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The Orthodoxization of Psychology in France at the Turn of the 20th Century

1 Introduction: The French exception

The institutionalisation of parapsychology in France suffered from some paradoxes. Although the scholarly interest in this field was great at the turn of the 19th century, then again at the turn of the 20th century, its institutionalisation never reached the same level as in other countries, for instance with Hans Bender’s chair in Freiburg. Still, parapsychology has a reputation of a non-scientific and non-academic discipline. As I will show in this article, French parapsychology has suffered from the orthodoxization of psychology, which developed a discourse placing parapsychology as a heterodoxy. The hegemony of psychology over parapsychology made it difficult to hear something else than this discourse of the victors. But the implementation of these boundaries is nevertheless of interest for the history of science in general, and of psychology in particular.

This competition between psychology and parapsychology has now been well documented by some historians.¹ The boom of animal magnetism and artificial somnambulism in the pre-Revolutionary period in France, with Mesmer and Puységur among others, was the source of numerous currents of psychodynamic research and therapy.² Subsequently, these currents were explicitly rejected in official forums: The French Academies of Sciences and Medicine were really divided on the status of magnetism but finally banned it as an object of study. On June 15, 1842, animal magnetism was compared to the “squaring of the circle”. Academics tried to kill the controversy by an official condemnation with no equivalent in North America or other parts of Europe.³ Instead of closing the controversy, this prohibition has frozen the opposition between an orthodoxy and a heterodoxy and, thus, is the root of this controversy until today.

As we will see, psychology and parapsychology first shared the same institutions, journals, and research objects, i.e. a common undifferentiated matrix that I will call “psycho-parapsychology”. Some researchers tried to circumvent

¹ See Plas: Naissance d’une science humaine; Méheust: Somnambulisme et médiumnité; Brower: Unruly Spirits; Lachapelle: Investigating; Evrard: La légende de l’esprit.
² See Méheust: Somnambulisme et médiumnité.
³ See Edelman: Force psychique, 82.
the academic prohibition by way of some epistemological handlings, by hypnotism, psychophysiology and psychical research. The historian Andreas Sommer notes that “the intersection between ‘official’ nascent modern psychology and psychical research was, albeit relatively short-lived, nowhere as overt as in France”.⁴ But it is only through an integrative or symmetrical approach that we can understand the historical significance of this “strong albeit clandestine historical continuity”⁵ between orthodox and heterodox psychology.

The French exception seems to lie both in the history of the interactions of parapsychology with psychology and in the way in which the history of para-sciences was written. As sociologist Pierre Lagrange wrote, the history of para-sciences has a singular status in France:

There is, in France, in the field of history of science, a cultural exception. While the Anglo-Saxons are used to make no difference between the currently accepted sciences and those that were rejected during the centuries, like astrology or alchemy, between the history of normal sciences and that of ‘pseudo-sciences’ (which actually refers mostly to knowledge that preceded the appearance of experimental science in the 17th century, i.e. occult philosophy), the French separated the two areas which, therefore, seem totally unrelated to each other. This phenomenon is further reinforced in France by the fact that the symmetrical history of accepted and rejected sciences is almost excluded from academic publishers’ catalogues to end up in esoteric publishing houses.⁶

There is a kind of looping effect through which any work on heterodoxy itself is doomed to marginalisation. The historian of science Dominique Pestre⁷ confirmed that the French had had great difficulty to adapt themselves to the principle of symmetry, which broke with their epistemological traditions. The “strong program” which made the Anglo-Saxon historians ignore the division between “true science” and “false science” had had virtually no echo in France. “The French academic community,” concluded Lagrange, “is then behind and even against the current of a movement that, in England and the United States, has profoundly revolutionised the history of science for over fifty years. The situation is changing slowly.”⁸ Keeping this differential treatment may have maintained resistances on what para-sciences have to teach us.

