Invoking spirits in the material world: spiritualism, surrealism, and spirituality at work

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Abstract

This paper considers the recent upsurge of interest in workplace spirituality through an analysis of three cultural movements – late nineteenth century spiritualism, early twentieth century surrealism, and late twentieth/early twenty-first century 'spirituality at work'. These movements share a common interest in harnessing the power of the human spirit in the transformation and 'betterment' of social life. It is argued that these movements have successively adopted and de-radicalised invocations of the spirit world such that the proto-feminism and utopianism of spiritualism and the revolutionary pretensions of surrealism have been usurped by a strongly managerialist discourse of workplace spirituality. The paper ends with a consideration of the implications of these developments for the critical study of spirituality, management and organisation.

Key words • spirituality • surrealism • spiritualism • invocation • technology • materialism

Introduction

Spiritualism: a cultural movement devoted to communication between living persons and those who had passed to the Other Side, or "Summerland".

Surrealism: a cultural movement devoted to communication between the human spirit and the world beyond the façade of reality.

Spirituality at work: a cultural movement devoted to the promotion of spirituality in the workplace.

Since the 1990s there has been a noticeable upsurge in both managerial and scholarly interest in workplace spirituality. Major business corporations such as Apple, Ford and Shell Oil have shown a keen interest in harnessing the power of the spiritual to achieve material gains in

employee performance, and academic journals regularly publish special issues and individual papers on workplace spirituality. However, as Case and Gosling (2007) observe, much of the contemporary literature on spirituality is ahistorical, apolitical, narrowly utilitarian and instrumental, and seemingly more concerned with commodifying spirituality than analysing its provenance or trajectory.

This paper attempts to understand workplace spirituality through an analysis of two cultural movements – late nineteenth century spiritualism and early twentieth century surrealism – which, along with the spirituality at work movement, share a common interest in harnessing the power of the human spirit in the transformation and 'betterment' of social life. At first sight it may seem preposterous to argue that these three movements have much in common. Spiritualism conjures up images of séances, Ouija boards, and ghosts; surrealism is associated with strange works of art and revolution; spirituality at work with new age management ideas and practices. I do not deny their radical differences in terms of organisation, strategy or intellectual pretensions, but their similarities are not merely alliterative. All three are quite literally 'movements' as, in locating themselves in-between the extant social world and a desired future social world, they each profess to offer the means for followers to move from the flawed present to a more perfect world. Each share a belief in the important role played by the medium or seer in the invocation of a power outside ordinary perception and action for assistance or guidance; the key role of non-conscious action or automatism in achieving personal enlightenment and the transformation of social organisation; and an opposition to, and yet fatal fascination with, the established institutions and technologies of authority.

In teasing out such commonalities, I hope to illustrate how the invocation of an immaterial, spiritual world has served as a means to criticise the materiality of the here-and-how and to promote social change. I also want to show how the proto-feminism of spiritualism and the revolutionary pretensions of surrealism have been usurped by the managerialist discourse of workplace spirituality in which the medium is the CEO, the perfect future state is the happy corporation, and technology is the new Messiah. The paper ends with a consideration of the implications of these developments for harnessing the power of the spiritual to achieve social reform or even radical change within organisations.

Spiritualism (c. 1850 – 1920)

Spiritualism probably first came to public attention in 1848 following the well publicised experiences of Kate and Margaret Fox at Hydesville, and later at Rochester, in New York State (Isaacs, 1983). The sisters claimed to have been contacted by the spirit of a murdered peddler who communicated to them through a series of audible rapping sounds emanating from a table. Kate and Margaret were adopted by Quakers and it wasn't long before their experiences inspired a whole generation of US social reformers who had grown disenchanted with the views held by established churches on a range of issues including slavery and women's rights (Carroll, 1997). The Fox sisters toured the US showing off their prowess as mediums (between this world and the afterlife) through the holding of séances and demonstrations of automatic writing. Within ten years, mediums were performing in theatres throughout the US, and séances were regularly held in many middle and upper class households. In 1852, spiritualism took root in Europe as a number of American mediums crossed the Atlantic to hold public séances. It would seem that within a year séances in the UK became extremely popular household activities, with table – turning and levitation, along with automatic writing, vying for the most popular means through which spirits communicated with the living (Britten, 1884). On both sides of the Atlantic mediums were keen to prove their psychic abilities, and it wasn't long before spiritualism attracted the serious, and highly skeptical, attention of the scientific community.

