

# Does Something Leave the Body? (OBE Historical Perspectives)

The idea that ‘something leaves the body’ during an out-of-body experience has a long history in the literatures of spiritualistic and psychical research. This article complements factual information about [OBEs](#), describing historical ‘projection’ theories formulated by writers from nineteenth century to the 1950s. These are based on the idea that the out-of-body experience suggests that consciousness can function outside of the physical body and may therefore be seen as evidence of postmortem survival. The article does not attempt to evaluate the validity of this approach. However, this material has been somewhat neglected and arguably has importance for a full understanding of the OBE phenomenon.

Readers may find it helpful first to become familiar with the concepts involved in apparitions and out-of-body experiences. See for instance [Ghosts and Apparitions in Psi Research](#) and [Out-of-Body Experience](#).

## Introduction

The idea that the soul or ‘subtle bodies’ can leave the physical body goes back to antiquity.<sup>1</sup> According to Italian psychical researcher Cesar de Vesme, it can be found in the beliefs of most premodern societies: ‘the *sukshma-sarira* and the *linga-sharira* of Indians, the *kuen* of the Chinese, the *ka* of Egyptians, the Hellenic *ochêma*, the *psyche* of Pythagoras, the somatoide of Plato, which comes to the *perispirit* of some modern Spiritists, and to the *astral* or *sidereal* body of Occultists’.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘double’ is sometimes used instead of ‘subtle body’,<sup>3</sup> also with reference to apparitions of living people,<sup>4</sup> which has been taken to be the objectively observed counterpart of the subjective out-of-body experience.

Subtle bodies are not always conceived of as carriers of consciousness. But the idea of the spirit (or some other principle) leaving the physical body has been connected both to OBEs and to apparitions of the living.<sup>5</sup> One writer states, ‘It is reasonable to suppose that there is within the earthly body of man a refined, invisible, and living organism (which constitutes the *real* man), and whose organs of sense and percipient powers are adapted to a cognizance of that more ethereal world, by which the world of gross materiality is thus surrounded and pervaded’.<sup>6</sup> [Alexander Aksakof](#), a Russian psychical researcher, believed that the doubling or ‘extracorporeal activity’ involved in producing an apparition at a distance from the physical body is a ‘simulacrum of oneself, which acts for a certain time, independently of its prototype and presents undeniable attributes of corporeality’.<sup>7</sup>

However, not all apparitions of the living present evidence of consciousness. Philosopher [Carl du Prel](#) commented on the variety of observed manifestations, with only some apparitions seeming to be conscious.<sup>8</sup> Hart and Hart<sup>9</sup> stated that ‘some apparitions of living persons seem to have been self-conscious personalities,

while others appeared to retain only vague memories, or none whatever, of having appeared'.[10](#)

This idea, or simply the general concept of the spirit, has been applied to OBEs and also to apparitions of the living, including those where the appearing person had no consciousness of doing so. Many writers referred to a subtle body that connects the physical body with the soul. The concept of it leaving the physical body was also used to explain various psychic phenomena.[11](#) One author stated that 'the mystical activity of the organizing soul demonstrates the fluidic body or perispirit, and this gives the key to the explanation of even more controversial phenomena: doublings, phantasms, materializations, which are basically identical, since they derive from the same source: from the organizing energy of the soul'.[12](#)

Photographs have been published that are said to be of apparitions of living individuals,[13](#) - although none of these provide strong evidence of consciousness in the double. Photographs of 'subtle bodies' have also been taken while the person was magnetized [hypnotized].[14](#)

## Projection Ideas

### Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling

[Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling](#), a German physician and writer, believed the body contained 'a subtle luminous body, an ethereal covering of the immortal rational spirit',[15](#) which he called the soul. He stated:

By magnetism, nervous disorders, long-continued efforts of the soul, and by other secret means, a person who has a natural predisposition for it, may in the present life detach his soul, in a greater or less degree, from its corporeal organization.[16](#)

Apparitions of the living, Jung-Stilling believed, were caused by the soul's travels. He cited at second hand a case that took place sixty or more years earlier:

In the neighbourhood of Philadelphia ... there dwelt a solitary man in a lonely house. He was very benevolent, but extremely retired and reserved, and strange things were related of him, amongst which were his being able to tell a person things that were unknown to everyone else. Now it happened that the captain of a vessel belonging to Philadelphia was about to sail to Africa and Europe. He promised his wife that he would return again in a certain time, and also that he would write to her frequently. She waited long, but no letters arrived: the time appointed passed over, but her beloved husband did not return. She was now deeply distressed and knew not where to look either for counsel or consolation. At length, a friend advised her for once to go to the pious solitary and tell him her griefs. The woman followed his advice and went to him. After she had told him all her troubles, he desired her to wait a while there, until he returned and brought her an answer. She sat down to wait, and the man opening a door, went into his closet. But the woman thinking he stayed a long time, rose up, went to the window in the door, lifted up the little curtain, and looking in, saw him lying on the couch or sofa like a corpse: she

then immediately went back to her place. At length he came and told her that her husband was in London, in a coffee-house which he named, and that he would return very soon: he then told her also the reason why he had been unable to write. The woman went home pretty much at ease.