My article is about the boundary building between parapsychology and academia starting with the ideas of sociologist Thomas Gieryn on boundary-work. In

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⁴ Sommer: Crossing, 11.
⁵ Ibid., 12.
⁷ See Pestre: Pour une histoire.
⁸ Lagrange: Une ethnographie de l’ufologie, 52.
his book “Cultural Boundaries of Science”, Gieryn defined this process as one conducted “for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative residual non-science”. This common practice of the denunciation of pseudo-sciences is itself closely scrutinised and therefore regarded with a certain critical distance. Gieryn distinguished three types of demarcation in what he called “credibility contests”: expulsion, expansion, and protection of autonomy. Expulsion characterised the competition between rival authorities which both claim scientific status. In this context, boundary-work becomes a means to enforce social control, punishing transgressions of the symbolic boundaries of legitimacy. Expansion is used when rival epistemic authorities attempt to monopolise the jurisdictional control over a disputed ontological domain. Finally, boundary-work is mobilised to protect professional autonomy against external powers (legislators, corporatism etc.), which attempt to infringe or exploit the epistemic authority of scientists for their own purposes. In sum, Gieryn introduced plasticity into a problem that tended to rigidify, since he described boundaries of science as being “ambiguous, flexible, historically changing, contextually variable, internally inconsistent, and sometimes disputed”.

2 The rise and fall of psycho-parapsychology from 1874 to 1914

2.1 Psycho-parapsychological matrix in the 1870/1890s

There is an etymological ambiguity with the term “psychology” because it really means the “science of the soul”, of the psychê, and depends on how we understand it. The first use of the term “psychology” in French was in a book on ghosts and other miracles published in 1588. Many spiritists called themselves psychologists. For instance, Allan Kardec’s “Revue spirite” was subtitled “Journal d’études psychologiques” (“Journal of psychological studies”). The “Scientific Society of Psychological Studies” (1878–1883) was indeed a group of magnetisers and spiritists who were very reluctant when it came to practicing science.

9 Gieryn: Cultural Boundaries, 4–5.
10 Gieryn: Boundary-Work, 192.
11 See Taillepied: Psychologie.
12 Hyppolite Léon Denizard Rivail (1804–1869), alias Allan Kardec, was a French educator who became the author of five very popular books that systematize “spiritism”.
What may be regarded, in retrospect, as a usurpation, questions why today “the science of the soul” means a scientific and secular approach of behaviors, conducts and mental life.

From 1874 to 1876, the physician and botanist Timothée Puel (1812 – 1890) published the “Revue de psychologie expérimentale” (“Journal of Experimental Psychology”), based on the model of Aksakow’s “Psychische Studien”. It was the first journal of its kind at that time, but it is totally overlooked by historians today. In fact, Puel circumvented the prohibition formulated by the “Academy of Medicine” and mainly devoted his journal to a discussion of psychical research, next to his works on various forms of sleep, somnambulism, and catalepsy.¹⁴

These ways of using the term psychical, psychological or experimental psychology were very problematic for some scientists. This is why the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825 – 1893) accepted the presidency of the first psychological society in France only if the word “physiological” was added to its name¹⁵ – even when this short-lived society was modelled after the “Society for Psychical Research”, founded in Cambridge in 1882. It covered hypnosis and psychical research, two ways to bypass the academic prohibition. There were also studies on altered states of consciousness induced by drugs, and some research on “ordinary” psychophysiology, as we may say nowadays.¹⁶

The “First International Congress of Physiological Psychology” in 1889 was organised by members of this society in Paris, such as Charles Richet, Théodule Ribot and Julian Ochorowicz.¹⁷ There was room for psychical researchers: Psychology had a large intersection with parapsychology, both in terms of actors and interests, so that we could speak of an undifferentiated psycho-parapsychological matrix. But this eclectic and integrative strategy was partly unsuccessful because the attention given to hypnotism and related subjects was rejected, especially in Germany, where this kind of congress was considered heterodox.¹⁸ The “Society of Physiological Psychology” declined dramatically after the 1889 Con-

¹⁴ See Evrard/Pratte: From Catalepsy to Psychical Research.
¹⁵ See Ochorowicz: Psychologia i medycyna, 5; quoted by: Domanski: Julian Ochorowicz.
¹⁶ See Plas: Naissance d’une science humaine.
¹⁷ Charles Richet (1850 – 1935) was a French physiologist, laureate of the Physiology/Medicine Nobel Prize 1913, and a pioneer in many disciplines, including psychology and what he called “metapsychics”; Théodule Ribot (1839 – 1916) was a French psychologist and the first to teach psychology at the Collège de France; Julian Ochorowicz (1850 – 1917) was a Polish polymath who contributed to many disciplines, including psychology and parapsychology, especially during his years in France.
¹⁸ See Sidgwick: The International Congress, 284. See also: Wundt: Hypnotisme et suggestion.
gress. It seems that the emphasis put on the “marvellous” repelled Charcot and its supporters.¹⁹