In 1851, the Fox sisters were examined by medical physicians from the University of Buffalo who concluded that the 'Rochester rappings' were simply the cracking of the girls' toe joints against a table. In Paris, table-turning and rappings were investigated by Count Agenor de Gasparin who concluded (in an 1854 monograph entitled 'Des tables tournantes') that the phenomena were caused by some physical force of the human body. However, other scientists took such phenomena more seriously and urged their colleagues to undertake a thorough and systematic investigation of the power of the medium. Some of the most eminent names in late nineteenth century science – the chemist William Crookes; the physiologists Jules-Etienne Marey, Wilhem Wundt, and Gustav Fechner; the naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace; the psychologist William James; and the physicist, Karl Zollner, – rallied to the call, and armed themselves with the latest technologies and scientific instruments in their efforts to observe and measure the unseen spiritual forces emanating from spiritual mediums (see Kottler, 1974; De

Kosky, 1976; Staubermann, 2001; and Lamont, 2004). Unlike the mediums invocation of spirits, these scientists invoked the power of natural laws, technical measurement and scientific experimentation to establish the 'truth'.

However, numerous problems confronted the experimental scientific study of mediumship. First, by the 1860s, a number of fraudulent mediums had been exposed. How could scientists be sure that they hadn't been deceived by sleight of hand? In the aftermath of Karl Zollner's experiments on the medium Harold Slade at Leipzig University, a heated debate ensued between Wundt, Fechner and Zollner concerning the nature and validity of scientific authority. Wundt argued that Slade, rather than Zollner, was actually in control of the experiment. He argued further that the ability to reduce the experimenter to the role of passive spectator, whilst giving the illusion that the experimenter's authority was maintained, was one of the key psychological skills of a medium (Oppenheim, 1985). Later experiments on mediums employed elaborate technical props to protect against such influences. Mediums were often tied and gagged under the blaze of bright lights in bare rooms, intimately searched, photographed from a variety of angles, and required to comply absolutely with the orders of the skeptical experimenters in rooms within which the medium had never previously been present. Often complex measuring devices were attached to the mediums' arms to measure pulse rate and bodily movement. If a table was used this too would be festooned with measuring devices. Nevertheless, some spiritualist phenomena occurred which could not be ascribed to trickery or suggestion by those present. In 1871, a report by a committee appointed by the London Dialectical Society concluded that "motion may be produced in solid bodies without material contact, by some hitherto unrecognised force operating within an undefined distance from the human organism and beyond the range of muscular action" and that "this force is frequently directed by intelligence" (p. 8). In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was established in Cambridge, England, to continue the scientific study of psychic and spiritual phenomena. The Society still flourishes today and researchers continue to employ sophisticated technological apparatus (e.g. Faraday cages) in their search for a material basis of spirit. Popular interest in spiritualism would still seem to be fairly widespread. Ouija automatic writing boards – which work through the movement of a miniature table on wheels, a planchette, across a board – remain popular with over seven million unit sales in the US since 1980.

When reading the history of the Spiritualist movement it is easy to overlook its social reformist agenda and philosophy. The historian Robert Delp (2007) suggests that two strands of spiritualism co-existed in the US in the second half of the nineteenth century. 'Phenomenal spiritualism' was the strand centred around public séances and performances of table-turning and automatic writing; the other was 'philosophical spiritualism' which concerned itself more with establishing a firm philosophical understanding and strategic utilisation of such phenomena. A key figure in the development of philosophical spiritualism was Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910) whose most famous, and best-selling, work - *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations and a Voice to Mankind* - was apparently dictated to him by the spirits of Galen and Emanuel Swedenborg whilst he was in a trance (Davis, 1857a). This highly influential book outlined the three core beliefs shared by philosophical spiritualists. These were:

- a. Humans can communicate with spirits;
- b. Spirits are 'more advanced' than humans and can progress through successively higher spheres of knowledge and perfection (with 'Summerland' being the sixth and highest plane);
- c. Spirits are capable of providing knowledge about moral and ethical issues and can actively contribute to the betterment of human society.

According to Delp (2007), Davis saw no antagonism between these beliefs and the transformation of society championed by abolitionists, feminists, vegetarians, peace devotees, and child protection campaigners, and he regularly toured the reformist conference circuit with such campaigners. Davis made the links explicit in his presentation to the 1857 Free Convention held in Vermont when he told delegates:

"Spiritualism is a broad and glorious triumphant archway leading in all directions into freedom, and a universal enjoyment of a heaven in the world" (1857b: 147).

Indeed, spiritualist journals and magazines in the US gave much attention to social reform, with articles criticising social injustices and inequities appearing regularly in the pages of *Herald of Progress*, *Sunflower*, *Spirit Messenger*, *Banner of Light*, and *Carrier Dove*. The utopian socialist writings of Charles Fourier and Robert Owen were also heavily influenced by spiritualist beliefs. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, were far less impressed (de Tollenaere, 1992) although, more recently, scholars have argued that nineteenth century spiritualism sowed the seed of radical change through its promotion of "rebellion against death and rebellion against authority" (Braude,

2001: 2). Sword (2001) has also shown that many nineteenth century spiritualist texts embodied the experimental ideas of the radical and avant-garde.

