

AMONG SPIRITS AND SCIENTISTS: CHARLES RICHEL AND THE QUEST FOR ‘UNHABITUAL PHENOMENA’

Gustavo Ruiz Chiesa

Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to present some of the main ideas and events that gave rise to Metapsychics, as formulated by Charles Robert Richet (1850-1935), physician, researcher and professor of the chair of Physiology at Sorbonne. For the formulation of this new science, a certain substance will play a fundamental role, attracting the attention of a myriad of scientists interested in understanding a series of extraordinary phenomena that occurred around certain people with special abilities. At the end of the text, we intend to point out some possible approximations and also differences between the formulations presented by Richet and those that emerged in another scenario and historical context, some decades later. It is about Conscientiology, as proposed by the Brazilian physician Waldo Vieira (1932-2015), also interested, like Richet, in investigating a series of phenomena neglected by the hegemonic science.

Keywords: Charles Richet, Metapsychics, Ectoplasm, Conscientiology, Science/Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I intend to briefly present some of the main ideas and events that gave rise to Metapsychics, as formulated by the French physician and physiologist Charles Robert Richet (1850-1935). Convinced of the existence of a series of phenomena called by him as “unusuals”, Richet will enumerate, in his extensive *Traité de Métapsychique* (1922), the defining elements of a new science, focusing on understanding certain facts historically neglected by the dominant science until that moment. As we shall see, for the constitution of this new science, a certain “substance” will play a fundamental role, attracting the attention of a myriad of scientists interested in understanding a series of extraordinary phenomena occurring around certain people with special abilities. It is the “ectoplasm”, a curious substance allegedly produced by “mediums of physical effects” or simply “ectoplasts”. Becoming one of the main investigators of this substance and of the phenomena produced by it, Richet and his colleagues will create a research environment, with a rigorous protocol of investigation, in order to verify the veracity of such facts and to understand how they happened. After all, for him, any object and phenomenon, for more unlikely (or “unusual”, as Richet prefers) it may seem, deserves to be carefully investigated through the methods and resources offered by

science, even if such investigation leads to the questioning of what we conventionally have learned to accept as reality.

Indeed, in the course of the research about ectoplasm and the materialization of invisible beings, Richet often placed under suspicion everything he had learned (and taught) during the years he studied and taught physiology at Sorbonne. In this process, science itself comes to be seen as an important ally in humanity transformation or, more precisely, in the way the latter perceives the world and all its beings. Such a transformation is also moral because it alters our mentality, our attitude and our values, Richet adds. It alters, therefore, the way we perceive and live life. This, as we started to recognize the existence of phenomena, forces and substances hitherto ignored by a strictly materialistic worldview, assumes new meanings, more “spiritual”, “metaphysical” or “transcendental.”

In this aspect, at the end of the text, I intend to point out some possible approximations and also differentiations between the formulations presented by Richet and those arising in another scenario and historical context, some decades later. Referring to Conscientiology, as proposed by the Brazilian physician Waldo Vieira (1932-2015), who, without giving up the dialogue with the established scientific practices, decides to create his own research campus, located in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, in order to investigate, as Richet had done, a series of phenomena denied or “made invisible” by hegemonic science.

Themes related to “astral projection” or “out-of-body experience”, “bioenergies”, “invisible/spiritual surgeries” or “parasurgeries”, past lives, “clairvoyance” and communication between beings of different dimensions are examples of phenomena investigated and “experienced” by conscientiologists in their research laboratories. Indeed, the idea of experiencing these or some of these phenomena is one of the structuring aspects of its epistemology. More than simply believing, one must “have your own experiences”, conscientiologists emphasize. Thereby, the research subject becomes its first and main investigation object. Such subjectively lived experiences will be registered and compared with the personal experiences of other ones aiming to construct objective facts from shared intersubjectivity.

We shall see that the idea that these phenomena or these subjective experiences must be experienced in a controlled laboratory space somehow retakes Richet’s concerns of investigating the mediums responsible for the materialization process, adopting rigorous control protocols. However, rather than transforming the “medium” into a researchable object, Conscientiology will concentrate much of its attention and interest on the researchers’ own personal experiences and perceptions, thus dissolving the classical opposition between investigation’s subject and object.

In the same sense, the alleged contradiction between a scientific practice on one hand and a therapeutic/spiritual experience on the other will also be examined

by Conscientiology when it seeks to centralize in the personal experience the primordial “object” of its attentions, understanding “healing” or, more accurately, the “restoration of physical, mental and energetic balance” as deriving from experiences that somehow manage to stimulate, in the “unbalanced” subject, the construction of another understanding, another (healthier) perception about oneself and everything that surrounds and affects it. A view to what transcends the merely physical or material explanations about health and illness, as well as about life itself and its possible and imagined meanings.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF MARTHE BERÁUD

In 1905, Charles Richet and his friend, the engineer Gabriel Delanne (1857–1926), received an invitation from general Noël to observe a series of strange phenomena that occurred in his residence, specifically around a young woman, named Marthe Beráud, who was living in his house and would be his future daughter-in-law (which unfortunately did not happen since lieutenant Maurice Noël, general’s son and Marthe’s fiancé, had passed away a year ago). These experiments took place outside the house, in a room, of a renovated old stable, situated in the gardens of the Villa Carmen (name given to Noël couple’s property) in the city of Argel, and were usually witnessed by the general and his wife, the two Marthe’s sisters, and Aischa, the family maid. Eventually, other people interested in the phenomena occurring there could be present, for example, a fortune-teller named Ninon.

Richet, upon entering that space, begins to analyze it carefully, taking its measurements, checking of which properties were made the walls, floor and objects in that space: a carpet, a table, a sideboard, an old bathtub, some chairs and a red curtain divided in half, separating the environment into two parts: an isolated “cabinet” behind the curtains and an area for the public to remain seated. The two windows were closed and covered by curtains attached to the wall. On the floor there was no trapdoor where anyone or anything could enter. Also, there was no “false door” on the walls. The environment, illuminated only by candles placed in red glass lighting fixtures, therefore, was completely insulated and no one could access it without passing through its only door. Richet, continuing his investigation, also tries to talk to Marthe and discovers that she is a beautiful young woman, short stature, brunette, delicate, joyful, and apparently does not present any physical or mental disorder.

Upon entering the dark environment, everyone sits on chairs arranged around the table and remains silent. Marthe, positioned next to the curtain, is also seated and concentrates herself for about 30 minutes until she stands up and, under the company of Aischa, walks to the back of the curtain that will be closed. Even separated by the curtains, the present guests can hear Marthe’s increasingly gasping breath and, shortly thereafter, perceive the movement of something. “The

curtain opens up. One sees in the loose light of the red lamps a kind of spinning smoke, that gives twists, rolling on itself, jumps like a spring and fixes itself in a form that condenses, thickens and materializes” (Lantier, 1971, p.17). In front of everyone, arises a beautiful woman, tall, young, with long blond hair. She was a princess, was said, her name was Bergólia, and was able to spend little time among the guests until she began to “dematerialize”. Before that, however, she asks Richet to cut a lock from her hair as a mean of proving her existence. He does so and later confirms, using microscopic analysis, that it was real hair. Bergólia was the sister of Bien-Boa, a clergyman who would have lived in the XVII century, in the city of Golconda, central region of India, who claims to have lived with lady Noël, General’s wife, in a past incarnation.

