Introduction

> Intimacy between people, like occult phenomena, is fundamentally bewildering.[1]

In 1921 Sigmund Freud was invited to co-edit three periodicals dedicated to the study of occultism. He refused all three invitations. However, according to Hereward Carrington who issued one of them, he did so reluctantly, saying to Carrington: 'If I had my life to live over again I should devote myself to psychical research rather than psychoanalysis.' Later an irritated Freud denied ever having expressed such sentiments, and the task of imagining a Freud who traced his patients' mental illnesses to unruly ghosts rather than to unruly sexuality has been left to the occasional novelist.[2] Freud, the full-fledged psychical researcher, was never born. But as any viewer of *The X-Files* knows, today's popular parapsychology owes him a great deal.

Psychical research, the scientific study of the occult which emerged as a discipline in the late nineteenth century, has usually been dismissed as a pseudo-science, an embarrassing sideline to the otherwise serious careers of figures such as William James, Henri Bergson and Henry Sidgwick. In this book I argue that, on the contrary, interest in nineteenth-century parapsychology and psychical research suffuses late Victorian literary and scientific culture, and helps spawn psychoanalysis. Through examining the works of the Society for Psychical Research, the society formed in Cambridge in 1882 in order to investigate scientifically the claims of spiritualism and other paranormal phenomena, it becomes clear that the concerns of psychical research are centrally related to a late nineteenth-century fascination with the modus operandi of cultural transmission and communication. Psychical researchers' debates about the possibility of telepathy, hypnosis and survival after death

contribute to wider reconceptualizations of the borders of individual consciousness and emerge together with new communication technologies such as the telephone and the telegraph, and new psychological theories such as crowd theory, the hypnosis debates of the 1880s and 1890s, and psychoanalysis. These occult reformulations of community and communication also appear in the literary work of the time. Authors such as Oscar Wilde, Henry James, George Du Maurier and Sigmund Freud often explain cultural and communicative transmission by implicitly or explicitly invoking occult concepts such as ghosts and telepathy. Through readings of late nineteenth-century writings including Du Maurier's *Trilby*, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and James's *In the Cage*, *The Sense of the Past*, letters, and autobiographical material, I relate literary extensions of individual consciousness to questions that are raised by psychical researchers about what separates one mind from another and what separates the living from the dead. Occult ways of imagining cultural transmission and communication, which organizations such as the Society for Psychical Research are attempting to make scientifically plausible, are used by a wide variety of writers of the period to create phantasmatic spaces in which they redefine intimate, sexual, familial and national ties between people against the usual patriarchal models of inheritance and community via marriage and the nuclear family. In the works I examine, occult transmission can be doubly transgressive, disrupting both sense boundaries and traditional codes of behaviour and alliance.

During the 1880s and 1890s various discourses – occult, literary, scientific, psychological, and technological – converge to inaugurate shifting models of the permeability and suggestibility of the individual's mind and body. It is by now standard to note that the 1890s is also the decade in which anxieties about the permeability and suggestibility of bodies and minds erupt in crises around sexuality. Sexual and gender panic manifests itself in representative figures such as the New Woman and the dandy, in public scandals such as Oscar Wilde's trials, and in the reification of medicalizing, pathologizing, and criminalizing discourses around homosexuality.[3] Deep and far-reaching anxieties about the stability of the traditional grounds of gender and sexuality pervade *fin-de-siècle* culture.

Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920 seeks to relate these anxieties to a series of real and fantasized connections which are being made at the *fin de siècle* between the occult world, innovative

technologies of communication and intimate bonds between people. Teletechnologies such as the telegraph and the telephone suggested that science could help annihilate distances that separate bodies and minds from each other. When these new technologies begin suffusing the public imagination from the mid-nineteenth century on they appear to support the claims of the spiritualist mediums; talking to the dead and talking on the phone both hold out the promise of previously unimaginable contact between people. Intimacy begins to take on new, distinctively modern forms.