Surrealism (c. 1920 – 1966)

The term 'surrealism' was first coined by Guillaume Appolinaire in 1917 for the programme notes for the avant-garde ballet, *Parade* (Twaine, 1967), but was to reach greater public awareness seven years later with the publication of André Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism*. In this work, surrealism is defined as the liberation of the human spirit through the destruction of bourgeois capitalist society. Breton had trained in medicine and psychiatry, and was heavily influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud on the unconscious. After serving as a psychoanalyst in the treatment of shell-shocked troops during the First World War, Breton returned to Paris and became involved with the dada movement. However, it wasn't long before his interests turned to the spiritualist writings of Frederic Myers (co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research) and the psychologist Theodore Flournoy, and particularly to the practice of automatic writing. This led him to argue that such practices may offer a better means of bringing about social change and spiritual liberation than the Dadaist's artist subversions of cultural values.

In 1922-3, Breton held regular séances and sessions of automatic writing, referring to them as experiments in 'psychic automatism'. A photograph taken by Man Ray entitled *Waking Dream Séance*, published in the magazine *La Revolution Surrealiste* in December 1924, captures one such experiment. The day before this picture was taken, one of the participants, Robert Desnos, entered into a trance and became convinced he was possessed by the spirit of Rose Selavy (Duchamp's alter ego) who channelled her voice through his inert body. During yet another séance, several members of the surrealist group were discovered inside a wardrobe in the midst of a collective suicide attempt (Brandon, 1999). We also know from Breton's own writings that the group held experiments during which they attempted to converse with the dead in an effort to prophesize the future (Breton, 1996).

Despite such activities, Breton and the surrealists were keen to distance themselves from the revival of spiritualist beliefs and practices occasioned by the death and horror of World War One. Yet, as Thompson (2004) argues "like spiritualist automatism, psychic automatism

functioned as a technique for producing creatively fertile psychic dissociation and communion with a kind of force that seemed radically other. No longer authors, no longer the originators of discourse, Surrealist practitioners envisioned themselves as conduits for a kind of magical dictation, as modest recording instruments" (p.6-7). If, for spiritualists, the radical other-world of the spirits was exterior to the human body and mind (in 'Summerland'); for surrealists, this radical other-world was an interior force located deep in the unconscious. The surrealists celebrated the unconscious – and particularly unconscious desire - as a liberating force, as an escape from the alienating pressures of the rational world. The rationality of western culture, confessed Breton, "clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement" (Breton 1969:6). The objective of surrealism was therefore less of a fusion of the spiritual and the material than a deliberate confusion of the unconventional and subjective world of the unconscious with the deadening logic and rationality of the real material world. Breton offered his own definition of surrealism as "pure psychic automatism, which has the aim of expressing, whether verbally, in writing, or in some other manner, the actual functioning of thought freed from any control of the reason and any aesthetic or moral preoccupation" (ibid: 34).

Heavily influenced by Freud, surrealism was not interested in curing hysteria through free techniques of free association, but in liberating the creative forces locked inside the unconscious in the creation of a material 'Summerland'. But, just as spiritualism was eventually reduced to popular vaudeville entertainment, by the time of Breton's death in 1966 surrealist imagery was starting to adorn the walls of museums and art galleries, and feature in corporate advertising campaigns.

Spirituality at work (c. 1987 - present)

Beginning around the late 1980s in the US, the Spirituality at Work movement (SAW) encapsulates a number of recent developments in management and business thinking, including spirit at work, spirituality of work, spiritual computing, and spiritual leadership – all of which have websites, literature, conferences, and training courses associated with them (see Cavanagh, 1999, for an overview). An indication of the popularity of this movement can be gleaned from a simple internet search using the term 'spirituality at work' which identified 12,400,000 sources at

the time of writing. Although, as Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) have noted, proponents of SAW are loathe to offer clear definitions of spirituality, those who do suggest a strong resonance with the aims of surrealism; with SAW offering a means to "encourage the creator and artist in every person. It will be actively involved, as every artist is, in making the unconscious conscious – not for an elite but for the people" (Fox, 1981: 11). More recently, work spirituality has been defined as "a source of energy empowering and transforming the life of daily work...It is beyond the rational and is creating a new order" (Ottaway, 2003: 34).