At different occasions, Bien-Boa himself will materialize, wearing peculiar costumes, in the presence of Richet, Delanne and all those who were there. When describing and touching Bien-Boa, Richet (1906, p. 9) states that he seems to present all the attributes essential to life:

He walks, talks, moves, breathes like a human being. His body is tough; there is a certain muscular strength. It is neither a dummy, nor a doll, nor an image reflected in a mirror: and can be resolutely set aside any supposition other than one of these two hypotheses: either a ghost having life attributes, or a living person performing the ghost role.

While Delanne carefully observes Marthe and Aischa through the half-opened curtains, who remain seated in their chairs, distant from each other, Richet asks Bien-Boa to exhale in a tube containing “barium water” because in contact with exhaled carbon dioxide from human respiration such a chemical solution, originally transparent, would assume a whitish coloration. Bien-Boa obeys his request, blows the liquid contained inside the tube, that begins to bubble and turns completely white.

In one of these observed experiments, Richet notices the presence of a white light, a kind of ball or luminous spot floating on the floor, near the curtain, presenting initially imprecise contours, but that in a moment it rises towards the ceiling and forms the figure of Bien-Boa. Then, it begins to walk, or rather, to slide in front of the present audience, maintaining the standing position for a few minutes until it fades completely toward the ground. About this phenomenon, Richet concludes (*ibid.*, p. 10-12):

It seems to me that this experience is decisive because the formation of a luminous spot on the floor, which then becomes a walking and living being, cannot, by all accounts, be obtained by a trick. To suppose that Marthe, sliding under the curtain, then rising, disguised as Bien-Boa, might give the appearance of a white spot rising straight, this seems impossible to me.

[...] I was so certain that this living body could not come from the curtain that, at first, I assumed the (absurd) possibility of a trap. The day after this experience of August 29th, I examined meticulously the pieces of the floor and the renovated stable that underlies that part of the kiosk. The very high ceiling of this stable is plastered with lime, covered with spider web and haunted by spiders that were not disturbed for a long time, until, with the aid of a ladder, I explored the stable's ceiling.

Richet's immediate concern was to know whether or not it was a fraud. Even relying on Marthe's integrity and attesting her good intentions, he requested us to confront our common sense and place the girl under suspicion, treating her hypothetically as a "skilled and perfidious magician, clever and skillful".

If I insist on the Marthe's personage is that, for the fact, all deceit from other people should be discarded. 1st – There are no trapdoors in the room; 2nd – The room is visited carefully at every session and nobody strange can hide there; 3th – No one can enter without our knowledge; 4th – People who are in the room, and we can see and hear during the whole time of the experiences, cannot intervene directly by the mechanical production of phenomena that occur behind the curtain and away from them; 5th – Aischa, who can also be seen very distinctly in almost every experience, is not a concern, because she stay always far away from the form of Bien-Boa; and, in the sequence of most of the experiments, Bien-Boa shows himself without Aischa being present, either in the cabinet or in the local (ibid., 22).

Thus, in order to fraud occurs, one would have to suppose that Marthe, perhaps with the aid of Aischa, disguises herself as Bien-Boa and carries under her dress:

A helmet, several cloths, a turban, a fake beard, elaborate ornaments, and that, in the small cabinet where she sits next to Aischa, she takes off her clothes to dress the cloths that she would have hidden under her dress, and place, on the chair where she was sitting, a type of mannequin, with gloves that simulate the hands; devices (which?) that simulate her body, her knees, her arms; it's necessary that she dresses that mannequin with her dress, her shirt, that she puts above the mask (?) that simulates her face with a perfect verisimilitude, [to then] retake all her objects, helmet, mustache, clothes and mannequin, to undress the mannequin and hide them again under her dress, all this in the presence and beside Aisha (ibid.).

Richet, without warning, abruptly opens the curtains, analyzes Marthe's vestment and says that it's impossible to store inside it all the objects and costumes

necessary for a “simulation”, as well as to remain seated and at the same time walk dressed up as Bien-Boa. After all, it “is like a living being, it’s neither a dummy nor a doll: it’s a person identical to a living one and, if it is not a ghost, cannot be anyone other than Marthe” (ibid., p. 23). Moreover, Richet adds: “I do not see how it would be possible to produce the luminous spot phenomena, rising from the ground and giving rise to a living being. No agility, even that of a professional gymnast, can produce this impression that shocked me as a categorical proof” (ibid., p. 24).

Even so, Richet acknowledges that he is still unable to attest, in a scientific and definitive way, the authenticity of all the phenomena he has observed and experienced. “It’s too much,” he says (ibid., p. 25), “to ask a physiologist to accept a fact so extraordinary and improbable, and I would not surrender so easily, even with the evidence”. New experiences would be needed to try to clarify what was, in fact, the “materialization”. Such explanations, Richet adds (ibid.), if taken seriously, may change “completely our ideas about matter and life”.

CHARLES RICHEL AND THE “INVENTION” OF ECTOPLASM

Son of Alfred Richet, a renowned surgeon and professor at the *Faculté de Médecine* in Paris, Charles Richet was attracted by both literature and science, but decided to follow his father’s career by joining the same medicine college in 1869. Since the beginning of its activities he showed interest in research and laboratories, particularly on investigations about human body’s constitution and functioning. Such interest led him to be invited to participate in research groups from different French academic institutions. He also served for a few years, as an intern, in Parisian hospitals, to finally assume, in 1887, the chair of Physiology at Sorbonne (Paris University), where he remained until his retirement at the age of 75. Before that, after graduating, he even taught classes and developed investigations in other institutions such as the *Faculté de Médecine* itself and the *Collège de France*.

In parallel to the activities and academic articles, Richet, sometimes using the pseudonym of Charles Epheyre, also ventured into literature, poetry and dramaturgy, even publishing some novels, three poetry books and a play. But it is undoubtedly in the science field, specifically in physiology, his specialty, that Richet will devote himself with greater effort and receive his greatest consecration. In this area, in different phases of his life, he carried out a series of experimental research, on the most varied subjects. However, the research that would make him renowned worldwide, inclusively providing him with the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology in 1913, was that performed about the “anaphylaxis”. He proposes this word to describe the severe and acute allergic reaction, derived from the sensitivity developed by the body to a certain substance, which leads to

a decrease in blood pressure, an increase in heart rate and blood circulation imbalance, which can lead to respiratory tract constriction, loss of consciousness and, if not treated immediately, even death (characterizing the “anaphylactic shock”, in this extreme case).