Excellent recent work has shown the ways in which much modernist writing responds to, and emerges from, technological innovation, whether that writing is in agreement with, or in protest against, the forces of modernity.[4] Theodor Adorno's influential argument that literary and artistic Modernism was largely a reassertion of the aura of the work of art in reaction to the commodification and bureaucratization of the individual in modern mass culture, has been modified by recent critics to encompass a wider variety of reactions to modernity. Furthermore, critics have argued that many of the defining formal aspects of Modernism emerged in dialogue with developments in the mass market and technologies of communication.[5] This book supports these compelling claims while tactically shifting their scale and emphasis to encompass the uncanny nature of technological transmission as it was imagined at the *fin de siècle*. Modernism's technological roots affect and are affected by a supernatural erotics of bodily and cultural transmission that emerges sharply in the anxious cultural context of Wilde's trials, in turn of the century high and popular literature, and in psychoanalytic writing, as well as in the writings of the Society for Psychical Research. These fantasies of supernaturally enhanced intimacy alternatively embrace, and are threatened by, modernity's technological and cultural disjunctions. Yet it would be misleading to label these imaginings straightforwardly Modernist. The mutually constitutive sexual, technological and occult beliefs and desires that I focus on become particularly acute in the 1890s, reverberating between the poles of psychical research and psychoanalysis. If anything, this work is a contribution to what might (rather sheepishly) be labelled studies in the long *fin de siècle*. Even with that caveat, the rough periodization, 1880–1920, is in fact somewhat misleading, since some of the Freud and Ferenczi material, and Theodora Bosanquet's automatic writing correspon-

dence with James, extends the book well into the 1920s and 1930s. This is the price one pays for working with the dead. James's reincursion into Bosanquet's life in the 1930s may be taken as emblematic of the dangers of too-assured periodizing: a reminder that even an author's death date may be insufficient evidence for fixing an endpoint to a literary career or historical phenomenon. Howsoever dead the authorial body may appear, technological resuscitation is always possible from the end of the nineteenth century onwards: phonographs and automatic writing assure that spectral authors can always re-emerge.

In the works I examine cultural imaginings of technologically uncanny contact are intertwined with an expanding sense of sex and gender flexibility. Ideas about sexuality inevitably engage fears of transmission – what types of contact are people having and imagining having? What is exchanged during these contacts? This book concerns itself with these, at times, basic questions, performing a reduction of sex to proximity and distance (or materialized and dematerialized contact) in order to explore the relationship between the emerging science of sexuality – psychoanalysis, and the emerging (soon to be submerging) science of the occult – psychical research. At the turn of the century, theories of occult and technological transmission subtend the psychic and social construction of transgressive sexual desires and encounters. As the history behind psychoanalysis's fraught relationship to occultism reveals, fantasies of occult transmission cannot be reduced to the repressed secrets of sex. Rather psychoanalysis emerges from the same questions which mobilize psychical researchers.

Psychoanalysis still provides one of the few compelling critical languages for talking about affective ties and intimate attachments. Yet, over the past twenty years, psychoanalysis as a discipline and a philosophy, has suffered a barrage of attacks. One important root of this dissension can be found in Freud's early attempts to elaborate the origins of sexuality in children and the paths of psychical transmission that sexuality takes. A major and continuing source of tension for psychoanalysis has been the vexed relationship between psychoanalysis's emphasis on fantasy, and the actual contingent events that happen to a person during the course of his or her life. Critics have accused psychoanalysis of ignoring the effects of history or the 'real event' that impinges upon a person from the outside, in favour of psychical reality – the inner desires, fantasies and repres-

sions which are equivalent to reality for the subject.[6] A sustained attack on psychoanalysis of this sort began with Jeffrey Masson's 1984 book, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*.[7] In *The Assault on Truth*, Masson claims that Freud was correct in his initial postulation of the seduction theory as the source of his patients' hysterical illnesses: Freud's patients were, in fact, sexually assaulted by their fathers. According to Masson, when Freud renounced the seduction theory in favour of fantasy to found what we now think of as psychoanalysis, he betrayed not only his women patients but history as well, moving from the real world of events to the staged and therefore inauthentic world of the psyche and fantasy.