What the solitary had told her was minutely fulfilled, her husband returned, and the reasons of his delay and his not writing were just the same as the man had stated. The woman was now curious to know what would be the result, if she visited the friendly solitary in company with her husband. The visit was arranged, but when the captain saw the man, he was struck with amazement; he afterwards told his wife that he had seen this very man, on such a day; (it was the very day that the woman had been with him), in a coffee-house in London; and that he had told him that his wife was much distressed about him; that he had then stated the reason why his return was delayed, and of his not writing, and that he would shortly come back, on which he lost sight of the man among the company.<sup>17</sup>

Jung-Stilling suggested that the soul, separated from the body, could enter the world of spirits but continue to communicate with people in the material world with whom he or she were in rapport. He explained this case by assuming that the man could place himself in a somnambulistic state in which his soul could leave the physical body, in order to trace the man in question and obtain relevant information.

### **Robert Dale Owen**

In *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860), social reformer [Robert Dale Owen](#) referred to what he called the 'visionary excursion'. He recounted a case of a sleeping woman who saw her body lying on her bed, then travelled to a distant friend, who later confirmed he had seen her at this location. It seemed to Owen that she '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'.<sup>18</sup>

This idea of separation was assumed for a case, also described by Owen, of a French teacher, Emélie Sagée, whose double was said to have been seen several times by her students,<sup>19</sup> although she herself had no sense of having been out of the body.

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 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.<sup>20</sup>

This case was cited by authors over the years in support of objective ‘doubling,’<sup>21</sup> although it was evidentially weak and later research cast doubt on the facts.<sup>22</sup>

In Owen’s opinion, cases of apparitions of the living made evident 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.<sup>23</sup>

## Allan Kardec

[Allan Kardec](#), pseudonym of French educator Hippolyte-Léon Denizard Rivail, was considered by many as the founder of Spiritism in France, a result of publishing spirit teachings received via mediumistic communications.<sup>24</sup> One of these described the concept of the *perispirit*, a semi-physical (or fluidic) principle that linked the physical body and the spirit. The perispirit was said to be involved in physical phenomena<sup>25</sup> and in some visible apparitions. At death it left the physical body together with the spirit, the latter being the conscious part of the human being.<sup>26</sup>

In Kardec’s system, phenomena such as clairvoyance and hypnotic trance represented the temporary liberation of the spirit from the physical body. Similarly, he considered dreams to be ‘the product of the emancipation of the soul rendered more independent by the suspension of the active and relational life’.<sup>27</sup>

Kardec discussed the phenomenon of ‘bicorporeity’, cases in which apparitions of the living were seen at a distance from the physical body.<sup>28</sup> He presented an explanation said to have been given through a medium:

The spirit, or the soul, as you call it, abandons ... its body, followed by part of its perispirit, and leaves the impure matter [the physical body] in a state near to death. I say near to death because a link is left on the body which connects the perispirit and the soul to matter ... The body therefore appears at the place requested.<sup>29</sup>

## William Stainton Moses

[William Stainton Moses](#), an English clergyman and medium, shared the common belief that a human is a spirit in nature, whose spirit occasionally leaves the body during life and leaves permanently at death, to continue living. He examined the idea of the ‘transcorporeal action of the spirit’, interpreting OBE and apparitional phenomena to imply ‘action of the ego outside of its bodily tenement’.<sup>30</sup> Moses wrote:

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.<sup>31</sup>

Most accounts of apparitions of the living that Moses presented from published sources lacked sufficient detail to determine whether the person represented by the apparition felt that she was located at the place where the apparition was seen. In some cases there was no conscious intention to produce the experience: for instance as autoscopy (where the person saw her own apparition); seemingly unconscious apparitions of the living; apparitions that seemed to indicate a future death; and apparitions coinciding with anxiety, with or without consciousness of being out of the body. Other cases involved some form of volition, possibly including those that occur during intense emotional states (including closeness to death), as well as those that were deliberately produced.

### **William H Harrison**

William H Harrison, an English publisher and spiritualist, described cases of spirit travel in *Spirits Before Our Eyes* (1879). He was interested in the 'occasional appearance of the spirit of a person in one place, at about the time that his body is dying in another place'.<sup>32</sup> Apparitions of the living suggested to him that 'when the bodily vitality is at a low ebb, the human spirit may temporarily leave its earthly tenement'.<sup>33</sup>

Harrison thought that some of these apparitions, notably those that appeared able to open doors, might be physical, capable of being 'objectively and palpably materialized'.<sup>34</sup> Others might instead be caused by the mental influence of spirits or the perceiver's clairvoyance. He did not interpret veridical dreams as spirit travel, suggesting instead that the dreaming individual could be 'seeing that which a spirit or mortal *en rapport* with him thought'.<sup>35</sup>

Harrison agreed with earlier writers that sleep and trance could facilitate the release of the spirit from a person's body, but thought there was seldom any recollection of such experiences. Something similar occurred with mediumistic communications transmitted by living persons, which he felt might be an effect of the human spirit in its out-of-body roamings.