Richet also became interested in a series of phenomena defined by him as “unusuals” and believed that physiology itself or a new science should be created to understand such “facts” that lie beyond physical and psychic dimensions and explanations. Among those phenomena, those that have most stimulated his attention were the so-called “telekinesis” cases (objects’ movements without contact) and “materialization”, both being directly linked to the production of a certain substance called “ectoplasm”.

In the cases investigated by Richet and many other fellow scientists, it was not a mere accident, or uncommon, that “extraordinary” situations like those described below could happen.

We are, Albert [Schrenck-Notzing] and I [Richet], sitting next to Marthe, so close that without raising up I may touch Marthe’s hands. The light (an electric lamp covered by a red veil) is strong enough to illuminate all the white parts (white ribbons around the head) of Marthe’s clothing. After about half an hour, I open the curtains and see a faint glare on the floor, weak enough for me to doubt its reality. Little by little, the glare becomes increasingly stronger. It is on the floor, like a very small luminous tissue. Marthe’s body is motionless. The light spot increases. Its contours are milky, indecisive, nebulous, more uncertain and more vaporous than a fabric. It approaches the chair, grows, takes the form of a kind of snake that tends to rise to the left arm of Albert’s chair. Its contours become sharper. It’s like a half full mass of fabric. Suddenly, an extraordinary spectacle. From the mass comes a tip that rises, recurves and goes to Marthe’s chest (whose hands are still grasped). The tip continues to advance, in an astonishing way, like an animal that guides by the beak; and as it proceeds over the rigid rod, there is a tunic that unfolds (a bat wing membrane) so delicate and so transparent that through it one can see Marthe’s clothing. The rod of this membranous veil that surrounds it is well distinguished. Marthe stands still and speaks at intervals. I can approach and look very, very, very close, two or three centimeters away. I see it as an inflated fabric, of mutable shapes, animated by movements. For five to six minutes, I carefully examine it. I see extensions, like snail’s horns, which rise to the right and to the left: the horns are like transparent gelatin, can enter and leave the main mass most clearly formed (Richet, 1922, p. 657-8).

The word “ectoplasm” arises precisely from unusual experiences such as these, experienced by those who are, above all, looking for “facts”. And starting from the phenomena produced by Marthe and many other “mediums”, the physiologist Richet believed he had found a “fact” that deserved to be investigated

by science, or more precisely, by experimental physiology and psychology. His idea was that such amorphous, gelatinous and volatile “substance”, expelled by the mediums’ bodies (hence its neologism: *ecto* or *ektos* = out or coming out from inside; and *plasma* = mold or substance that shapes) would have a purely organic or physiological origin. Extremely malleable and sensitive to the environment (especially to excessive luminosity and temperature), ectoplasm would exert a fundamental role in the constitution of “spiritist facts” or “mediumistic phenomena”, especially those involving materialization of beings or things, or physical effects in general (such as objects’ movements without contact).

But what is ectoplasm, what is its origin and function, and why does it deserve to be studied by science? To try to answer these and other questions, Richet decides to “follow it” and, with cooperation of other researchers, take it to the laboratory. The first question that arises is whether such substance really comes from the medium’s body or whether it is something already present in the environment and the medium, or even the spirit (in the hypothesis of its existence), manipulates and uses it. Thus, one of his fellow scientists, the English physicist *sir* Oliver Lodge (1851-1940) will propose the following experiment to be performed with the medium Florence Cook and the spirit Katie King (cf. Palhano Jr., 1996). While the medium should remain seated and confined in an electric circle with its resistance being measured and controlled by a galvanometer, the spirit, when materialized, should place its hands in a mercury tub, with a very strong dye. In the moment the spirit dipped its hands in the tub, nothing happened to the medium. However, when the spirit disappeared, dematerialized, Lodge and the other researchers observed that the medium’s body was full with stains on the same coloration of the dye, which, according to them, would prove that the substance had actually been emanated and reabsorbed by the medium’s body.

Other scientists, including Richet and his colleagues Albert Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929) and Juliette Bisson (1861-1956), literally cut out the ectoplasm exuded by the mediums Florence and Marthe, and took it to the laboratory to be analyzed under the lenses and the “mediation” of their microscopes. From these analyses, they found that ectoplasm would be composed of epithelial tissues, albumin, lipids, leukocytes, minerals, proteins, amino acids, water and bacteria-like cells. One researcher has even postulated the alleged chemical formula of the ectoplasm’s molecule: $C_{120} H_{1184} N_{218} S_5 O_{249}$.

Some hypotheses were also raised about which region or body’s organ would be responsible for its production. Some said that ectoplasm was produced in the abdomen region, at the navel height, because the mediums’ reports of pains and discomforts in that area were common, right at the beginning of the materialization sessions. Other researchers, also based on the mediums’ reports, stated that the lungs or organs associated to respiration should be responsible for its production because complaints of shortness of breath, breathing difficulty, feeling pressure in the lung, the desire to cough and a feeling of choking or suffocation, are

recurrent at the moment when the ectoplasm supposedly began to be produced. There is still a third opinion, which has become the most popular, that associates the ectoplasm production to the female and male reproductive organs, considering them as a kind of that substance's "generating power plant", however, that would spread to other organs and human tissues, even exceeding the limits of the skin. Finally, more recent hypotheses suggest that ectoplasm would be a product or a natural consequence of cellular metabolism, being more specifically associated to the cellular respiration process performed by mitochondria and to ATP (adenosine triphosphate) production. The latter, being the main energy source of cellular processes, would play a crucial role in the ectoplasm production, also inferred as a type of energy produced and released by the organism (cf. Munari, 2008).

In seeking to follow the ectoplasm, Richet perceives that this substance, when leaves the medium's body, behaves like a "confused mass", a nebula, without defined form, almost imperceptible, seeming to be very fragile and sensitive. It seems to be a "mixture" of fluids, of threads, which gradually begin to organize itself and "compose" a specific form. Thus, it makes more sense to think of ectoplasm in the plural, that is, as many ectoplasms that together move and form a "thing" that appears to be alive and possesses a certain autonomy. As it moves, its contours appear to become sharper, its forms are more visible and stable. Through this whitish substance released by the mouth, nose, ears, and other medium's body parts, and that, under the effect of gravity falls toward the ground, more or less perfect limbs/parts of a human body (hands, arms, feet, head, etc.) gradually begin to form. As if ectoplasm, as it develops and moves, was capable of involving something that already existed in that environment, but which was not yet perceived by the senses of the people present there. Little by little, a new creature, with seemingly human features, gestures and attitudes, "made" of (or through) ectoplasm, gains form and material life.