Psychoanalysis responds to this charge by emphasizing the importance of psychical reality, the ways in which fantasy takes on the force of reality for the patient. The world of the psyche may be staged for a variety of unconscious motivations, but that in no way makes it inauthentic to the person who experiences it. Yet the question of what constitutes psychic or historical authenticity has remained a vexed one for psychoanalysis, prompting other more recent attacks. Returning once again to Freud's earliest theories, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen has claimed that psychoanalysis's building blocks – Freud's women patients' fantasized seductions by or of their fathers – have shaky foundations. If, according to Freud, psychoanalysis discovered the inner truth of desiring fantasy; and if, according to Masson, Freud disavowed the outer truth of the histories of sexual abuse that his patients told him; then according to Borch-Jacobsen there never were any histories, either real or fantasized, until Freud created them. The real truth of psychoanalysis is that of the suggesting therapist and the suggestible patient. Through suggestion, Freud installed his own theoretical (Oedipal) framework in his patients, and now we all live with the consequences, the culturally seductive, egoistic dream of Sigmund Freud.[8]

It is not the place of this study to adjudicate amongst these positions. That an event that did happen to a person probably will have different effects on her than an event that did not, seems like a relatively uncontroversial statement.[9] However, the potentially wayward workings of unconscious fantasy make it impossible to state categorically that we can predict how any event, either real or fantasized, will be experienced. Similarly, people are undoubtedly suggestible, but some more so than others; some suggestions work while others do not. One reason Freud gave up hypnosis was not

that it worked too well, but rather that he couldn't get it to work well enough, and that he risked losing his credibility and authority by his failure.[10] If certain suggestions (for instance, the Oedipus complex) have successfully accrued to the collective and individual psyches of our culture, then simply pointing out that these suggestions were based on the mistaken impositions of one turn-of-the-century Viennese nerve specialist who hated his father and loved his mother, will not necessarily undo their effects. Nor will it explain why this particular suggestive fantasy 'took' – had the far-reaching consequences it did, while another (Fliess's belief in male cyclicality, for instance) did not.

What I offer in this book is not so much a settlement of the Freud wars as a new way of understanding why psychoanalysis 'took' by examining it through the lens of late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century literary and scientific interest in occult forms of intimacy and transmission. Psychoanalysis's volatile relations to questions of history, memory and suggestion can be seen as part and parcel of its inviting and disavowing magical thinking, or 'the omnipotence of thought' that Freud found in children, obsessive compulsives, psychotics and primitive societies.[11] Magical thinking is the belief that thoughts and desires can directly transfer themselves to, and transform, the material world, other people, the future. As Freud explains in *Totem and Taboo*, quoting J. G. Frazer: 'Men mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature, and hence imagined that the control which they have, or seem to have, over their thoughts, permitted them to exercise a corresponding control over things.'[12] Like telepathy and contact with the dead, magical thinking collapses distances: 'since distance is of no importance in thinking – since what lies furthest apart both in time and space can without difficulty be comprehended in a single act to consciousness – so, too, the world of magic has a telepathic disregard for spatial distance and treats past situations as though they were present.'[13] Psychoanalysis claims mastery over these beliefs by analysing them and identifying their sources in the infant's rapidly disappearing but endlessly desired sense of its own omnipotence. Yet, Freud's description of magical thinking also works as a description of the unconscious which knows no time or distance. When magical thinking is mobilized, the unconscious's reality, psychical reality, becomes impossible to distinguish from outer reality. As Freud and Breuer discover in *Studies on Hysteria*, through the hysterical symptom,

hysterics' bodies seem magically to translate the psychic into the somatic, registering the effects of psychic troubles directly on the body. Psychoanalysis's original task was to trace the paths of transmission of those effects.