People who were frequently seen as apparitions, Harrison felt, might be 'so physiologically constituted, that their spirits are not unfrequently seen in the place to which their thoughts are directed'.<sup>36</sup>

### **Adolphe d'Assier**

[Adolphe D'Assier](#), a French specialist in grammar and language, proposed that human beings are constituted with an internal phantom that can appear during life as well as after the person's death. In *Posthumous Humanity: A Study of Phantoms* (1883), he wrote:

The phenomena of 'doubling' present ... all the shades of difference, from the complete and living apparition of the human form to the simplest dreams. These different manifestations evidently depend upon the degree of moral energy in the individual, the tension of his mind toward a determined result, his physical constitution, his age, and probably other causes as well, of which we are ignorant ...

The same applies to the memory of what passes during the 'doubling.' Certain persons recollect most accurately all that they have done, seen, or heard. Others only catch vague and broken reminiscences alternated with perfect blanks; others have no remembrance of the part which they have played during their lethargic sleep.[37](#)

This double could have physical properties similar to the those of the physical body, 'the gaseous replica of that which exists in the body ... united to the latter by a plexus of invisible capillaries'.[38](#) He added:

The child who comes out of the body of its mother is attached to her by a vascular system which brought it strength and life. It is the same in this doubling; the human phantom is constantly in immediate relation with the body whence it has wandered for some moments. Invisible bonds, and of a vascular nature, so intimately connect the two extremities of the chain, that any accident happening to one of the two poles reacts (*se répercute*) instantaneously upon the other.[39](#)

D'Assier noted that while the double looks like the physical body, being less dense it can pass through walls. There are instances in which the double and the physical body can be seen in close proximity. But apparitions of the double are rare, occurring only with very sensitive people. This double, D'Assier stated, can separate at death and continue to be active. Its constitution is similar to that of doubles from live physical bodies, and its visible appearance is equally rare:

This comes evidently from the same causes. It is not enough that death frees the fluidic being from its bonds for the latter to become an independent and active personality, endowed with a life of its own; it is further necessary that at this moment it shall be suitably saturated with mesmeric ether. Now this fluid decreasing with age and illness, and losing at the same time its essential qualities, it is excessively rare that it should have sufficient strength and energy to vivify the phantom at the instant when the latter is about to open the doors of its prison.[40](#)

The posthumous double may cause physical phenomena such as raps and may carry intentions and follow customs after death. It may also want to say goodbye to loved ones. This discarnate existence, D'Assier says, is brief. 'Its tissue disintegrates readily under the action of the physical, chemical, and atmospheric forces which constantly assail it, and re-enters molecule by molecule the universal planetary medium'.[41](#) However, in its desire to survive it may try to find sustenance from vampirism.

**Frederic WH Myers**

Ideas on the subject were also proposed by the classical scholar and psychical researcher [Frederic WH Myers](#).<sup>42</sup> Myers disagreed with the explanation proposed by his SPR colleague Edmund Gurney, that an apparition of the living is a telepathic hallucination. He also doubted that a subtle body was 'capable ... of detaching itself from the solid flesh and producing measurable effects on the material world',<sup>43</sup> objecting that this could not explain, for instance, why apparitions of the living were wearing clothes.

Myers also pointed to cases of clairvoyance of distant events which were reported as being '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'.<sup>44</sup> This seemed also to be the case with reciprocal apparitions, in which, as described by Gurney, 'each of the parties might receive a telepathic impulse from the other, and so each be at once agent and percipient'.<sup>45</sup>

Myers noted cases where there was a clear sense of location of consciousness in a particular place, which did not seem to him to be necessarily telepathic; also those in which, when more than one person was in a position to see the apparition, some could not perceive it. For this reason he did not believe in a physical double. In his conception, such an apparition was not a semi-physical double but rather the perception of something non-physical. He 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.<sup>46</sup>

Such idea should also apply, Myers believed, to non-collective and reciprocal cases. The latter were rare, Myers suggested, perhaps because some experiencers died soon after, and the testimony of being out of their bodies was thus not collected; for this reason, it was important to study the experiences of the dying while remembering 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'.<sup>47</sup>

Myers noted that evidence for transfer of consciousness to a different location was infrequent both in the waking state and in reciprocal cases. But he commented it was more frequent when the person was in other states of consciousness (sleep, trance, delirium).

Myers also considered varieties in features. Some cases referred to a dying person with no sense of location in space, while others involved spatial sensations or 'visions in the mind's eye'.<sup>48</sup> The 'clairvoyant invader' — someone who obtained information about a location from a distance — perhaps could 'generate in the denizens of that scene a hallucinatory perception of a supernormal invader'.<sup>49</sup> But

there was little recollection of it, even if the person in the invaded location perceived the invader.

Myers later returned to the experiences of the dying, writing, 'Why should not every death-bed be made the starting point of a long experiment?'<sup>50</sup> Here he summarized the Wiltse (1889) case in which the experiencer was very ill, and the case of the Reverend LJ Bertrand, both of which occurred close to death.

Myers also discussed the topic of psychical invasions in his posthumously published *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). These involved the creation of a phantasmogenetic center close to the person seeing the apparition. He thought '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'.<sup>51</sup> Some rare individuals, he went on to argue, were able to make themselves seen as an apparition at a distance place, a phenomenon he termed 'psychorragey,' and the tendency to exhibit it as 'psychorrhagic diathesis.' This presupposed that something broke loose from the individual perceived at a distance, 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'.<sup>52</sup>

Experiences in which the person's consciousness was perceived to be in places other than their physical body were believed by Myers to be an aspect of telepathy and related phenomena, implying the existence of a psychical element – or part of human personality – that can transcend the physical body.