A new being is "created" at the expense of the material elements contained in a being that already existed. But, in fact, does this have a "cost"? William Crawford (1881-1920), a professor of mechanical engineering at *Queen's University* in Belfast, alleges that the medium may lose 7 to 18 kilos during spirits materialization sessions. Discomfort feelings and malaise are also quite frequent especially after intense and prolonged mediumistic sessions. At the end of them, the well-known medium Elizabeth d'Espérance said that she felt weak, tired, even getting prostrated in bed for a few weeks. Florence Cook also had her health compromised by the long sessions, forcing her to remain at rest for several days (cf. Palhano Jr., 1996). More seriously, in the experiments with d'Espérance, it was observed that the shredding or blockage of the ectoplasm emitted by the medium could seriously affect and harm her health (Richet, 1922, p. 585). The same applies to cases of medium's partial dematerialization where painful "physical" repercussions

can be felt at the moment when someone touches or passes the hand where the medium should be seated, even without being perceived. There are reports that simply touching the ectoplasm or the materialized spirit can generate burns on the medium's skin.

It is interesting to note that in the case of Richet and his contemporary colleagues, although many of them had medical training, at no time, apparently, consideration was given to the possibility that the ectoplasm could present some therapeutic and curative potential, such as, for example, occurred to its famous "ancestral", the magnetic or "mesmeric" fluid (cf. Chiesa, 2016). Using a scientific methodology, they seemed to be more interested in drawing attention to the phenomenon reality (making it a "scientific fact") and, undoubtedly, to the possibility of establishing (and scientifically proving) the communication with beings of other dimensions, than to properly understand its possible therapeutic effects on living organisms.

The power of ectoplasm, however, was never put into question. Telekinesis, that is, the movement of objects without physical contact, raps or beats on walls and furniture, levitation of tables, direct writing (where texts appear on paper without "anyone" having written), the physical sensations described by mediums, the "invisible touches" felt by researchers, and, surely, the materialization or "semi-materialization" of beings, objects and plants (in the case of d'Espérance), would be "facts" caused by this powerful substance that, initially invisible or transparent, leaves the medium's body and assume the most varied forms. The famous "spinning table" phenomenon, for example, would be the result of ectoplasm condensation and transformation into a rigid "psychic lever" (cf. Crawford, 1919) responsible for lifting, rotating and moving tables, chairs, and any solid objects. In saying this, it seems to us that ectoplasm, when leaving the mediums' bodies, gets a "life" of its own, an autonomy, a willpower and an intentionality that allows it to act on the "material world" insofar as it becomes a "material" itself and becomes part of *this* world.

However, ectoplasm is only an "instrument", a "resource", a "material" used by beings who also want to interact or, who knows, to live in *this* world. The "disembodied spirits", for many reasons (missing someone, assistances, consolations, proofs of survival...), wish to establish communication with the beings who were "left" here, that is, us, "incarnate spirits". The most common means for this contact are the intuitions, dreams, clairvoyances and mainly psychographies (when spirits use the body, or more precisely, the mediums' arm and hand to send a letter, a message, to those who are in this dimension). Other ways, much less common and probably much more remarkable, are those that involve some form of *agency* or interference on the physical plane, either by the movement of objects or by the very *presence* of the spirit in person, or rather, *in matter*. And their agency or presence depends almost exclusively on the ectoplasm produced by the mediums

to become effective. I say *almost* because, as we have already said, ectoplasm is not *one*, but *several* substances; it's a mixture of fluids that are in the bodies and in the environment; is an "entanglement of things", a meeting of "happenings", where, undoubtedly, the medium is the keystone, but not the only one. After all, the fluids found in the environment (which include those emanated by the invited researchers themselves) join to the fluid released by the medium forming a kind of "fluidic mass" utilized and organized by the spirit to shape its own "physical" body, to move certain object, or to touch (and be felt by) someone. Such phenomena occur only in the presence of "ectoplasmic mediums", in other words, persons capable to provide ectoplasm in a necessary amount to its materialization and use by the spirits. It is understood, therefore, that the spirits cannot produce it, being such a substance a curious property of the living organisms and responsible for performing this mediation between beings and material and immaterial dimensions.

METAPSYCHICS: THE SCIENCE OF "UNUSUAL FACTS"

Convinced about the existence of the reported phenomena, Richet, still in the year 1891, decided to create the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, a magazine that would become one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of research on mediumistic phenomena. The journal, however, will be interrupted during the World War I, and will return, under a new name – *Revue Métapsychique* – beginning at 1920. With the emergence of this magazine, but mainly with the publication, in 1922, of *Traité de Métapsychique*, Charles Richet will become the main disseminator of the new Metapsychics "science". Inspired by Aristotle's metaphysics, the French physiologist suggests that the Metapsychics' goal is to understand not only what lies beyond physical things, or "beyond what is seen", but also, and fundamentally, the facts produced by unknown "intelligent forces", whether they are of human or non-human origin, which go beyond the "normal" or "conventional" limits defined by psychology. In this sense, he declares that Metapsychics is the only science dedicated to the study of these "intelligent forces" since, until the present moment:

all the other forces which the sages have studied and analyzed from the point of view of its causes and effects, are blind forces, which are not conscious of themselves, are deprived not only of whimsy but also of personality and will. Chlorine combines with sodium without the least amount of intellectuality in chlorine and sodium being suspected. The mercury expands by the heat unbeknownst to us and we cannot prevent it. The sun projects its caloric, electric and luminous rays into the spaces, without any voluntary intention, without fantasy, without choice, without a thinking personality (Richet, 1922, p. 3).

On the contrary, the “forces” that interest Metapsychics seem to be endowed with “intellectualities, wills, intentions, which may not be human, but that, in any case, resemble human wills and intentions” (ibid.).

Such “forces,” or rather, “facts” will be cataloged and presented in detail in the treatise of 793 pages written by Charles Richet. The task, he acknowledges, is quite demanding. After all, what is at stake is the description of unusual phenomena that are, mostly, rejected beforehand, without prior examination by science or by the general public. Nevertheless, the facts persist in existing: “they are numerous, authentic, radiant. In the course of this work, examples so abundant, so accurate and so demonstrative will be found that I do not see how a sage in a good faith, consenting to its examination, may dare to doubt them” (ibid., p. I). The treatise will be divided into three main tomes or volumes, where the first one, smaller than the subsequent ones, will consist of an introduction dedicated to present the Metapsychics in a general way, emphasizing its historical genealogy, and the second and third ones will address, respectively, what Richet called as “subjective Metapsychics” and “objective Metapsychics”, each one compiling a set of entirely different phenomena.

Subjective Metapsychics deals with the so-called mental, intellectual or psychological phenomena that do not cause any intervention or change in the physical, chemical or mechanical laws that regulate the material world. Everything happens, he says (ibid., p. 3), “as if we had a mysterious knowledge faculty, a lucidity that our classical physiology of sensations cannot explain yet. I propose to call cryptesthesia, a sensibility whose nature escapes us, this new faculty”. The reading of a letter enclosed in an opaque envelope, for example, would correspond to one of the possible phenomena studied by this branch of Metapsychics, since it surpasses (or is beyond) the “normal” knowledge sensory faculties. In contrast, Objective Metapsychics analyzes certain material or external phenomena, inexplicable by “conventional sciences”, which appear to present intelligent character and are perfectly tangible and accessible to our senses. Objects moving without contact, lights, blows on the tables, materialized forms of living appearance and perceived by several people, loud noises heard from a distance, are examples of the studied phenomena. According to Richet, the boundary between these two specialties, in some cases, may not be perfectly clear, presenting a simultaneity of phenomena (when, for example, initially, only one person subjectively can see a spirit, and then, it materializes and becomes an objective reality for all), but in innumerable others it is well defined. Thus,

in Paris, on June 11th, 1904, the murder of Queen Draga [of Serbia] was promptly indicated, when it occurred, and the medium, who revealed it, had no possible rational knowledge of the crime, which occurred in Belgrade, precisely in the minute indicated in Paris. This is a case of Subjective Metapsychics.