A desire for the effectivity of magical thinking unites the literary and cultural discourses I discuss. Psychoanalysis cannot finally endorse magical thinking, but at crucial moments it relies on it as a bridge between unconscious desire and worldly effects. In their work, James, Wilde, Du Maurier and other turn-of-the-century writers employ magical thinking as a powerful tool to expand the potential effects of consciousness and the possibilities for intimate ties and identifications. Psychical researchers search for the mechanism of these magical transmissions to explain apparently inexplicable trafficking between minds and bodies, while the emergence of new technologies creates new imaginative correspondences for delineating these psychic and physical transmissions.

Psychoanalytic ways of reading inform this study to the extent that I find the category of fantasy helpful for interpreting these manifestations of magical thinking, and to the extent that I believe psychoanalysis can provide compelling, if sometimes limiting, narratives of the forms and formations of psychic and social fantasy. But the impetus of my work is to show that the cultural fantasies I discuss are as formative for psychoanalysis as they are able to be analysed by it. To employ psychoanalytic interpretative techniques without uncovering their historical roots would be mistaken. Friedrich Kittler's Foucauldian analyses of the medical, technological, scientific and literary discursive networks which run throughout turn-of-the-century European cultural production have proved helpful to my own project. In Kittler's work the Derridean deconstruction of the western metaphysical tradition sometimes serves as the uncertainly historicized grounds from which he builds his apparently historically determined arguments. Although my work is similarly implicated in this critical see-saw of historical and theoretical arguments for the development of cultural and literary forms, my emphasis on the affective investments and fantasies these forms provoke and/or satisfy means that the assignment of specific historical moments for the emergence of these forms is not my primary object. Rather I situate my work at the conjunction of psychoanalysis, deconstruction and a Foucauldian historicism, in order to analyse both the affective and historical consequences of certain late nineteenth-century cul-

tural fantasies of transmission, and the less securely historicizable logics of affect these fantasies mobilize. This study is also centrally indebted to recent work in queer theory in that these logics of affect are often perverse and fantastic – aligning subjects and their desires in unexpected and culturally unacceptable ways (affiliations between the living and the dead being one limit-case example). Magical thinking is, in Freud's terminology from *The Three Essays on Sexuality*, another factor to consider in the dramatically unstable relation between sexual aim and sexual object. Ideally, I hope that this work, like Freud at his best, has something to contribute towards uncovering the unfixed nature of those physical and mental connections that we group under the umbrella of sex; to ask why and how those connections were being constructed in the period from around 1880 to around 1920.

My first chapter, 'The Society for Psychical Research's experiments in intimacy', argues that the Society for Psychical Research's writings on telepathy indicate that the existence of telepathy was taken for granted and became a basis for 'scientifically' explaining the spiritualist claims of contact with the dead. Through readings of the journals and letters of the Society, I show how this presumed existence of direct contact between minds was an object of intense erotic investment for some of the Society's members. Even as the Society attempted to maintain a code of scientific objectivity, the séance became a place for transgressive cross-class/cross-gender contact, as well as a site for communication with a desired other world. Similarly, the possibility of telepathy, legitimated by comparisons to the telegraph and telephone, focused erotic fantasies of minds and bodies merging, as well as utopian hopes for better communication. Through readings of Rudyard Kipling's story 'Wireless', Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and the anonymously written *Teleny*, I elucidate some of these hopes and fears for telepathic and séance transmission at the turn of the century. Although the Society for Psychical Research set itself up against the mystical claims of the spiritualists, its 'scientifically' validated championship of telepathy endorses an occulted erotics of communicative contact, which can later be traced through Freud and other turn-of-the-century theorizations of transmission.