For Myers, this transcendence includes various types of apparitions of the living: induced and reciprocal apparitions, recurrent appearances of the same person, apparitions perceived collectively, also 'arrival' apparitions, those 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'.<sup>53</sup> Not every case involves consciousness of visiting a distant location, but all are psychical invasions. The next step in the series are apparitions of the dead: this assumes continuity, leading to a conception of death as the ultimate self-projection of the spirit, 'the one definite act which it seems as though a man might perform equally well before and after bodily death'.<sup>54</sup>

## **Albert de Rochas**

[Colonel Albert de Rochas](#) was well-known in psychic circles for his studies of hypnosis and unorthodox forces.<sup>55</sup> One of these was the exteriorization of sensibility, in which a hypnotized individual was said to project his tactile sensations out of the body, in layers visible only to a sensitive individual or to another hypnotized person.<sup>56</sup> De Rochas proposed a four-stage process of exteriorization:

We obtain in effect a first stage of the release of the fluidic body in the exteriorization of sensibility in the form of concentric layers around the body of the subject ...

The second stage is given by the coagulation of these effluvia in a sensitive double, but not visible yet to ordinary eyes.

The third stage is visible and tangible materialization, but only of a part of the body. The psychic matter emitted by the medium seems to be able to produce these effects on the condition that it appears in a place sheltered from light vibrations and of the sitter's gaze ...

Finally, the fourth stage is the materialization of an entire human form. Here it is almost always that the medium herself is away from light and from the gaze of the sitters; as in the previous case the form only shows up when it acquires a sufficient degree of materiality ...

In the third and the fourth stages, it is as a galvanoplastic transport of the matter of the physical body of the medium, matter that comes from the physical body to occupy a similar position on the fluidic body.[57](#)

De Rochas wrote about experiments he carried out with a young man named Laurent.[58](#)

I stood before Laurent and magnetized him with passes in half-darkness. After some time, he saw a blue luminous column forming on his right and then moving away as the states of hypnosis were succeeded by their phases of lethargy. At the same time a red luminous column developed on the left which had appeared after the blue column and which moved away also. These columns were becoming more and more luminous, but without distinct forms; they were clouds of his size and height, roughly representing the profile of his body; when he lifted one of his arms, a bulge appeared in the cloud on the corresponding side. I pressed his epigastrium intensely so as to draw fluid. Laurent declared that he felt empty; at the end of a few moments he saw the two columns unite between him and me, and form a partly red and blue column, representing again the shape of his body.[59](#)

Working with another individual, a woman called Mireille, he induced out-of-body travels in which she said she visited other planets and encountered spiritual entities. In Mars, 'she discerned canals of an enormous size'.[60](#)

In some tests, de Rochas claimed the subject was induced to leave the body by hypnosis[61](#) and offered photographs said to be of 'fluidic phantoms'.[62](#) There was no clear evidence that the subject's consciousness was in fact located out of the body, although sensations were felt by the subject when the invisible double was touched.[63](#)

In the case of one subject, Mme Lux (Mme L. Lambert), de Rochas said she observed two doubles emerge from her body, each connected to the other, and both emitting flames.[64](#) He wrote (see diagram below):

I put Mme Lux to sleep with passes and I exteriorized her astral body which ... was located between her and me and needed but little effort to get out from the astral body *d* the second double *d'* which was placed on her left.

The first *d* became transparent, bright blue; it was extremely sensitive [open to sensations].

The second *d'* was thick, opaque and *reddish*, it was completely indifferent to her [no sensations], I could manipulate it at my convenience ...

I entered the double *d'* inside double *d* and I did longitudinal passes on the subject.[65](#)

 Diagram showing positions of de Rochas, subject and doubles

Figure 1: Diagram showing positions of de Rochas, subject and doubles

During this experience, Mme Lux said she felt the sensation of travelling outside the body and that she encountered various entities: her deceased niece, angels, the Virgin, and a living sister

De Rochas believed his observations proved the existence of various types of emanations from the physical body, which he referred to as *magnetic fluid* and which concurred with the beliefs of ancient oriental wisdom, Greek philosophers and early Christian authorities about the *fluidic body* or *soul*, an intermediary between the spirit and the body.[66](#)

## Hector Durville

[Hector Durville](#) was a French mesmerist who published many works about hypnosis and its therapeutic use at the turn of the twentieth century.[67](#) In experiments with hypnotized individuals he projected their double, testing their physical actions and perceptual capabilities.[68](#) Durville wrote:

The phantom of the doubled subject is composed of several bodies that double over again. When it is located near the subject ... it is the etheric body, which is animated by the astral body. When it is away for some time, it abandons its etheric form and parts with the astral, which from then on is animated by the mental body. At this moment the etheric body, seat of vitality, reenters into the subject to animate it, because without it physical life cannot be prolonged for a long time.

The phantom is all the individual. On it live the sensations, thoughts, will, judgement; it has become the seat of consciousness... In talking about themselves all the doubled subjects ... declare that the visible body is nothing ... 'The phantom is me ...' said one of my subjects.[69](#)

The main report of these tests appeared in Durville's 1909 book *Le Fantôme des Vivants: Anatomie et Physiologie de l'Âme: Recherches Expérimentales sur le Dédoublément des Corps de l'Homme* [The Phantom of the Living: Anatomy and Physiology of the Soul: Experimental Researches about the Doubling of Man]. The first part discussed his ideas and historical aspects, while the second described the

experiments. He hypnotized various women in his tests, among them Mme L Lambert.