Eusapia Palladino placed her hands fifty centimeters above a heavy table: her hands, feet, knees, trunk, head and mouth had been immobilized, and yet the table, without contact, rose four feet. Case of Objective Metapsychics (ibid., p. 4).

The frequency of subjective phenomena, he says (ibid.), is far greater than that of objective ones, because mediums endowed with this objective ability are hardly found. Almost all of these subjective facts correspond to what Richet called as “cryptesthesia”. Of Greek origin, the word *kryptós* means “hidden, occult, secret” and, in this case, “indicates that there is a hidden sensitivity, a perception of things, unknown in relation to its mechanism, whose effects we do not know” (ibid., p. 74). It’s about a special faculty, “mysterious” – somehow similar to the “clairvoyance” presented by the spiritists, and to the “somnambulistic lucidity” demonstrated by the magnetizers (cf. Chiesa, 2016), or to the “telepathy” suggested by the British researcher, co-founder of the *Society for Psychical Research*, Frederic Myers (1843-1901) – a sensitivity that allows to know or “perceive” certain past, present and future information or facts, that the “normal” senses are unable to reveal (ibid.). Let us look at one of the many examples presented by Richet:

One night, during sleep, “A” sees “B”, his friend, appearing to him, pale as a cadaver. “A” writes the “B”’s name in his notebook, with the following words: *God forbid*. However, at this very moment, “B”, who is in the other side of the hemisphere, perishes in a hunting accident. Thus, two hypotheses arise. Either it’s the notion of the outer phenomenon that was perceived by “A” (namely, that “B” dies due to an accident) or it’s the thought of “B” that, dying, crosses the space and will impress the spirit of “A”. I definitely do not dare to take sides with one or other of these hypotheses, since they seem to me to be equally mysterious, assuming, in human being, a knowledge faculty that does not fit into the order of its usual knowledge processes. [...] So speaking, there is no hypothesis. Cryptesthesic knowledge is not supposed to be due to the human thought vibration; it contents with enunciating a fact. Nevertheless, it is more scientific to enunciate a fact without comment than to submit to theories which, like telepathy, are absolutely indemonstrable (ibid., p. 80).

Richet does not rule out the possibility that the phenomenon of telepathy may exist. However, he considers it a particular case of lucidity, whose hypothesis does not hold in all situations and is not possible to be demonstrated by the methods and resources provided by science. To affirm that subject “A” has a “special sensitivity” that makes it capable of knowing about the death of “B” is not a hypothesis, but rather, Richet says (ibid., 81), is a “fact.” On the contrary, to suggest that the thought of “B” was transmitted to the thought of “A” or that one has accessed the thought of the other, this is indeed a hypothesis of which there is no

certainty about its veracity (ibid.). Thus, he adds (Richet *apud* Magalhães, 2007, p. 256), cryptesthesia is an unarguable fact and so undeniable “as the stopping of the heart by the pneumogastric, as the convulsion of the muscles by strychnine, as the absorption of oxygen by the blood, as the presence of nitrogen in the atmosphere. Doubting its existence would be like having the audacity to say: “I do not believe in the experimental method”.

Despite always holding himself in the domain of “facts” and experiences, Richet also attempted to elaborate a theoretical hypothesis, consistent with the prevailing scientific explanations at the time, that could clarify the phenomenon under discussion. At a conference held at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, in 1925, in an occasion that he was leaving his teaching activities at the Sorbonne, he developed the following idea:

There are ether vibrations around us that we do not perceive. But they do not cease to exist because of that. In this room in which I speak, no concert is heard, and you would be tempted to say that there is no music here. Hold on. Put a T.S.F. receptor on this table with a speaker and all of you will hear the concert that is taking place at the Eiffel Tower. Just have a receiver to hear it. Consequently, it is possible that from things around us, although minuscules, vibrations are emitted. These vibrations, we do not perceive them, because we are neither sensitives nor mediums. But, as long as an individual endowed with this particular sensibility (mysterious and misconceived), which I call cryptesthesia, is present, he will perceive these vibrations, even though they are nil for the common men. It will be enough for me then to make these two suppositions, bold, perhaps, but that the rigorous experience makes almost necessary: 1st – that things and movements cause certain vibrations; 2nd – these vibrations can be perceived by especially sensitive beings. Thus, since a great number of new facts are still difficult to establish, we have given a scientific character to the marvelous phenomenon in appearance of cryptesthesia (ibid.).

In summary, it can be said that there are three fundamental phenomena that constitute this new “science” presented by Richet: 1) *Cryptesthesia*, a knowledge faculty different from the normal sensory knowledge faculties; 2) *Telekinesis*, that is, a mechanical action distinct from known mechanical forces, which under certain conditions, acts remotely and without contact, on objects and persons; 3) *Ectoplasmia*, that is, the formation of a varied of material things, which seem to leave the human body and take the appearance of an external physical reality (e.g., objects, clothing, veils, bodies or parts of them). How these “unusual” phenomena should be studied by Metapsychics? With the same rigorousness and in the same way that the other sciences study the “usual” phenomena, that is, through observation and experimentation. Inspired by his master Claude Bernard, Richet

believes that Metapsychics is a science as experimental as chemistry or physiology. Their methods are similar (“balances, photographs, graphics...”), its rigorousness should also be the same, but what really differentiate them are the objects of analysis. The chemist or physiologist works with readily available materials, whereas the metapsychist, in order to perform an experience, necessarily needs a medium: “a rare, fragile, eminently fantasist person that one must know how to handle with an always awoken diplomatic *finesse*” (ibid., p.12).