Chapter Two, 'Wilde, hypnotic aesthetes and the 1890s' argues that as the hypnotizing villain became a staple of *fin-de-siècle* fantasy and horror literature, anxieties about the limits of suggestibility diffused throughout *fin-de-siècle* culture. 1890s Britain found itself

fascinated by a courtroom scene that raised the question of dangerous influence – Oscar Wilde's 1895 trials for gross indecency. During the trials Wilde's writings, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and his homosexuality were portrayed as substitutable for one another, and as dangerously influential and contaminating. In the eyes of the prosecuting attorneys and the press, Wilde was a monster of influence. In this chapter I examine Wilde's trials, and *Dorian Gray*, along with two other 1890s portrayals of suggestibility run amok – George Du Maurier's best-selling *Trilby* (1894) (with its evil hypnotizing musician Svengali) and J. MacLaren Cobban's *Master of his Fate* (1890) (with its Charcot-trained, hypnotizing, aesthetic villain who resembles Wilde) to argue that the aesthete encapsulated a constellation of fears and desires in the 1890s about hypnotic effects, both of the market and of new transgressive sexual possibilities. I argue that the paradigm shift around homosexuality, which Foucault and others have located in the late nineteenth century, intersects significantly with popular and scientific debate about hypnosis. In *Master of his Fate* after the villain Julius Courtney has hypnotically (and homoerotically) drained the life from a young soldier on a train from Brighton, *The Daily Telegraph* appeals to the police 'to find the man who has alarmed the civilised world by a new form of outrage'. This chapter explores the ways in which hypnotic influence contributes to the spectacular public imagination of new forms of outrage in the 1890s.

Chapter Three, 'Henry James's lives during wartime', explores how Henry James's very late work constructs the possibility for intimate knowledge of others through his expansive use of identification, specifically in relation to his reaction to World War I. I read James's participation in the war effort – his patriotic fervour, his adoption of British citizenship – along with his final unfinished ghost novel, *The Sense of the Past*, to argue that the structures of imaginative ghostly identification with the past which are at work in the novel are also employed by James in his taking on of a new national identity at the end of his life, and that the anxieties about identificative failure which palpably haunt the novel also appear in James's uncertain relationship to the war as evidenced by his war writings, especially his book of propaganda, *Within the Rim*. In order to overcome his sense of exclusion from a wartime community, because of his age, his nationality and, crucially, because of anxieties about his previously inactive status during the American Civil War, James

overcompensates with jubilant, homoerotically charged identifications both with fighting and wounded soldiers, and with the nation as a whole. James's identificatory strategies performatively, even wilfully, enact his version of community through repeated rehearsings of a nationalistic, patriotic 'we'. His wartime identifications allow him to play out transgressive homoerotic desires within a sanctioned patriotic arena, while simultaneously, it is the very erotics of those identifications which make for hegemonic cultural transmission and community formation.

Chapter Four, 'On the typewriter, *In the Cage*, at the Ouija board', suggests that Henry James's ghost stories, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, may not be the only or the best places to look for the ways in which James creates the consciousnesses of his characters as shared, occult places. In her book *Thinking in Henry James*, Sharon Cameron claims that thought is portrayed in late James as shared, and that consciousness is impossible to pin down securely to any one mind. In this chapter I trace this telepathic effect back through James's middle period to his engagement with new forms of communication technology. In his novella about a telegraph office, *In the Cage*, James externalizes the possibility of intimate knowledge of another person through the commercially and materially mediated transactions of the telegram. The erotics of the story, in which a young, working class telegraphist constructs a relationship with an upper class customer through her picture-perfect knowledge of his telegraphing habits, depend on a melding of commercial and sexual transactions which coalesce around the new forms of access to knowledge of others provided by new communication technologies and the workers who run them. These erotics of the technological storehouse are also detectable in James's relationships to his secretaries to whom he dictated his work at the end of his life. I compare the mediated intimacy of *In the Cage* to the extensive automatic writings of James's final secretary Theodora Bosanquet, a dedicated psychical researcher, who, after James's death, spent a good deal of time channelling him as well as other literary figures. Specifically new forms of commercialization of intimacy, with precursors that encompass both prostitution and paying mediums for séances, begin to gather force with the revolution in communication technology at the end of the nineteenth century, creating a new figure, the (primarily female) information worker, whose access to others' minds results in anxieties about the permeable boundaries of individual knowledge.