The phantom, Durville wrote, tends to form on the left side of the subject, but it can move and go to more distant places. 'The constituent parts of this double escape under the form of emanations from all parts of the body of the subject, but chiefly from the forehead, the top of the head, the throat, the epigastric region, and the spleen'.<sup>70</sup> It assumes the shape of the subject and seems to be luminous.

Some sensitives ... see it as blue to the right; yellow, orange or red to the left; others only see a more or less distinct glimmer of white light ... Those partially sensitive perceive it in an undefined form, generally that of a bust, or rather of a dressmaker's dummy, which seems as though formed of mist or greyish vapour.<sup>71</sup>

A cord is sometimes seen connecting the double to the physical body, coming out mostly from the navel of the physical body (but there are exceptions).

In all subjects this cord is the seat of a very intense luminous circulation, and to sensitives it presents the aspect of a mixed nerve, the luminous fluid circulating from the subject to the double in the one part, and from the double to the subject in the other portion.<sup>72</sup>

In some experiments the following took place (Durville is assisted by André; Marthe and Nénette are the subjects):

*First Experiment.*—Without my knowing what he was about to do, M. André commanded Nénette to send her double to that of Marthe and tread on her feet. Marthe quickly drew her feet back, complaining that someone was treading on them.

*Second Experiment.*—M. André desired Nénette to send her double and strike that of Marthe a hard blow with the fist on the head. Marthe raised both hands to her breast, and, seemingly in pain, said that someone had fallen on her chest. I remarked to her that from her position it was not possible for anyone to fall on her chest, but she still persisted that she had experienced a violent blow.<sup>73</sup>

Some of the tests were about visual perception:

M. André and I tried the following experiment with Marthe, which has been verified many times by M. André himself:—A paper with large letters printed on it was placed before the half-open eyes of the subject, who declared that she could see nothing. The paper was then placed before different parts of the body by which the somnambulistic subjects sometimes see: the top of the head, the nape of the neck, or the epigastrium; the subject again declared that she could see nothing. The paper was placed before the eyes of the double, but it could see nothing, nor yet at the top of the head; but at the nape of the neck it could read without hesitation ....

*First Experiment.* — Mme. Fournier seated herself on the table. ‘I see,’ said the subject, ‘Mme. Fournier seated on the table.’

*Second Experiment.* —The three persons walked into the room and gesticulated. ‘They walk and make gestures with their hands; I do not know what it means.’

*Third Experiment.* —Mme. Stahl took a pamphlet from the table and handed it to Mme. Fournier. ‘The two ladies are reading,’ said the subject.

The phantoms were made visible using special screens:

The phantom gives off N-rays in great abundance, which illuminate phosphorescent screens in a very remarkable manner ...

The double of the subject having been projected, I took the three screens and showed them to the witnesses, who observed that they were completely dark. Laying the small screen aside for a moment, I placed one of the large ones on the abdomen of the subject and held the other in the phantom, which was seated on an arm-chair to the left of the subject.

The screen placed in the phantom became rapidly illuminated, and the one on the subject remained completely dark ... I then took the screen which had been on the subject, and remained dark, and placed it in the phantom. It immediately became illuminated like the first ...

I then took the small screen which had not been used and placed it on the abdomen of the subject for two or three minutes without obtaining the slightest trace of luminosity. I then placed it in the phantom, and it became very strongly illuminated ...

These experiments, repeated about ten times with seven or eight different subjects, always gave similar results, which were very intense when the screens had been well exposed to the sun, less so when the exposure had been insufficient.

It is as well to add here that I had previously observed the action of nearly all the subjects on the same screens when the double was not projected. When they approached their hands to the screen in the dark, especially when they closed their fists firmly, the screen was more or less illuminated, as, in fact, is the case with anyone. But it is worthy of notice that the luminosity is always considerably less than that which is observed when the screen is placed in the phantom.[74](#)

On occasion, when the screens were photographed, silhouettes of the phantoms were seen in the photo.[75](#)

 Photo of Screen with a Phantom Silhouette

Figure 2: Photo of Screen with a Phantom Silhouette

Durville also had the projected doubles produce physical effects. Both movement of objects and raps were reported to take place, showing to Durville that the doubles were physical. According to Durville some phantoms had the 'very principle of life, as well as will, intelligence, memory, consciousness, the physical senses, while the physical body does not have any faculty'.<sup>76</sup> Some of the doubles seem to have had the awareness of the subject with them in the projected state, a fact that is not always clear in Durville's reports of test reports.

## **Gabriel Delanne**

Gabriel Delanne, a French engineer and Spiritist leader, discussed the existence of the double in *Evidence for a Future Life* (1899/1904). Delanne favoured Edmund Gurney's telepathic hallucination theory of apparitions,<sup>77</sup> but did not think it explained all such cases. He pointed out those where physical events occurred such as opening doors, and others where the emotion – which Gurney assumed helped a telepathic agent create an apparition – was lacking. He was sceptical that in cases of collectively perceived apparitions each of the percipients received a telepathic message, also that reciprocal telepathic influence could be the cause of reciprocal apparitions.