SAW has its roots in so-called 'new age' thinking which rose to prominence in the late 1960s and which, in common with spiritualism and surrealism, was critical of the dominance of organised religion and scientific rationality in everyday Western cultural life (Heelas, 1996). From 'new age' spiritism, SAW inherited the belief that all life is interconnected and that divine beings (or one divine Being) exist(s) who can guide humanity to a clearer understanding of the spiritual foundations of life and thereby achieve 'inner transformation'. Many 'new age' movements have channellers (people able to tap into this spiritual foundation) who, at least on the surface, have much in common with the mediums and seers of the spiritualist movement. The equivalent within SAW is the enlightened spiritual leader who can guide and help others to achieve self-transformation at work (e.g. Renesch, 1992; Chappell, 1993; Hawley, 1993; Conger, 1994; and Hendricks and Ludeman, 1996).

What is most striking about SAW is that, despite its critique of existing business practices in terms of their lack of compassion or 'soul', it does not offer any means by which the work situation can be improved or transformed (Ottaway, 2003). Instead, the focus is upon the need for spiritual guidance and leadership. John Renesch (1992), an early advocate for, and leading light in, the SAW movement, argues that the disappearance of the village and the tribe in Western culture has left a spiritual 'hole' which can only be filled by the business corporation. Consequently, he maintains that corporate leadership should introduce and develop 'tribal rituals' to enhance the sense of spirit amongst corporate members. So, although spirituality is beyond the rational logic required in business, it is deep within the person and can be channelled by corporate leaders to achieve the desired end. The assumption would seem to be that work can fulfill our spiritual needs just so long as the CEO invokes the 'corporate good' to channel our spiritual energies in the direction of creativity, personal growth, trust, and organisational commitment (see, for example, Fairholm, 1997 and Moxley, 2000).

Movement between the movements

How are we to make sense of the *recuperation* of spirituality by the very institutions its proponents rallied against? The spiritualist movement encouraged wide social participation and, in resisting domination by any one individual or elite, tended to be democratic in orientation. As for the surrealists, Cottom (1991) suggests that despite their professed sympathies for the masses, they defined themselves as a superior and authoritarian few. The contemporary SAW movement restricts its cadre to corporate leaders. In short, the valorisation of the (feminine) body in spiritualism and surrealism has given way to the valorisation of the (male) head.

So how are we to account for this movement between the movements? We now turn to consider this de-radicalisation of spirituality in relation to three broader cultural discourses, namely;

Virilisation – the process whereby qualities associated with the 'feminine' are appropriated and re-cast in 'masculine' terms;

Materialisation – the process whereby the true existence of anything is judged on its visible material existence;

Subjectivisation – the process whereby 'forms of spirituality which resource unique subjectivities and treat them as primary sources of signification' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005: 78) are favoured and reinforced.

Virilisation of spirit The long-established cultural equation of spirituality with female sexuality was reinforced by the popularity of the nineteenth century séance in which conventional sexual etiquette was often upset by the flirtatious behaviour of the medium (Owen, 1990). At a séance, "the boundary between the spiritual and the flesh of the medium became indistinct, and, by virtue of this slippage, one could not demarcate the medium's identity, locate her accountability or intention, or distinguish the Victorian woman from the unfettered spirit" (Tromp, 2003: 69). Hence female mediums were a dangerous liminal creature residing between fluid boundaries of identity, agency, and responsibility. They became ontological hybrids, contradictions, "physical category errors" (Brown, 1999: 147). But, as Sotto (1998) observes, such hybridity is untenable

within a culture steeped in the Enlightenment view of the individual exercising a personal, sovereign power which makes them responsible as individuals for their engagement with the world. Bauman (1991) argues that modernity's quest for order is a war against such ambivalence and uncertainty. The logic of such a war insists that the medium must undergo a process of 'purification' (Latour, 1993) in order to return her to a more stable, and less threatening, category: whether it be fraudster or hysteric.

Yet it was this very hybridity or category crisis that surrealists were eager to exploit in their war against such 'purification'. Breton wrote, "everything leads us to believe there exists a certain point in the mind where life and death, real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be perceived as contradictory" (cited in Lewis (1988: 82). It is clear from even the most cursory glance at surrealist art that the hybrid, sexualised female body plays a key role in the surrealist's efforts to awaken this 'point in the mind' and to enhance erotic motivation towards a material transformation of society.

"Eroticism, the 'great nocturnal beast of desire', as Breton called it in the *Ode to Charles Fourier*, was the model for that tension which mobilized the whole being towards an unknown end. Love was exalted as the archetypal Surrealist art because it brought about the seemingly impossible fusion of the self with the other, because it was at once a perpetual challenge to the prevalent life-denying equation between the good and the useful, the highest manifestation of the pleasure principle, and the experience best able to assuage man's [*sic*] thirst for the absolute" (Matthews, 1977: 145-6).