A similar trend can be observed in the other journals where psychical research was discussed. During a short period of approximately ten years the “Revue de philosophie de la France et de l’étranger”, directed by Théodule Ribot, was the forum for all kinds of psychology. It was there where Richet (1884) published a pioneering article on the use of probabilities in the human sciences, applied in an experiment on ‘lucidity’.²⁰ It was there as well that the young Pierre Janet²¹, who later became one of the most famous French psychologists, published his first experimental reports on “hypnosis at distance” with the somnambulist Léonie Leboulanger.²² After his first report there was a wave of works discussing phenomena such as telepathy or lucidity.²³

But the number of papers in this journal, papers which were open-minded in their discussion of psychical research, also declined after the 1889 Congress. It was not until 1891 and the founding of a specialised journal by the physiologist and psychologist Charles Richet and the ophthalmologist Xavier Dariex, the “Annales des sciences psychiques”, that these researches found an open forum again.²⁴ Richet conceived this journal as “a fair balance between the credulity of spiritist journals and the blind ignorance of the collections of official psychology”.²⁵ The “Annales” welcomed testimonies and experiments done by everyone and tried, initially, to avoid a discussion of theories. Sofie Lachapelle²⁶ has acknowledged the journal’s democratic nature, navigating between popular science and scholarship. Nevertheless, the “Annales” developed the default of all journals devoted to psychical research: Only few enthusiasts read them. The “Annales” did not address the same readership as the “Revue philosophique” previously had. The gap widened and fostered the isolation of parapsychological topics from mainstream psychology.

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¹⁹ See Wolf: Brain, Mind and Medicine, 54–55.
²⁰ See Richet: La suggestion mentale.
²¹ Pierre Janet (1859–1947) was a French psychologist, philosopher and psychotherapist, specialized in the field of dissociation and trauma memory.
²² See Janet: Note sur quelques phénomènes; Janet: Deuxième note.
²³ See Alvarado/Evrard: Nineteenth Century.
²⁴ See Alvarado/Evrard: The Psychic Sciences.
²⁵ Richet: Traité de métapsychique, 37.
2.2 The tables have turned

German psychology, and especially Wilhelm Wundt’s (1832–1920) “Leipzig Laboratory of Experimental Psychology”, was a model for French psychologists through its popularisation by Ribot. When Wundt developed his strong criticism of psycho-parapsychology symbiosis in 1892, it was not without effects. His criticisms were not methodological but mainly epistemological. Hypnosis and psychical research were theoretical threats for the ordered view of the world that materialism provided. So Wundt accused parapsychology or “wissenschaftlicher Okkultismus” (“scientific occultism”), the term for such research in Germany at that time, of being “step-children of science”, a “mystical psychology” and an “absolutely pathological way”.²⁷ The “Society for Psychical Research” and its sister-societies, such as the “Society of Physiological Psychology”, were some of the targets of his anathema.²⁸ Hypnosis and psychical research were considered psychological heterodoxies, because they were “epistemologically incorrect”²⁹ as the historian Bertrand Méheust wrote. In his own way, Wundt enforced a boundary marking of human faculties in order to anticipate the future distinguishing of psychology, perhaps fearing that his own approach would become marginalised.³⁰ It was on this occasion that he withdrew altered states of consciousness of his research program to limit it to ordinary states.³¹

In France, Pierre Janet made a similar turnaround. He did not discuss his own parapsychological experiments in his doctoral thesis³² and, following the advice by Charcot, kept distance from the marvellous.³³ To clear his image as a pioneer of parapsychology, he would even go as far as to become the champion of scepticism, claiming for example that all mediums were pathological.³⁴ He used in particular a condescending historiography to relegate magnetists and spiritists to the pre-history of psychology. Some of his arguments supported a growing demarcation between psychology and parapsychology. His brilliant academic career is inseparable from his role as a “border guard” of psychology.³⁵