In many cases, apparitions of the living did not seem to be conscious, he observed; however, there were some in which the subject retained a memory of having been in a location other than the physical body. He thought 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'.<sup>78</sup>

Delanne thought that the experience of being out of the body occurred only in certain circumstances, during sleep, or as a result of strong emotion or ill-health. Similar conditions could be produced by anesthetics, he suggested, pointing to a case reported by electrical engineer Cromwell Varley, who following the application of chloroform for pain relief saw himself lying on the bed, the sponge in his mouth, unable to move.<sup>79</sup> The low physical activity involved in these states suggested to Delanne that the forces of the body were redirected to cause the experience; perhaps there was 'a direct connection between the intensity of the psychic action and the state of prostration of the physical body'.<sup>80</sup>

Delanne also broached the topic of materializations with mediums, attempting to show 'that the human soul exists during life and after death' <sup>81</sup> and that people have an inner intelligent component that may leave the body during life. Delanne believed that the soul 'possesses an ethereal body by which it affirms its presence through the phenomenon of apparitions' – the *perispirit* discussed earlier by Kardec and others.<sup>82</sup>

In Delanne's view, cases of recurrent apparitions such as Sagée's (see above) stood as evidence against the telepathic explanation. Rather, they suggested to him a 'physiological idiosyncrasy of agents ... a particular biological anomaly, that allows the agent to *unconsciously* project a concrete view of itself to the place where his

thought is directed'.<sup>83</sup> Such apparitions could be physical in some way but did not necessarily carry consciousness or intelligence.

Delanne approved Myers's concept of a phantasmogenetic center in terms of some type of change in space. However, he disagreed that the apparitions in question were non-physical, preferring to accept the existence of a physical double – a projection of a 'fluidic image without interior organization, without intelligence'.<sup>84</sup> He was also sceptical about Myers's view that this phenomenon represented the manifestation at a distance of aspects of personality: in his view the soul was not a physical thing that could be divided.

### **Ernesto Bozzano**

[Ernesto Bozzano](#) was a leading Italian student of psychic phenomena and proponent of postmortem survival. Under the heading 'bilocation' he discussed a variety of phenomena appearing to suggest the action of an 'etheric' body lodged inside the physical body:<sup>85</sup> These included the 'phantom limb' experienced by amputees, the sensation of doubling in patients of hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body) and 'autoscopy', in which persons see an apparition of themselves. Bozzano also alluded to cases in which the personal consciousness is 'transferred to the phantom',<sup>86</sup> and cases in which the doubled phantom is perceived only by a third party,<sup>87</sup> as in some apparitions of the living and the experiences of persons at deathbeds who see a subtle body, mist or luminous emanations coming from the dying person's body.

Most of these phenomena did not present evidence for the feeling of being out of the physical body, but Bozzano was clear that there were cases 'in which the personal consciousness is transferred to the phantom'.<sup>88</sup> He thought the person's consciousness was located in the etheric body, a vehicle which 'constitutes the supreme, immaterial envelope of the discarnate spirit'.<sup>89</sup>

Bozzano attached particular significance to veridical OBE cases, those where a person in an out-of-body state made observations about the real world that were later discovered to be true in fact. Such cases, he thought, set OBEs apart from 'oniric or hallucinatory romances, that is, completely subjective phenomena'.<sup>90</sup>

Like others before him,<sup>91</sup> Bozzano was especially interested in cases where persons attending deathbeds saw a lights or mist or a 'subtle body' emanating from the dying person. He believed these events were instances of 'embryonary and rudimentary' doubling and the beginning stages of death<sup>92</sup> - the exteriorization of a vital substance that showed '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"'.<sup>93</sup>

Bozzano insisted that bilocation was best understood by considering these phenomena collectively rather than individually, as the actions of an etheric body. He also believed in the existence of an etheric brain and an independent spirit.

### **Sylvan J Muldoon and Hereward Carrington**

In 1915, British-born psychical researcher Hereward Carrington published a book in which he defended the idea of a double capable of projecting from the physical body. He wrote, 'Occult science has long since proved that – besides this physical body, which we know – there is also a more subtle and refined envelope ... and that this body is capable of being detached, at times, and of ... [making] itself manifest to others at considerable distances'.[94](#)

As a result of this he was contacted by Sylvan Muldoon, a young American who frequently experienced OBEs, and who shared Carrington's belief of a projected body. They collaborated in writing *The Projection of the Astral Body*,[95](#) one of the most influential accounts of OBEs ever published. Carrington contributed the introduction, describing the existing literature on the topic and the concept of the astral body. The rest of the book was mostly written by Muldoon based on his personal experiences.[96](#)

Independently, Muldoon continued to collect OBE reports and to defend the concept of survival, for instance in *The Case for Astral Projection*.[97](#) Years later, he and Carrington published another influential case collection, *The Phenomena of Astral Projection*, in which cases were classed by their circumstances: for instance sleeping or waking, an effect of accident or of drugs, or deliberately induced.[98](#)

Muldoon and Carrington believed that there was other evidence besides OBE reports for the existence of subtle bodies: instances of veridical apparitions, physical effects produced by phantoms (such as being visible in photographs), and materialization phenomena in séances.