In 1919, a group of French scientists interested in studying these “unusual” phenomena decided to create the *Institut Métapsychique International* (IMI). Founded on the initiative of the physicians Rocco Santoliquido (1854-1930) and Gustave Geley (1868-1924), under the financial support of the wealthy industrialist Jean Meyer (1855-1931), IMI emerges with the ambition of being an international reference in research on psychic phenomena, integrating, in the same ambience, a well-equipped laboratory, a library open to the public, with documents and information about the main “Metapsychic experiments” carried out around the world, a magazine – *Revue Métapsychique* – for dissemination of institute’s research and activities, and finally, a room for conferences and teaching of Metapsychics, directed to the general public, but especially for mediums (cf. Lachapelle, 2005). Since its beginning, IMI has had the enthusiasm and active collaboration of Richet who, after the death of Santoliquido, will assume the institution presidency. Geley, in turn, was the director responsible for conducting the research, defining, from his own interests, what would be the institute’s investigation object. Following numerous experiments with the medium Marthe Beráud and also with three other mediums of Polish origin, Geley selects the ectoplasm as one of the central elements of the Metapsychic investigations and experiments, which will be published in his last book entitled *Lectoplasmie et la clairvoyance* (Geley, 1924). In this book, the author points out the fragility and difficulty of producing (and replicating) mediumistic phenomena such as those of *ectoplasma* (i.e., the materialization of the ectoplasm emanated by the medium). To occur, a series of conditions and variables must be taken into account: a low light environment (otherwise the medium may have his trance disturbed, interrupting the materialization process); a medium who trusts the observer and who is in good health and humor; and above all a “friendly atmosphere”, an “environment” that favors and potentiates the mediumistic capacities of the person to be observed (cf. Lachapelle, 2005, p. 8). Thus, Geley recognizes the influence that other people and the environment exert on the medium, making it clear that the audience and the researchers also “affect” (and are affected), that is, they are an active part of the experiment.

The members of the *Institut Métapsychique International* experienced real dilemmas regarding the obtainment of financial support to continue their research on mediumistic phenomena. These researchers had to face the fact that most of the public interested in their activities, and willing to finance them, was

not formed by scientists, but rather by spiritists or spiritualists concerned in “scientifically” proving their own beliefs (including, some of the IMI members, such as Meyer, Geley, Flammarion and Delanne, were admittedly spiritists or sympathizers of the doctrine). Thus, in a paradoxical way, the desire to make Metapsychics an “official” science depended largely on the religious interests of those who financially aided that institution, which in turn was logically misunderstood by the “established” sciences, which rejected and condemned these “other sciences” to the eternal “marginality” in relation to the “scientific world”. Because of this, IMI members and researchers themselves (and the same applies to similar institutions) presented an ambivalent attitude towards “official science”. On one hand, they exalted the rationality and the scientific method, claiming to be strictly the path followed by Metapsychics. On the other hand, they questioned the difficulty of the scientific community in accepting and recognizing the enormous potential of Metapsychics experiences to broaden the understanding of human being. The metapsychists, Lachapelle adds (2005, p. 12), while they felt persecuted and ridiculed by the academic science, perceived themselves as defenders of a “heroic cause”, true “science martyrs”, that would be understood only by future generations. As good outsiders, metapsychists wanted their research to be accepted and recognized by the establishment, but they also did not want to lose control over the explanation of the observed phenomena, nor the status of “victims and rebels” (ibid., p. 22).

The “established ones” (in this case, a group of Sorbonne scientists), however, provided an opportunity for metapsychists (here represented by the researcher Juliette Bisson) to prove “scientifically” (read it: according to the terms and definitions of established science) the existence of ectoplasm. Thus, the medium Marthe Beráud was invited to demonstrate her mediumistic phenomena to the scientists of the physiology laboratory directed by Henri Piéron (1881-1964), in Sorbonne. Marthe, fearful at first, accepted the invitation, but requested the environment preparation according to her needs, or rather, with the needs of the ectoplasm. Thus, the laboratory space had its luminosity reduced (since the phenomenon is extremely sensitive to the clarity) and was divided, through a curtain, into two rooms: one smaller, even darker, where the medium would stay and another one, larger, for the scientists. The applied protocol was the same normally used by the metapsychists: they undressed the medium, examined her whole body (especially their mouth, nose and hair), dressed her with a special clothing, totally closed, leaving only her head, hands and feet uncovered, and lastly, tied her up in a chair behind the curtain, so that her hands and feet were still visible to all the present observers. After 15 sessions, in the course of four months, the scientists said they did not find anything similar to the ectoplasm described by metapsychists. In only two sessions they were able to observe the presence of a very small grayish-colored substance close to the medium’s mouth (apparently

produced by her own saliva or expelled by vomit), and which showed no sign of mobility. Faced with this, scientists concluded, there would not be enough evidence to make it possible to assure the existence of ectoplasm (*ibid.*, p. 16). Bisson, who at the time was accompanying Beráud, questioned not only the scientists' lack of patience and willingness, who made a lot of noise during the sessions, making it difficult for the medium to concentrate, but also the absence of clinical tests (for example, a stomach analysis) to try to find out some information about the substance expelled by Marthe. The central point of criticism, however, lay in the conditions under which the phenomenon was observed.

It is a phenomenon difficult to be analyzed and explained by current scientific parameters given the complexity to reproduce it at any time and circumstance. What makes these experimental demonstrations fragile, Richet says (*apud* Magalhães, 2007, p. 277), "does not mean that they are bad, they are just not repeated". In fact, ectoplasm cannot be reproduced, but rather "captured" and such capture depends on certain conditions in order to be successful. Geley, for example, argued that the major problem of the sessions that took place at the Sorbonne was the "antipathetic atmosphere" found in the laboratory that prevented or made difficult the phenomenon production (*ibid.*, p. 17). In addition, following the same protocol, with the same control, ectoplasm has been perfectly observed by the metapsychists. This would imply, at least, in the recognition and validation by academic scientists of the results already obtained in the IMI laboratory, because there, on the contrary of Sorbonne, the "atmosphere" was perfectly favorable to the production and capture of ectoplasms. Such arguments, however, were not even taken into account by scientists because they could not understand how they could themselves (or the environment) affect the production of a phenomenon that was supposed to happen in (or through) Marthe's body. Thus, we can suggest the idea of an "epistemological incompatibility" (cf. Neubern, 2008) to understand that the controversy surrounding the existence or not of ectoplasm would not be only the result of an impasse about the adopted methods or protocols, but rather due to distinct ways of knowing and relate to the environment and everything that surrounds it. They are different worldviews that necessarily imply, although the methods and the objects can be the same, in different forms (and "conditions") of making science. This was the metapsychists' understanding, this was the recognition they sought, that is, the approval of "official" science, but not according to its terms or its forms of appropriation and interpretation of mediumistic phenomena. The aspiration was for their own approaches and explanations to be studied and taken seriously. And it was precisely this attitude or desire that ended up preventing the metapsychists from gaining the so dreamed label of "scientific" (*ibid.*, p. 17). Such an impediment or refusal would be, in Richet's view, prejudicial to science itself,

too young to be granted the right to be absolute in its denials; it is absurd to say: *we will not go further. Here are the facts that man will never be able to explain; these are the absurd phenomena, since they go beyond the limits of human knowledge.* Talk like this limits the science to a small number of laws already established and to the facts already known; and to condemn ourselves to inaction, is to deny progress, to prevent the advance of one of these fundamental discoveries which, opening up an unknown path, create a new world; is to substitute progress for the routine (Richet *apud* Magalhães, 2007, p. 270).

