck and Mme Bisson (and Geley), publication of these findings by Osty would bring nothing new and would therefore be useless, and that looking at photographs without the context provided in the texts would lead to confusion. He furthermore added that he had nothing to retract, that he felt the experiments were valid, and he denied the charge that Mme Bisson was excluded from the Sorbonne Congress, which Lambert later repeated.⁵⁹ French researchers challenged the validity of other charges made by Lambert.⁶⁰

A later SPR commentator argued that talk of dishonesty was 'entirely unjustified':

In Geley's own view the 'threads and wires' shown so clearly on the negatives would have been part of the materialization, and he would not have accorded these images the high degree of significance attributed to them by those who immediately concluded that the attachments must have been made to the medium's hair by Geley's colleague, Juliette Bisson.

Also, if Geley had wished to suppress evidence of faking he would surely not have preserved the negatives but destroyed them.⁶¹

(A similar controversy over 'threads' occurred in the case of [Stanislawa Tomczyk](#), a Polish medium investigated by Julian Ochorowicz.)

Materializations 'Made of Paper'

In one test, traces of the substance produced by Béraud appeared to be ordinary paper. Schrenck-Notzing wrote:

[W]e have no occasion to doubt that even paper-like substances can be materialized, as can substances of the nature of gauze veiling and cotton, including the morphological structure of the weft, folds sewn in, etc. Just as traces have repeatedly been left of the pure organic-teleplastic substance, so may similar fragments of the materialized products, textile or cellular, have been left behind.⁶²

Criticisms by the Society for Psychological Research

The SPR's 1922 report is sometimes seen as critical, since it dwelled heavily on the possibility of faking. For instance, one of its principal authors, Eric Dingwall, in a review of Schrenck-Notzing's work, brought attention to several sittings he considered problematic – that of 21 August 1912 showing apparent pin holes in the medium's cabinet, that of 30 August 1912, where apparent paper was found among the small white particles, and the sittings on 11 August 1911, 25 May 1912, and 9

August 1912, which contained features that he argued revealed that Eva C would have been able to get her hands free to perform tricks.⁶³ Schrenck-Notzing recorded an instance in which self-luminous material that he argued was not paper appeared as if it was fastened to Eva C.'s hair by a thread or a pin.⁶⁴ In a record of sittings aside from those Dingwall outlined, 18 and 20 August 1912, Schrenck-Notzing provided the testimony of his photographer Georg Hauberrisser that he (the photographer) had pinned a piece of newspaper to the black curtain of the cabinet in order to fix the cameras, and that it was likely that he (the photographer), had done this in another instance as well.⁶⁵

Schrenck-Notzing dealt with the complaints regarding the pins by arguing that Dingwall ignored Georg Hauberrisser's testimony. He countered Dingwall's complaint as to 11 August 1912, arguing that it was based on a misunderstanding, by noting that he (Schrenck-Notzing), recorded the existence of other hands away from her person, and arguing that the hands were ectoplasmic. He also stated that:

Eva C.'s stockinette costume and her clothing were regularly held up by the light of a hand lamp before the sittings and especially searched for defective places. During the many years covered by the period of experimentation only once, at the sitting of the 29th May 1912, were holes found in the stockinette, and these were noted in the record.

In spite of the monotonous repetition year after year of the same process of examination, our attention never flagged; for we were convinced of the value and the necessity of examining the séance-costume. Had it not been for this careful control, those minute paper particles could not have been discovered on August 30th, 1912.

Rectal and vaginal examinations have repeatedly been carried out, many of them during the later period by the present writer himself.⁶⁶

The report was criticized for its prevarication, and in particular Dingwall's failure to commit to a single point of view. Richet wrote:

[The authors] admit that the only possible trickery is regurgitation. But what is meant by that? How can masses of mobile substance, organized as hands, faces, and drawings, be made to emerge from the œsophagus or the stomach? No physiologist would admit such power to contract those organs at will in this manner. How, when the medium's hands are tied and held, could papers be unfolded, put away, and made to pass through a veil?