Both researchers considered astral projection an example of the mind acting independently of the physical body, consistent with the existence of an etheric brain. It also implied an etheric body 'which body we may inhabit at death, and which constitutes the vehicle of the mind in astral projections'.[99](#)

## **Hornell Hart**

[Hornell Hart](#) was an American sociologist who became interested in OBEs and survival. He used the term 'ESP projection', meaning experiences in which a person obtained veridical information while feeling they were out of the body and consistently located in a particular place.[100](#) Hart analyzed 99 veridical cases, classifying the circumstances and seeking common patterns among their features. He also focused on OBEs seen as apparitions, analyzing 165 published cases and quantifying their features.[101](#)

Hart believed that ESP projections 'provide internal views of the phenomena observed externally in connection with apparition of the living'.[102](#) Comparing features in OBE apparitions to apparitions of the dying (where clear evidence of conscious experience is lacking) and of the dead, he found few differences. For Hart, the close similarity of conscious-seeming OBE apparitions to other apparitions said 'something of the nature of the experiences undergone at and (to a limited extent) after death'.[103](#)

In a later paper, Hart underlined the significance of this for the debate about post-mortem survival. ESP projections having been shown to be genuine experiences, he commented,

and since these conscious projections of living are in most respects essentially indistinguishable from most types of apparitions of the dead, it follows that some of the most frequent types of apparitions of the dead presumably carry with them the memories and purposes of the personalities which they represent, and that they thus constitute evidence of survival of personality beyond bodily death.[104](#)

## Others

The above-mentioned authors are only a few of many who have discussed or cited projection ideas of OBEs. Other examples include Brittan (1864 & 1875); Bulford (1947); Cornillier (1920/1921); Du Prel (1888); Fugairon (1907); Hellenbach (1885/1888); Lancelin (1921); Mattiesen (1931); and Tweedale (1925).

Later writers include Crookall (1967); Osis and McCormick (1980); Vieira (2008); and Tressoldi et al (2015).

## Writings on the OBE Projection

Aspects of the history of projection ideas can be found in books about OBEs such as *The Projection of the Astral Body*[105](#) and in overviews of research and ideas about OBEs.[106](#) Also relevant are works about ideas of subtle bodies in different historical eras, namely *Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society* Deveney (1997), *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition* Mead (1919), and *Vehicles of Consciousness: The Concept of Hyllic Pluralism (Ochema)*.[107](#)

The projection idea of OBEs has been discussed by Carlos S Alvarado in various essays meant to present material from the spiritualist and psychical research literatures, material forgotten by most current writers.[108](#) In other articles, Alvarado has reprinted excerpts from the writings of previous students on the subject, many of which are mentioned in the current article.[109](#)

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Carlos S Alvarado

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1](#). Detienne (1958–1960); Mead (1919); Poortman (1954/1978). For some nineteenth-century ideas see Deveney (1997).
- [2](#). Vesme (1898), 150.
- [3](#). E.g., Durville (1909).
- [4](#). E.g., Stead (1896).

- [5.](#) E.g., Britten (1875); Rogers (1857).
- [6.](#) F---, W. (1853), 134.
- [7.](#) Aksakof (1890/1895), 523.
- [8.](#) du Prel (1888).
- [9.](#) Hart and Hart (1933).
- [10.](#) Hart and Hart (1933), 247.
- [11.](#) E.g., Du Prel (1899/1907–1908).
- [12.](#) Spatzier (1892), 15–16. Nineteenth century discussions of doubles that refer to apparitions of the living include Blackburn (1868), Crowe (1848), Du Prel (1888), and Stead (1896). Various writers related the medium’s double to materializations in the séance room, e.g., Anon. (1873); Coleman (1865).
- [13.](#) E.g., Moses (1875); Stead (1896); Volpi (1911).
- [14.](#) de Rochas (1900, 1908); Lefranc (1911a); Durville (1909).
- [15.](#) Jung-Stilling (1808/1861), 48.
- [16.](#) Jung-Stilling (1808/1861), 229.
- [17.](#) Jung-Stilling (1808/1861), 74–76.
- [18.](#) Owen (1860), 347–48.
- [19.](#) Owen (1860), 348–57.
- [20.](#) Owen (1860), 349–50.
- [21.](#) Richet (1922), 702–3.
- [22.](#) Hövelmann et al. (2020). See, for example, Aksakof (1890/1895), 498–504; Battersby (1942/1969), 14–17, Besant (1892), 12; D’Assier (1883/1887), 62–68; Durville (1909), 75–77; and Shirley (1938/1965), 64–69. For more recent discussions see Caratelli (2006); Davis (1998), 54–55; Evans (2004), 40; and Zorab (1975), 25–26. For an interesting case of recurrent apparitions of a living person, see Gurney et al. (1886), vol. 2, 85–86.
- [23.](#) Owen (1860), 360–61.
- [24.](#) For Kardec and his work see Sharp (2006).
- [25.](#) Kardec (1858b).
- [26.](#) see also Kardec (1860; 1863); for the perispirit, see Alvarado (2008).
- [27.](#) Kardec (1860), 179.
- [28.](#) Kardec (1858a).
- [29.](#) Kardec (1858a), 330.
- [30.](#) Moses (1876–77), 100.
- [31.](#) Moses (1876–77), 102.
- [32.](#) Moses (1876–77), 24.
- [33.](#) Moses (1876–77), 144.
- [34.](#) Moses (1876–77), 55.
- [35.](#) Moses (1876–77), 146.
- [36.](#) Moses (1876–77), 161.
- [37.](#) D’Assier (1883/1887), 41.
- [38.](#) D’Assier (1883/1887), 49.
- [39.](#) D’Assier (1883/1887), 51. Instances of repercussion or feeling pain or tactile sensations in the physical body due to actions on the double have been discussed by others (de Rochas (1910); Muldoon & Carrington (1929). Léon Lefranc, who investigated and obtained results similar to de Rochas et al (1911a) obtained photographic evidence of burns presumably caused by repercussion Lefranc (1911b).