Whilst noting the sexism and homophobia of some surrealist writing and art, Conley (1996) argues that the surrealist muse, inspired by the figure of the female spiritualist medium, was the powerful and creative female figure at once marvellous and threatening – a figure she terms 'Automatic Woman'. "The connection between Automatic Woman, as exterior object of desire, and the unconscious, from which automatic writing springs, thus creates Breton's surrealist ideal, the fusion of subject and object" (p. 10). However, as we shall see in the next section of this paper, this ideal was to prove beyond the surrealists' reach.

When we turn to the writings of the SAW movement, it is noticeable that hybridity and eroticism are completely absent. The female medium and the Automatic Woman are displaced by a distinctly masculine notion of the leader. "Being empowered by a leader who is strong and

virtuous, trustworthy and supportive, is a spiritual experience" proclaim Kanungo and Mendonca (1994: 183). For SAW, the problem – the lack of meaning in everyday routine work and the 'separation/alienation from oneself' (Naylor et al 1996: 59) – is resolved through increased affective commitment to work and employer. The 'purification' here is a return to an invocation of spirituality as a 'call for work', as doing 'god's work', a return to the age-old religious work ethic shared by the Christian (Naylor et al, op.cit.), Hindu (Menon, 1997), and Islamic churches (Yousef, 2000). In this reading, the utopian yearnings of spiritualists and surrealists are reduced to a vision of enhanced organisational performance, and the spiritual corporate leader comes to epitomise the Christian church's metaphorical figure of the 'good shepherd', and assume pastoral power over his (rarely, her) flock (see Nadesan, 1999). With the declining power of the Church in modern society, Foucault (1982) suggests, it is "no longer a question of leading people to their salvation in the next world, but rather ensuring it in this world" (p. 215). The unconscious and spiritual life of the employee is awakened not to achieve social change or enlightenment, but to render it manageable (and therefore more productive) through the application of 'technologies of the self' such as examination, confession, guidance and correction (Foucault, 1988).

To achieve this secular Capitalist version of 'Summerland', spiritual leaders seek to unlock the power of the unconscious in the service of the organisation – a process that has been an essential aspect of labour process management thinking since at least the nineteenth century (see Corbett, 2008). The twist in SAW thinking is the valorisation of the head, both in terms of leadership and as the human body part most readily associated with the culturally-coded 'masculine' traits of reason and control. It is not the leader-as-medium who goes into a trance to let the unconscious free, but the other gatherers within the séance/corporation. As Reich (1946) has observed "if the psychic energies of the average mass of people watching a football game or a musical comedy could be diverted into the rational channels of a freedom movement, they would be invincible" (p. 28). However, the freedom being offered by SAW would seem to be freedom from alienation through the expedient of possession by the spirited corporation through the mediumship of the charismatic leader – a definition of freedom which resonates strongly with that promoted by both the School of Fascist Mysticism, established in Milan in 1930 by Arnaldo Mussolini (Rainey, 1998), and the Al Qaeda terrorist network (Forray and Stork, 2002). Indeed, as Nadesan (1999: 35) observes, although SAW discourses claim to elevate the power of the individual "they have authoritarian tendencies, particularly when backed by the power of the

high-ranking CEO who sees himself or herself as either a spiritual 'guru' or 'magnetic preacher' (see Bellah et al., 1985: 237)". Nadesan argues further that SAW discourse "is particularly inclined to minimise external obligations and social or personal extraorganisational commitment because of its exclusive focus on the core, authentic self and on individual and organisational actualisation" (p. 35). Such a tendency may have a particularly strong impact on female employees who tend to spend more extraorganisational time with family and community than their male counterparts (King, 1993).

Materialisation of spirit Despite denigrating positivism and the aesthetics of materialism, all three movements found themselves unable to shake off their powerful hold, and particularly the hold of science and its attendant technologies. A number of writers have suggested linkages between the rise of spiritualism and technological innovation. For example, Connor (1999) notes that the progress of spiritualism through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries can be seen in terms of its twinning or ghosting the development of communication technologies, and especially the invention of the electric telegraph in the 1830s. At the very time the Fox sisters were rapping their toes in Rochester, the city's leading citizens, inspired by the local newspaper editor and venture capitalist, Henry O'Reilly, were purchasing the monopoly rights to the use of the electric telegraph throughout the Western corridor of the US (actions which would lead to the formation of the Western Union Telegraph Company three years later (Brewer, 1901)). The technology of automatic writing developed rapidly in the following decades. "There appeared a series of machines, as if to embody in material terms the linkage between automatic writing and contemporary technology, machines which ranged from relatively simple devices that translated table movements into the letters of the alphabet to more elaborate contrivances that performed the same task but whose design more fully bespoke the contemporary fascination with the marvels of engineering" (Rainey, 1998: 127). How ironic, Rainey suggests, that the hope of an after-life offered by such automatic writing was thus communicated by machines "in the silent syntax of advancing capital" (p. 129). Writing in 1857, Kardec observed that "mediums are simply electrical machines that transmit telegraphic dispatches from one point that is far away to another which is located on earth" (1857: 289). In short, the medium was being transformed into a machine at the same time as the machine gained a voice.