The members of the SPR, when they fail to understand, say, 'It is difficult to understand how this is produced.' Mr. Dingwall, who is an expert in legerdemain, having seen the ectoplasm emerge as a miniature hand, making signs before disappearing, says, 'I attach no importance to this.' We may be permitted to remark that very great importance attaches to Mr. Dingwall's testimony. The general conclusion is that there was probably no trickery, but the phenomena were not sufficient to warrant acceptance.⁶⁷

Gustave Geley made a detailed analysis of the SPR report in the *Revue Métapsychique* (1922), lamenting the investigators' 'obsession' with the possibility

of fraud and their corresponding failure (in his view) to give adequate consideration to the ectoplasmic phenomena that emerged, which to all appearances was identical to the early-stage phenomena that he and others had routinely witnessed with Béraud.[68](#)

In a separate article in the same issue, Geley briefly addressed suspicions over the insistence on the need for darkness, or very dim light, for the production of ectoplasm, comparing this to the biological processes involved in the growth of vegetation, which also requires some darkness.[69](#)

The SPR report has continued to be the subject of controversy. In *Science and Parascience* (1984), Brian Inglis argued that Dingwall exaggerated his devil's advocate role, inventing implausible hypotheses in order to maintain his agnosticism.[70](#) Inglis cited a letter from [EE Fournier d'Albe](#), a SPR member who attended some sittings, to Schrenck-Notzing, describing a 'mass which hung from the mouth like a stalactite', and Dingwall's statement that the phenomena observed could not have been produced by trickery.[71](#)

Dingwall later made a similarly inconclusive analysis of 'ectoplasmic' material produced by the American medium [Mina Crandon \(Margery\)](#).

'Paper Cut-Outs'

Suspicious were excited by photographs of materializations taken by Schrenck-Notzing that showed a distinctly flat appearance, as if they were paper or cardboard cut-outs.[72](#) Faces upon them seemed to be two-dimensional copies of photographs in the French journal *Le Miroir*, identifiable by the inclusion of sections of its masthead.[73](#)

Béraud explained that the form the materializations took was influenced by thoughts and impressions she was holding in her mind at the time.[74](#)

Schrenck-Notzing argued that the forms possessed features that were radically different from – and occurred in conditions that precluded the production of – paper cut-outs.[75](#) He revealed that the similarities of the images in his photographs to pictures in the magazine were found, on close inspection, to be superficial:

The dissimilarity between the phantom pictures and all the supposed models, as regards the build of the face, the expression, and the whole form of the heads, is so great that one is not justified in making the new objection that these models had been copied to produce the mediumistic images. For, in this case, there should be similarities, above all in the expression and in the proportions of the faces, but these are entirely absent.[76](#)

He continued:

Other observers belonging to the first period (1909 to 1913) gradually emerged into publicity with observations of their own. Among them Guillaume de Fontenay (*Ann. Sc. Psych.*, March 1914), who deals with the experimental arrangement, with the objections raised, with the hypothesis of conjuring, and the ideoplastic theory, and who, finally, fully corroborates the accuracy of the

author's observations. In the course of a lecture he also demonstrated his measurements of relative proportions in the photographed materialisation images, as compared with certain portrait heads from the journal *Le Miroir*. This re-examination, made quite independently of the author, arrives at the same result, viz., that reproductions from the *Miroir* could not have been fraudulently used by Eva C, since the relative proportions of the features do not correspond to the alleged models, as well as for other reasons.[77](#)

Schrenck-Notzing later stated, when responding to relevant criticism from Eric Dingwall, that:

The teleplastic reproduction of a portrait from the '*Miroir*' by a combination of ideoplastic force and cryptomnesia is not in itself more wonderful and also not more suspicious than the appearance of the letters 'Miro.' In judging the suspicions expressed by Mr. Dingwall, suspicions which it is not easy to dispel, the decisive factor can only be the experimental conditions of control imposed at the sittings under consideration; it can in no wise be the mere appearance of objects seen. Now, the experimental conditions were such as to be absolutely free from any objection, and, moreover, the mysterious emergence of these objects and their sudden disappearance, leaving no trace, supports in this instance the hypothesis of materialization.[78](#)

Schrenck-Notzing appended signed statements of photography and photo-chemistry experts to the effect that upon inspection, these particular phenomena were not equivalent to paper shapes fraudulently produced.[79](#)