²⁷ Wundt: Hypnotisme et suggestion, 5, 166, 167.
²⁸ See Sommer: Normalizing, 30.
²⁹ Méheust: Epistémologiquement incorrect.
³⁰ See Carroy/Schmidgen: Psychologies expérimentales, 200.
³¹ See Kohls/Benedikter: The Origins.
³² See Janet: L’automatisme psychologique.
³³ See Plas: Naissance d’une science humaine, 144.
³⁴ See Le Maléfan/Evrard/Alvarado: Spiritist Delusions and Spiritism.
³⁵ See Evrard/Sommer: Pierre Janet.
Some historians spotted that both Wundt and Janet had had mystical experiences in their youth and later followed a personal agenda, both in terms of ideology and career. These intellectual conflicts might have laid the foundations of a true boundary-work that Méheust called the “geopolitics of psychism”, where everyone was required to take sides, through compromise and transactions.

2.3 The “Fourth International Congress of Psychology” in Paris (1900)

Janet was the main organiser of the “Fourth International Congress of Psychology”, again in Paris in 1900. The congress was very special because throughout the whole section devoted to “hypnotism and related issues” a dozen heterodox talks were given by leaders of psychical, spiritist, occultist, and theosophical movements. This was in contrast to the three previous congresses which had not been as diverse. Although the speakers in the section on hypnotism tried to adapt their speeches to the context, they caused a strong reaction in the conference room. Many attendees demanded the banishment of so-called “spiritism”, without giving any methodological argument. The instantaneous vote was not favourable to this banishment, but the following conferences were less tolerant. Therefore, it appeared as an implicit rejection in official forums.

Despite its limited openness to hypnotism and related issues, this fourth international congress made the establishment of an internal border inside psychology obvious. The psychic miracles were no longer the problem of psychology as a whole but only of a subsection of it, in a dual process of emancipation and evacuation of this topic.

2.4 Paradoxes of the “Institut général psychologique” (founded 1900)

Indeed, at the same congress Ribot announced the launching of the “Institut psychique international”, soon renamed “Institut général psychologique” (IGP). Janet and Richet accepted to be the two heads of this new scholarly soci-
ety, which was funded by a young Russian prince, Serge Youriévitch (1876–1969), who interpreted some of his experiences as paranormal and wanted them to be studied scientifically.\textsuperscript{40} The IGP received a lot of support from elite scientists and soon became the major private society for studying the mind.\textsuperscript{41} But the project of this institute was soon “rectified” by Janet – as Régine Plas\textsuperscript{42} noted – to become more “psychological”. Evidence of that is the immediate replacement of the epithet “psychical” by “psychological” in the name of the organization and its bulletin.

The members of the IGP came from different backgrounds. Psychologists were in the minority\textsuperscript{43} among physicists, biologists, physicians, and psychical researchers – many of them holding prestigious positions in the academic system. According to the historian Matthew Brady Brower\textsuperscript{44}, they were the ideological and institutional heirs of Claude Bernard, Louis Pasteur and Jean-Martin Charcot. After a year and a half, the IGP had more than four hundred members.

Janet distanced himself from the approach of IGP; he stated that the institution would be too much in favor of the popular emphasis on the empirical and speculative studies of the paranormal. They would be far outside his own psychopathological scope. Subtly, he diverted some resources from the IGP to create, first within the institution, a “Société de psychologie”, which became independent in 1904 and later was renamed into “French Society of Psychology”. This “Société de psychologie” was autonomous; its members were limited to forty psychologists (without any foreign or psychical researchers) and a more hierarchical structure.

The paradoxes of the birth of the IGP were criticised by proponents of psychical research:\textsuperscript{45} several issued a call for the creation of a genuine society for psychical research.\textsuperscript{46} But the IGP nevertheless conducted a masterly study of the medium Eusapia Palladino\textsuperscript{47}, among several other prudent studies.\textsuperscript{48} It was done through a subdivision of the IGP, the “Groupe d’étude des phénomènes psychiques”. We can see that parapsychology was integrated as one of the spe-

\textsuperscript{40} See Youriévitch: Un grand projet français.
\textsuperscript{41} See Brower: Unruly Spirits, 47 – 74.
\textsuperscript{42} Plas: Naissance d’une science humaine, 148.
\textsuperscript{43} See Plas: Psychology and Psychical research, 99.
\textsuperscript{44} See Brower: Unruly Spirits, 59.
\textsuperscript{45} See De Vesme: L’Institut Psychologique International.
\textsuperscript{46} See Sage: Introduction; Geley: Comment faire progresser.
\textsuperscript{47} Eusapia Palladino (1854 – 1918) was an Italian spiritualist physical medium who mainly devoted her career to the experimental study of her powers, and convinced many scientists, but was also caught many times in deceptive trickery.
\textsuperscript{48} See Courtier: Rapport.
cialty of this institute, in a larger understanding of the nature of the mind and its role in nature, adjacent to the study of mind with animals, social groups, criminals, et cetera.