The subsequent technological inventions of the telephone (1860) and phonograph (1877) made the seemingly miraculous notion of voices coming from another place and from the dead an increasingly familiar experience towards the end of the century, and many mediums changed their means of spiritual communication from somatic tapping to a more telematic use of voice. Paradoxically this served to diminish the authority of the medium. Spirit messages no longer needed complex interpretation but could be easily understood by all. An editorial in the spiritualist magazine, *Direct Voice* (1930) suggested that such a shift was not without its merits.

"We are told that some day it will be possible for us to communicate without the alternative of a human medium, but until that time arrives we have no alternative to use the best means at our disposal. But even with the best mediums it is inevitable that whatever is received through them, whether it be automatic writing, clairvoyance, trance, or direct voice, must be colored to a greater or lesser degree by the personality of the medium who is the channel for such communication" (p.2).

The authority of the medium, which had posed an almost insurmountable challenge to the authority of earlier scientific researchers such as Zollner and Wundt, was slowly but perceptibly being challenged by the very technologies she twinned. Technologies were becoming the arbiters of truth as people more readily accepted the 'fact' that spirits may talk through or possess machines than the ambivalence of the hybridity of the medium. When spiritualists talked of the 'natural supernatural' spirit world they did not challenge the basis of scientific knowledge, but strengthened its authority by pleading that the supernatural be studied scientifically.

The surrealists were also keen to harness the power of scientific experimentation and technology in their work (see Ruffa, 2005). Breton in particular was keen on automatic writing as it represented "the ultimate attempt of discourse to purify itself from the corporeal presence of the subject" (*ibid*: 204). Partly as a reaction to any possible confusion between spiritual and psychic automatism, Conley (1996) suggests that the surrealists sought to maintain a degree of emotional detachment in their experiments in an effort to achieve what Breton termed 'rigorous objectivity' (Lomas, 2004). This effectively substituted the *corpus* of the automatic text for the body (*corps*), and aligned the female as Automatic Woman with a mechanical, non-sentient process. The female, thus coded as an object of desire and dread, acts merely a trigger to an understanding and liberation of the unconscious; but it was technologies such as the planchette and the typewriter, as

well as technologies of graphical recording, which made the immaterial unconscious visible and knowable (see Gibson, 1987).

"All night long a few surrealists would gather round the big table used for experiments, their eyes protected and masked by thin though opaque mechanical slats on which the blinding curve of the convulsive graph would appear intermittently in fleeting luminous signals, a delicate nickel apparatus like an astrolabe being fixed in their necks and fitted with animal membranes to record by interpenetration the apparition of each fresh poetic streak, their bodies being bound to their chairs by an ingenious system of straps, so that they could only move a hand in a certain way and the sinuous line was allowed to inscribe the appropriate white cylinders" (Dalí, 1932: 200).

Lomas (2004) argues that the early surrealists, and especially Breton, were impressed with the graphical method pioneered by the physiologist Jules-Etienne Marey precisely because it enabled a direct access to that which was previously hidden. Just as Marey described his mechanical graphical recording devices as a means by which the body writes itself automatically (Corbett, 2008), Breton defined thought as "the white curve on a black ground" (1924). Yet, by the time he wrote his second surrealist manifesto in 1930, Breton professed disquiet with the disappearance of the artist-subject. In his first *Manifesto* he had argued that psychic automatism "constantly and vigorously opposes any effort to retouch or correct" (1969: 24), yet, six years later, he would write: "[i]f the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them the control of our reason" (1969: 10). Thus, Thompson (2006) argues: "while automatism initially provided Surrealism with a method of 'liberating' both textuality and subjectivity, it ultimately eluded the surrealist's control, thus proving profoundly dangerous for artists and writers who were attempting to stamp their names upon a new creative movement" (p. 9). The violent loss of authorial control was specifically figured as devirilising by surrealists, Thompson opines, and this led to the projection of such a threat onto women's bodies within the surrealist's automatic texts. This is perhaps most notable in Breton and Soupault's "Soluble Fish" (1924) where the narrator's search for an understanding of the 'Automatic Woman' is finally only achievable through the medium of her dead body. "In lieu of such mastery over automatic textuality, it seems the surrealists settle for mastery over women's bodies and psyches" (Thompson, *ibid*; 9).