Stereoscopic photographs showed that the images that in ordinary photographs appeared to be flat were in fact three-dimensional. One series of images taken simultaneously by separate cameras showed a 'flowing transition from the flat to the plastic.'[80](#) He also drew attention to the fact, supported by much observer testimony, that the materialized productions tended to be strongly dynamic, moving and changing their form.[81](#)

Suspicious Against Juliette Bisson

Critics found much to complain of in the frequent presence of Juliette Bisson, whom they suspected of helping to introduce pictures or other materials into the séance room. Some have promoted the notion, unsupported by any evidence, that she was romantically involved with Béraud, implying a conspiracy on their part to deceive.[82](#)

Schrenck-Notzing noted that not one of the observers who had been present in the four years of his sittings, and who included many sceptics, had been able to prove that any materials had been brought into the sittings or removed after use.[83](#) He pointed out that Bisson routinely allowed herself to be examined by him before and after the sittings, without anything ever being found on her person to arouse suspicion, also that there was no obvious motive for her to carry out a long-term deception (certainly not monetary, since she was independently wealthy). Finally, he observed that the production of phenomena by Béraud clearly did not depend on Bisson, since it occurred also on occasions when she was not present.[84](#)

Failure to Touch the Material

Questions were raised regarding the reluctance or inability of the investigators to touch the material produced by Béraud.

According to Schrenck-Notzing, touch was avoided because on the few occasions it was attempted, harmful results ensued. In one test in Munich an observer tried to grasp a piece of brown or grey substance on the medium's neck, which then vanished. Schrenck-Notzing enlarges as follows:

The only consequences were some profound fainting fits, several days of illness, and an instinctive timidity of the medium, which lasted for six months, and had a very unfavourable effect on the sittings. On a few occasions Mme. Bisson did grasp some of the materialisation, but it dissolved in her hand, while the attempt to grasp it produced violent pains in the medium. In the sitting of 15th November 1910, the author grasped a piece of material which had given a blow on his right hand, but the mass wriggled out of his hand like a snake, while Eva screamed with pain. If we also take into account that the phenomena often appeared with lightning-like rapidity, and might disappear in the fraction of a second, we must reckon with the fact that these transitory structures do not hold out under our physical contact, and that the suggested procedure, while yielding no success to the observer, has grave consequences for the medium. In any case, the material does not seem to withstand the light, but appears to liquefy very easily, or even to evaporate. Many experiments in this direction gave material in a liquid state or in the form of residues on the medium's dress, which contained cell detritus. The few cases in which more permanent material was obtained (hair, etc.) are too isolated to affect the general conclusion.⁸⁵

Views and Hypotheses

Schrenck-Notzing favoured the following hypothesis as regards the mediumistic phenomena he witnessed: that some people can transform their physiological store of energy, and transmit it through space, while simultaneously suffering a loss in bodily energy. He cited the view of a Professor Ostwald that

[T]he mediumistic form of energy can be compared, as regards velocity of propagation, with light, and it appears to have polarity, for there are persons whose actions neutralise each other. This view implies no fundamental contradiction of any laws of Nature. We have, therefore, the possibility of a science.

These psycho-dynamical phenomena, he continued, citing the view of Morselli

comprise indefinite, undefinable, and unintelligible capacities of the human organism, which perhaps every one possesses to a quite small and unrecognisable degree, but which some personalities possess to such an extraordinary extent that they succeed in expressing their vital and psychic activity beyond the limits of the body. These powers disappear with the mechanism which produces them, and have, therefore, no survival.