The fear of what is new, *neophobia*, is, to him, one of the worst feelings a scientist can have. To fall into routine, that is, not allowing yourself to tread a different path from the one that had already been trodden, implies in the serious error of treating a new or “unusual” idea as something unscientific. These are ideas and phenomena that are hard to be perceived and understood because our attention is not usually directed toward them – we are “unaccustomed” or “unused” to the “unaccustomed” and “unusual” world - as well as “we do not wish to be disturbed, in our lazy quietness, by a scientific revolution that will change the commonplace ideas and official data” (ibid., p. 271). But, after all, “why not looking as extremely important to what can shed brilliant light on human intelligence, this mystery of the mysteries?” (ibid., p. 281). Who knows, this will not change our existence, our conception of life and even our ideas about human society? “Everything is possible,” Richet guarantees (ibid., p. 285). Even though we know almost nothing of the universe and everything that vibrates around us, we can suppose the existence

[of] other forces that we now call occult, that do not reach the senses (and therefore the consciousness) of individuals in general, but which reach, through a special sensitivity, the consciousness of certain individuals whom we call mediums. These unknown, mysterious forces, despite their hidden nature and mystery, are no less real (ibid., p. 290).

Silence, mockery and contempt. These are the most effective ways that “neophobes” find to deny a new, uncommon thought. Patience, disposition and courage. These are indispensable values for those who venture into the realm of “unusual facts”, deprived from the certainty that one day they will reach some definitive “place”. However, Richet says (ibid., p. 336), “it is necessary to search, and the pleasure of this investigation brings some happiness to life”. It is a journey which, as we have said, will not be free of questionings or persecutions.

They will say that we are not absolutely persecuted, that we can freely expose our ideas in books, newspapers, conferences, that the occult

facts that constitute the new science are published in numerous specialized journals, without the magistrates prohibiting them from selling. [...] Be it! There are no more *autos-de-fé* as formerly in Spain for the Jews. There is no exile, like in the 17th century for the Calvinists of France and the papists of England. Persecution, however, takes different forms. The violent ones disappeared. *The bonfires were replaced by the severe orthodoxy of the official sciences, academies, universities.* [...] There is no more Torquemadas, Villars' dragons, janissaries, against us. They are satisfied with the indifference and mockery. They ignore us or shrug (*ibid.*, p. 328; my italics).

At the end of his life, Richet, already retired from his academic duties, will affirm in his last work (*Au secours*) that, of all the sciences, Metapsychics has a “superior character” in relation to the others. For him, the advances and discoveries of the “official” sciences, no matter how great (and even though they provide an improvement in our living conditions), do not alter our mentality or our values, do not modify our conception of family, homeland and humanity, in summary, do not produce a moral transformation. Historically, he says (*ibid.*, p. 332), such a change in attitude and behavior has always been associated to religions, but, at the moment, neither do they would be able to perform this transformation. Therefore, humanity needs not only a “new science”, but also a “new religion”.

This new religion which I sense in the vaporous dreams of my imagination, will not be preached by a Moses, a Christ, a Buddha, a Muhammad. Will have no messiahs nor prophets, but unlike other religions, their basis will be scientific. The unusual and the unforeseen will be admitted by science. [...] A new moral ideal will be the consequence, and not the principle of this new science (*ibid.*, p. 334).

Science of moral, philosophical and religious consequences. That was how Charles Richet began to understand his Metapsychics. By approaching “facts” (scientific) and “values” (moral), he attempted to follow the “occult”, “mediumistic” or “unusual” phenomena, seeking to *improvise paths* different from those usually pursued by “conventional” science (and also religion). By following this path – a path of *midst*, *mixtures* and *margins* –, Richet ended up creating something “new” or, at least, “unusual”; something that would stimulate or even inspire those who wished to imagine alternative routes to those conventionally offered by the mainstream academy and science.

STEPS TOWARDS A “NEOSCIENCE”

Thus, by becoming interested in certain “objects” difficult to be “domesticated” or framed in preexisting classificatory schemes and, at the same time,

daring to tread a distinct (or “unusual”) path from that established in the orthodox academic and scientific environment, Richet had his voice silenced and his scientific proposal condemned to invisibility. Indeed, Metapsychics will only be truly revived a few decades later through the curiosity and creativity typical of someone who also inhabits the “margins” of science. He is the physician Waldo Vieira, proposer of the Conscientiology or “science of the consciousness”. In it, the research “subject” becomes the first and main investigated “object”. The key idea is to “have your own experiences”; experiences that are beyond (*meta*) or on the side of (*para*) the “normal” physical senses since they involve the perception or attention to reality aspects or dimensions not normally perceived. The development of this special perception (“paraperception”), or the education of such attention, would provide an experience and an understanding of the “visible” and “invisible” world no longer in discrete or dichotomous terms, but in a continuous or chromatic way, making all dimensions compose a single “multidimensional” reality. With a clearer “vision”, conscientiologists say, we will be able to participate in the world in a more “aware” and “healthy” way, because we will be more receptive and perceptive to the invisible exchanges and fluids that affect us, connect us and which constitute the environment and all its inhabitants. Thus, the world and its invisible forces will become increasingly visible and accessible to those who can qualify their perceptions of the environment and life itself. A perception, centered on a “cosmoethical” principle (Vieira, 2008 [1986]), more focused on the relations and continuities among all beings (humans and nonhumans) rather than on the “egoic” (or “egocentric”) attributes of each individual.

This other perspective, therefore, is based on the so-called “principle of disbelief”, usually expressed through the following sentence: “*Do not believe in anything. Not even to what they tell you here. Experiment. Have your own experiences*”. This phrase is present in all the Conscientiology environments, being constantly remembered in the events, courses, workshops, dynamics and other activities organized by conscientiologists. Curiously, an expression in some way similar was created and used by metapsychists associated to IMI: “The ‘paranormal’, we do not believe it; we study it” (or, in the original: “*Le ‘paranormal’, nous n’y croyons pas; nous l’étudions*”), which seems to strengthen certain sociological arguments that claim that this emphasis on empiricism and experimentation, on study and in research, to the detriment of doctrinal beliefs and orientations, would be something distinctive of the so-called “parasciences” (cf. D’Andrea, 2000). However, when analyzing these two statements, it becomes evident that the idea of self-experimentation is one of the principles that distinguishes Conscientiology from Metapsychics.