The spiritualist J. Arthur Hill argued that the aim of the spiritualist movement was "to retain our scientific gains, but extend our vision beyond the material" (1910: 298). The SAW movement shares this aim and sees no antagonism between spirituality and materiality (see, for example, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). Indeed, many SAW writers seek to 'scientifically' measure spirituality (e.g. Krahnke, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003) and its behavioural consequences at work (see, for example, Ashmos and Duchon, 2000, and Tischler, Biberman and McKeage, 2002). For example, Thompson (2000) opines that "in some cases (referring to research studies), the more spirited companies outperformed the others by 400-500%, in terms of net earnings, return-on-investment and shareholder value" (p. 19). The logic here is plain: if your employees are 'empowered' to put their heart and soul into work, they will be more creative, more committed, and more motivated.

The attempted 'fusion' of spirit and matter in SAW discourse is perhaps best illustrated by the growing interest among the SAW movement in 'spiritual computing' – a term which "does not yet refer to specific applications, but more broadly to the new potential of computing to gain access to – and act upon – spiritual substrata of one's mind" (Smith, 2007: 2). Members of the computer-supported spiritual development (CSSD) movement, along with researchers at Spiricomp (a business venture established after a series of meetings between Bill Gates and the Dalai Lama) now hold up the computer as the ideal medium for accessing spiritual experience as well as to decision-making processes in which individuals make choices informed by spiritual experience (see also Epstein, 2004).

Subjectivisation of spirit In his sociological analysis of religion Taylor (1991: 26) identifies a 'massive subjective turn of modern culture'. He argues that people, particularly in Western culture, are turning towards a subjective notion of spirituality and away from one based on organised religion. Taylor primarily applies his 'subjectivisation thesis' to trends since the Second World War but it would seem that the seeds of such a 'turn' were sown, or certainly nurtured, by the spiritualist and surrealist movements. These seeds have taken root and flourished in the SAW movement. As Bell and Taylor (2003: 344) argue "whereas the Protestant ethic embodied a transcendent philosophy and portrayed economics as in the service of god, the current [SAW] discourse embodies an immanent philosophy wherein work is seen as an activity through which personal growth can be achieved".

In common with nineteenth century philosophical spiritualism and twentieth century surrealism, the 'new age' movement which inspired SAW began as an explicitly counter-cultural movement. The 'new age' movement of the 1960s and 1970s sought alternative life-styles and means of expression for people who were trapped in ritualised conformity to an authoritarian culture. However, as Heelas (2008) has shown, by the early 1980s much of this thinking became psychologised with a far stronger emphasis being placed on self-transformation than social transformation. The modern-day 'new age' movement has continued this process of subjectivisation with a particular strong emphasis on health and well-being. Alternative life-styles remain on the 'new age' agenda but these are seen as a means of enriching ones own personal life to help cope with the pressures of mainstream society rather than to promote alternative ways of living. Indeed, some commentators argue that spirituality today has become deradicalised to such an extent that it has become little more than a consumer product (e.g. Lau, 2000 and Possamai, 2003).

Whilst the counter-cultural aspects of 'new age' thinking have been largely ignored within the SAW movement, the notion of self-transformation has become an integral part of its discourse. This de-radicalisation of spirituality resonates with a shift in post-Taylorist management control strategies towards what Casey (1995:138) calls the 'corporate colonisation of the self'. She is referring here to cultural interventions by powerful organisational elites into everyday organisational behaviour which are designed to shape the formation and development of employee subjectivities (see Foucault, 1979; Turner, 1992; Shilling, 1993; and Dale, 2001). These interventions attempt to ensure that "employees are, at the very least, guided in their inter-subjective relations and, as such, in how they [mis]recognise themselves in relation to other[s]" (Hancock and Tyler, 2001: 579).

Conclusion: mediums, technologies and the invocation of truth

The development of the spiritualist, surrealist and spirituality at work movements over the past 160 years may be seen as one in which the social reformist, proto-feminism of the Victorian spiritualists offering up an alternative way of perceiving and acting in the world, slowly gave way to the surrealist's fascination and dread of the female, and thereto a substitution of the spiritual

business guru for the dangerous hybrid of the medium. The development also represents a shift away from a discourse of utopianism and social reform towards what Jacques (2002) terms *crypto-utopia* - a discourse within which utopian ideals reside but are concealed. While crypto-utopianism purports to communicate the truth about the future, Milojevic (2003) argues, "such realistic futures also subtly promote implicit assumptions about the nature of future society (high tech, globalised) and impose these views on other future discourses. All other discourses about the future are made to adjust to and negotiate with these, arguably, most-likely futures (p. 446).