- [40.](#) D'Assier (1883/1887), 255.
- [41.](#) D'Assier (1883/1887), 274.
- [42.](#) Hamilton (2017); Gurney et al. (1886).
- [43.](#) Gurney et al. (1886), 279.
- [44.](#) Gurney et al. (1886), 288–89.
- [45.](#) Gurney et al. (1886) vol. 2, 153.
- [46.](#) Myers (1886), 291
- [47.](#) Myers (1886), 303.
- [48.](#) Myers (1886), 310.
- [49.](#) Myers (1886), 311.
- [50.](#) Myers (1886), 252.
- [51.](#) Myers (1903) vol. 1, 247.
- [52.](#) Myers (1903) vol. 1, 264. Years later Zorab (1975) called this a 'phantom forming predisposition.' Harrison (1879) speculated about a physiological constitution.
- [53.](#) Myers (1903) vol. 1, 257.
- [54.](#) Myers (1903) vol. 1, 297.
- [55.](#) Alvarado (2016b).
- [56.](#) de Rochas (1895a).
- [57.](#) de Rochas (1897a), 26–27.
- [58.](#) Laurent (1895b).
- [59.](#) Laurent (1895b), 258.
- [60.](#) de Rochas (1896), 229.
- [61.](#) de Rochas (1905; 1906; 1910).
- [62.](#) de Rochas (1900; 1908).
- [63.](#) de Rochas (1905), 5, 7; (1910), 291, 293, 294).
- [64.](#) de Rochas (1897b).
- [65.](#) de Rochas (1897b), 148.
- [66.](#) de Rochas (1904), 26.
- [67.](#) E.g., Durville (1895; 1895–96; 1905).
- [68.](#) Durville (1908a; 1908b; 1909; n.d.).
- [69.](#) Durville (n.d.), 15.
- [70.](#) Durville (1908a), 337.
- [71.](#) Durville (1908a), 337.
- [72.](#) Durville (1908a), 337.
- [73.](#) Durville (1908a), 336.
- [74.](#) Durville (1908a), 341–42.
- [75.](#) Although there were many studies about N-rays, affecting Durville's idea that such radiation emanated from doubles, their existence was later discredited in Ashmore (1993). Durville followed N-rays investigators who believed that calcium sulphide could detect such radiation, a substance he put in his screens.
- [76.](#) Durville (1909), 354.
- [77.](#) Gurney et al. (1886).
- [78.](#) Delanne (1899/1904), 82.
- [79.](#) Delanne (1899/1904), 99–100.
- [80.](#) Delanne (1899/1904), 99–100.
- [81.](#) Delanne (1909), 1.

- [82.](#) Delanne (1909), 16. In the second volume of this work, Delanne (1911) continued to discuss mediumistic materializations and also spontaneous apparitions of the dead.
- [83.](#) Delanne (1909), 197.
- [84.](#) Delanne (1909), 495.
- [85.](#) Bozzano (1911; 1934/1937, n.d.). See also Alvarado (2005).
- [86.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 41.
- [87.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 92.
- [88.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 41.
- [89.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 8.
- [90.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 42.
- [91.](#) E.g., Tweedale (1925).
- [92.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 120.
- [93.](#) Bozzano (1934/1937), 120–21. Two of the cases cited by Bozzano were those reported by Monk (1922) and by Tweedale (1921).
- [94.](#) Carrington (1919), 146.
- [95.](#) Muldoon & Carrington (1929).
- [96.](#) While the topic of this article is not the teachings of astral projectors, an important literature, it is of interest to mention some of the topics discussed by Muldoon. Examples are the importance of the subconscious will in producing projection, projection techniques, types of projection, and specific astral phenomena such as catalepsy, somnambulism, movements, cord-like connection, repercussion, and changes in sense perception.
- [97.](#) Muldoon (1936).
- [98.](#) Muldoon & Carrington (1951); see also Alvarado (2016a).
- [99.](#) Muldoon & Carrington (1951), 18.
- [100.](#) Hart (1954), 121.
- [101.](#) Hart et al. (1956).
- [102.](#) Hart et al. (1956), 177.
- [103.](#) Hart et al. (1956), 177.
- [104.](#) Hart (1967), 46e.
- [105.](#) Muldoon & Carrington (1929).
- [106.](#) Blackmore (1982); Irwin (1985).
- [107.](#) Poortman (1954/1978).
- [108.](#) Alvarado (1980; 2009b; 2011a ; 2011c).
- [109.](#) E.g., Alvarado (2005; 2009a; 2010; 2011b; 2012; 2016b).