The purpose of the “principle of disbelief” is to replace belief by knowledge that emerges from reasoning and lived experience, submitting any idea, for more logical and coherent as it may seem, to critical, dispassionate and rational analysis. “Everything must be verified, seen and experienced until it is accepted” (ibid.,

p. 166). Rather than believing, one must experience and perceive the “extraphysical reality”. Such personal experience, conscienciologists say, will be self-persuasive and enlightening, in itself. Thus, in Conscienciology, the same researcher is the “scientist” and the study “object”. The experience and perception of this broader reality, which goes beyond the physical senses, have as its immediate (therapeutic) effect a transformation in the way we feel and understand ourselves and everything that surrounds us. This will be the very understanding of health (and healing) idealized by Conscienciology because what is at stake is the idea that being healthy implies perceiving the environment in another way, with a new body and new feelings. It involves, therefore, a constant review of our habits, thoughts, feelings and energies¹ and the ways in which we interact with everything that surrounds us, taking into account all beings, human and nonhuman, and all dimensions, intraphysical and extraphysical. Thus, the health-disease binomial will be understood as a process of transformation of the being (where new ways of being and feeling are at stake), the environment (new beings and new dimensions come into play) and the perception that this being has of the environment (the world is perceived differently, with other eyes, other lenses). Health and disease are also understood as processes of evolutionary learning, or, in other words, education of attention (Ingold, 2010).

One of the defining elements of this cosmovision, as we have said, is the self-experimentation idea. The researcher interested in investigating the repercussions experienced in the activities, workshops, laboratories and dynamics developed by conscienciologists can, through self-research and self-experimentation, give up the figure of the medium – which, as we know, was the central character to the research conducted by Charles Richet and all other researchers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries – and making yourself the “guinea pig” of your own investigations (something apparently unimaginable for a metapsychist). It is, in this sense, the difference between that “subject” that does research with ectoplasm, in the condition of being himself an ectoplast (and therefore his own “object”) and someone who does research about ectoplasm and their donors (the ectoplasmic mediums)².

Thus, Conscienciology (and, to some extent, Metapsychics itself) indicates other possible ways of knowing, perceiving and acting in the world which destabilize one of the constitutive aspects of the knowledge mode or epistemology that characterizes the hegemonic science, namely, the separation between investigations

1 Waldo Vieira and his fellow conscienciologists (many of whom are physicians or psychologists) consider the energies or, more precisely, bioenergies, essential elements in the promotion and maintenance of physical and emotional health (D'Andrea, 2000, p. 176).

2 More than that, in this case, what is evident is the very process of constitution (or invention) of the modern sciences, where the separation between the research subject and the researched object becomes a fundamental element in which one hopes to construct a “scientific fact” – product of an “objectification process” - dissociated or distanced from the subject that fabricates it (Stengers, 2002).

subject and object. I say to a certain extent, in the case of Metapsychics, because in it, as we have seen, such a distinction still remains, somewhat, present since it centralizes the focus of the investigations in the medium. However, even in the Metapsychics (and this becomes even more radical when we look at Conscientiology) the subject who observes the investigated phenomena does not stand, in any way, outside the reality that investigates. He, as the metapsychist Gustave Geley recalls, participates in that environment, affects the phenomena production, and interacts with all beings, forces and substances that are there. More than this, as conscientiologists suggest, the researcher is himself the first and main research object. Thus, for instance, his research does not seek an understanding of the ectoplasmic medium or of the ectoplasm substance, but rather an understanding from the experiences that have occurred with him, with his own ectoplasm, his own energies, and that later, may be compared with the experiences of other subjects. It is, in this sense, a form of knowing, above all, based on the idea of *shared intersubjectivity* and *creative engagement* of the researcher in the investigated reality.

Creative synthesis of Franz Mesmer's thought and therapy with Charles Richet's ideas and Metapsychics experiences, Conscientiology, on the one hand, argues, as did the famous German physician and magnetizer of the 18th century, the existence of a universal "magnetic fluid", of therapeutic properties, found in nature and responsible for health equilibrium of living beings" (sf. Chiesa, 2016). On the other hand, it proposes the analysis of the so-called "unusual phenomena" in a scientific and rational way, using its own terminology³ and making use of all the instruments, techniques and methodologies that science can offer. These aspects perfectly characterize the efforts of Waldo Vieira and his fellow researchers to make Conscientiology a (neo)science of moral, ethical, philosophical and also therapeutic consequences.

REFERENCES

AKSAKOF, Alexander. 1979[1895]. *Um Caso de Desmaterialização*. Rio de Janeiro: FEB.

CHIESA, Gustavo. 2016. *Além do que se vê: magnetismos, ectoplasmas e paracirurgias*. Porto Alegre: Multifoco.

CRAWFORD, William. 1919. *Experiments in Psychical Science*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

3 Both, Richet and Vieira, were concerned to elaborate a series of new concepts, definitions and terminologies of their own capable to describe in the best possible way the set of phenomena experienced directly or indirectly by both. In the specific case of Conscientiology, this work resulted in the remarkable *Dictionary of Neologisms of Conscientiology* (Vieira, 2014), with 920 pages and more than 14,000 terms created by Vieira in order to provide a "more scientific" language, that is, 'aseptic, accurate and universal" (D'Andrea, 2000, p. 195), to Conscientiology. Such an undertaking, however, seems to have contributed to "outline" the group, differentiating it in relation to religious and esoteric systems, and the dominant science (ibid.).

CROOKES, William. 1971. *Fatos Espíritas*. Rio de Janeiro: FEB.

D'ANDREA, Anthony. 2000. *O self perfeito e a nova era: individualismo e reflexividade em religiosidades pós-tradicionais*. São Paulo: Loyola.

GELEY, Gustave. 1924. *Lèctoplasmie et la clairvoyance*. Paris: Alcan.

INGOLD, Tim. 2010. "Da transmissão de representações à educação da atenção". *Educação*, v. 33, n. 1, p. 6-25.

LACHAPELLE, Sofia. 2005. "Attempting Science: the creation and early development of the Institut Métapsychique International in Paris". *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, v. 41, n. 1, p. 1-24.

LANTIER, Jacques. 1971. *O Espiritismo*. Lisboa: Edições 70.

LOMBROSO, Cesare. 1975[1909]. *Hipnotismo e Mediunidade*. Rio de Janeiro: FEB.

MAGALHÃES, Samuel. 2007. *Charles Richet: o apóstolo da Ciência e o Espiritismo*. Rio de Janeiro: FEB.

MUNARI, Luciano. 2008. *Ectoplasma: descobertas de um médico psiquiatra*. Limeira: Editora do Conhecimento.

PALHANO Jr., Lamartine. 1996. *Experimentações Mediúnicas*. Rio de Janeiro: CELD.

RICHET, Charles. 1906. *Les phenomenes de matérialisation de la Villa Carmen*. Paris: Bureaux des Annales des Sciences Psychiques.

_____. 1922. *Traité de métapsychique*. Paris: Alcan.

STENGERS, Isabelle. 2002. *A invenção das ciências modernas*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

VIEIRA, Waldo. 2008[1986]. *Projeciologia: panorama das experiências consciência fora do corpo humano*. Foz do Iguaçu: Editares.

_____. 2014. *Dicionário de Neologismos da Conscienciologia*. Foz do Iguaçu: Editares.

Gustavo Ruiz Chiesa holds a PhD in Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and is adjunct professor at the Federal University of Pampa.

Translation: Oscar Kenji Nihei.

Revision: Patrícia Barbosa e Alexandre Zaslavsky.