The movements of spiritualism, surrealism and spirituality at work all have a message (of material and/or spiritual salvation from the here-and-now) communicated or channelled through a medium, entranced artist, or business guru. All three movements have been forced to confront the deeply ambivalent nature of the communication between the immaterial world of the other and the fleshy human self in this ventriloquial process, but in attempting to cancel out the divide between matter and spirit, masculine and feminine, science and belief, and instrument and actant, they have replicated the dichotomous structure of science in their own discourses. 'Spirit' has become subsumed under 'matter'.

So does this mean that spirituality is incapable of informing any reformist or radical agenda for social and organisational change? Is Casey's (2002: 191) belief that such "efforts of soul-searching, spirituality and sensual re-enchantments are efforts towards freedom" overly optimistic? In truth, all three of the cultural movements discussed here represent effort towards freedom, and yet the progressive materialisation, virilisation and subjectivisation of spirituality outlined above would seem to offer little support for her optimism.

The virilisation of spirituality can perhaps best be seen in the context of the increasing colonisation of emotion and spirituality in modern organisations by the masculine (see Lewis and Simpson, 2007), whilst the haunting of technology by the uncanny world of communication with spirits, gods, ghosts, and associated otherworldly phenomena may represent the male fantasy of disembodiment which Sconce (2000) argues have long been associated with modern technologies such as electricity, telegraphy, radio and television. Although the systems of belief called spirituality, magic, and science/technology are often seen as incompatible they share similar aspirations and methods. "Each aspires to extend perception and action beyond ordinary limits, and all share similar habits and procedures of ritual and power" (Chesher, 2006: 125). Certainly, spiritualism, surrealism, and SAW share with science/technology the practice of invocation – the

call to a power outside ordinary perception and action for assistance or guidance. Mediums invoke spirits, the artist invokes the muse, and the business leader invoke the spirit of the corporation (often through myths and stories of dead corporate founders and past corporate achievements) to encourage a perception of work as "a magical tool to develop, enrich and nourish our lives" (Neck and Milliman, 1994: 10).

Invocation is a key mechanism whereby social power reveals and sustains itself, for, as Chesher (op. cit.) argues, the invocatory act calls on a higher authority accessible only by virtue of the invocator's special position. The brief history of spirituality offered in this paper reveals how the invocations of the spirit medium in the late nineteenth century were subject to intense scientific experimentation in order that spirit had to prove its existence by "sordidly material phenomena. Within the scientific episteme, these phenomena were the only evidence for the independent existence of the spirit; indeed, they *created* the spirit"(Gomel, 2007: 203). The surrealist's fascination with science and technology led them down a similar path, whilst proponents of SAW have knowingly embraced materiality in arguing that employee self-actualisation is an exploitable corporate asset. In this view, the corporation becomes a spiritual entity which derives its life-force from its employees. Employee demotivation and lack of the 'right spirit' is not a sign of poor organisation or management but a sign of employee inauthenticity in need of therapeutic intervention. The complex assemblage of technologies, techniques and hierarchies we call the 'corporation' has become its own invocator.

If our ideas of social reality are indeed haunted by the things we exclude, as Derrida (1994) maintains, this paper suggests that technologies, and particularly media technologies, continue to remain shrouded in spiritual mystique which is exploited by both the surrealist and SAW movements, but either ignored or demystified within organisation studies. Materer (1995) has observed that spiritualism has been repressed in scholarly accounts of modernity. Sconce (2000) takes this argument further and opines that the postmodern turn in social science is a logical outgrowth of the technicisation of spirit such that "postmodern theory is in itself simply another in a long series of occult fantasies inspired by electronic media" (p. 170). Perhaps, then, if Casey's hopes for a re-spiritualisation within organisations are to be come to fruition, we need to consider our own techniques of invocation. The persistence of invocation across the supposedly incommensurable domains of spiritualism, surrealism, religion, magic, science and technology reveals continuities with the past and the rupturing of seemingly impenetrable

boundaries between different knowledge and belief systems. Serres (1995) sees hope in the development of "techniques of rapprochement" (p. 48) with pre-modern ideas, and if post-modernism can shake off its 'occult fantasies', it may become a vehicle for the invocation of voices expressing "tacit and often times unrepresentable forms of knowledge that modern epistemologies inevitably depend on yet conveniently overlook or gloss over in the process of knowledge creation" (Chia, 2003: 127).

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