Schrenck-Notzing favored these views, and asserted that all the investigators recently involved with physical mediumship 'incline towards a rejection of the spiritistic theory in favour of the psychodynamical conception, and towards a purely observational attitude ...'[86](#)

Gustav Geley embraced psycho-dynamical theories as explanatory of the phenomena he witnessed, though he believed that the 'normal' and 'supernormal' phenomena he analyzed showed that

matter—the unique substance—is resolved by final analysis into a superior dynamism which conditions it, and this dynamism is itself dependent on the idea.[87](#)

Benjamin Steigmann

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 36.
- [2.](#) Geley (2003), 182-97.
- [3.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 290-92; Carrington (1931), 181; Bowers (1936), 263-73; María de Heredia (1922), 186-94.
- [4.](#) Carrington (1939/2007), 78.
- [5.](#) Richet (1905).
- [6.](#) Richet (1905), 209.
- [7.](#) Richet (1905), 278-79.
- [8.](#) Richet (1905), 269.
- [9.](#) Richet (1905), 273-74.
- [10.](#) Richet (1905), 284.
- [11.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 39-40.
- [12.](#) Brandon (1983).
- [13.](#) Richet (1923/2003), 544n.
- [14.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 31.
- [15.](#) Richet (1923/2003), 510.
- [16.](#) Richet (1923/2003), 511.
- [17.](#) Richet (1923/2003), 524.
- [18.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 48-49.
- [19.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 66-67.
- [20.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 86.
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- [22.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 98-99.
- [23.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 250.
- [24.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 289.
- [25.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 37-38.
- [26.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 323-24.
- [27.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 324-26.
- [28.](#) Geley (1921), 53.
- [29.](#) Bulletin de l'Institut Physiologique (1918); Fodor (1966), 131.
- [30.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 182-83.
- [31.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 183.
- [32.](#) Geley (1921), 56-57.
- [33.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 194.
- [34.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 195.
- [35.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 196.
- [36.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 197.
- [37.](#) Inglis (1984), 100.
- [38.](#) Inglis (1984), 101.

- [39.](#) Dingwall (1922).
- [40.](#) Price (1939/2003), 87.
- [41.](#) Geley, 1927/2003), 381.
- [42.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 383-85.
- [43.](#) Richet (1906), 201-205.
- [44.](#) Richet, 1906), 205-209.
- [45.](#) Fodor (1966), 232; Maxwell (1906), 283-335.
- [46.](#) Verrall (1915), 333-69.
- [47.](#) Houdini (1924), 172.
- [48.](#) Doyle (1930), 60-61.
- [49.](#) Price (1939/2003), 87.
- [50.](#) Geley (1927/2003), 183.
- [51.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 270-71.
- [52.](#) Carrington (1931), 181.
- [53.](#) Coleman (1994), 98-103.
- [54.](#) Barrington (1994), 104-106.
- [55.](#) Lambert (1954), 380-86.
- [56.](#) Lachapelle (2011), 144-45.
- [57.](#) West (1953), 49.
- [58.](#) Lachapelle (2011), 144-45.
- [59.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1928), 299.
- [60.](#) Warcollier (1955), 55-57; Perot (1969), 11-18; Perot (1969-1970), 33-41.
- [61.](#) Barrington (1994), 104-106.
- [62.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923a).
- [63.](#) Dingwall (1922).
- [64.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 227.
- [65.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 189.
- [66.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923a).
- [67.](#) Richet (1923/2003), 544n.
- [68.](#) Geley (1922a), 103-31.
- [69.](#) Geley (1922b), 99-102.
- [70.](#) Inglis (1984), 103-105.
- [71.](#) Inglis (1984), 102-103.
- [72.](#) Price (1939/2003), 87.
- [73.](#) Braude (1997), 138.
- [74.](#) Inglis (1984), 32.
- [75.](#) In *Thirty Years of Psychic Research* (514n) Richet draws attention to a 'careful examination' by Schrenck-Notzing that demonstrated the phenomena here could not be reproductions of the *Miroir* photographs. Of a critic, he writes: 'Mrs. Barclay, who in the *Psychic Magazine* thought to prove fraud, merely proved that she had neither read the detailed accounts of the experiments nor carefully examined the photographs. Schrenck had, moreover, employed detectives for several months, who sought by every possible means to discover or even to provoke fraud. They got nothing.' See also Schrenck-Notzing (1914).
- [76.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 338.
- [77.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 338.
- [78.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923a).

- [79.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 292-306.
- [80.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 280.
- [81.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 129, 139, 144.
- [82.](#) Brandon (1983).
- [83.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 34-35.
- [84.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 44.
- [85.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 275-76.
- [86.](#) Schrenck-Notzing (1923b), 31-34.
- [87.](#) Geley (1921), 67.

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