Because of its openness and eclecticism, the IGP was disregarded by some psychologists who focused on the study of mental functions along the lines of physiology and psychopathology. The IGP was totally neglected by the history of psychology; at best, its work was reduced to some “amateur” psychology. It is as if, at that time, two psychologies co-existed: One that achieved its integration in academic institutions and later became official psychology; the other being confined to the activity of this scholarly society. Only the latter tried to integrate psychical research with all the difficulties we have just seen.

2.5 Metapsychics: An autonomous discipline

The disappointment of the IGP made Richet drop his project of the integration of parapsychology into psychology. In 1905, he coined the term “metapsychics” during his presidential address at the “Society for Psychical Research”. Richet had felt that the integration of what we called psycho-parapsychology was difficult, but at the international conferences in 1892 and 1905 he asserted that psychical research was the future of psychology, the field in which psychology would make major discoveries about the nature of mind. As psychologists seemed to turn away from this ambition, he was forced to create an autonomous discipline devoted to the exploration of the field.

That same year, Richet published the results (including stereoscopic pictures) of an experimental study of ectoplasmic materialisations inside the villa Carmen in Algeria. Some journalists published false interviews of Richet stating that he believed in ghosts. Some of his colleagues were solicited to judge the case on the basis of incomplete or false information, as the scientific community was forced to take position against this “return of obscurantist superstitions”. This scandal completely discredited Richet and metapsychics. It was a

49 See Plas: Naissance d’une science humaine, 149.
50 See Richet: L’avenir de la psychologie (1892 and 1906).
51 See Richet: De quelques phénomènes.
52 Amending letter published by Richet in several journals, quoted in: Delanne: L’Enquête,
53 See Le Maléfan: La psychopathologie.
critical period where the expertise of the gentleman savant gave way to another relationship between public and science.\textsuperscript{54}

One of the non-intended effects of the self-demarcation introduced by Richet was that this emancipation was coupled with an evacuation. Psychologists and physicians did not only criticise Richet but acted as if psychical research had not concerned psychologists for decades. Historians often described Richet only as an advocate of metapsychics, forgetting that he was first of all a pioneer of French psychology amid numerous scholars interested in the scientific approach of psychic miracles.\textsuperscript{35} In doing so, still today they reinforce the demarcation established by Richet which built an external frontier between psychology and metapsychics. This example shows that boundary work could also be done by the ‘excluded’, marginalised science, i.e. both demarcations overlapped and made the border so intransigent. However, partly because of Richet’s scientific reputation and the good reputation of his supporters, the controversy continued with a partial overlap between psychology and metapsychics for the next two decades.\textsuperscript{56} The rejection of metapsychics was still implicit and occurred primarily in a non-official manner, through the press or behind the scenes of journals and organisations.

2.6 Boundary-work by Henri Piéron after the turn of the century

One of the chief architects of the radical demarcation between scientific psychology and so-called pseudo-scientific metapsychics was Henri Piéron (1881–1964). It is not a trivial fact that Piéron was also instrumental in the professionalisation and institutionalisation of French psychology.\textsuperscript{57} Although initially he was Janet’s secretary, he accompanied the “physiological shift” of “modern psychology” with a gradual rejection of hypnosis, theories of the subconscious and metapsychics.\textsuperscript{58} He worked hard to increase the recognition of psychology as a legitimate science, in particular when he launched an investigation into the N-rays\textsuperscript{59}, where he eventually concluded that these pseudo-phenomena were the product of a collective

\textsuperscript{54} See Bensaude-Vincent: L’opinion publique.
\textsuperscript{55} See Hacking: Telepathy.
\textsuperscript{56} See Marmin: Métapsychique et psychologie, 160.
\textsuperscript{57} See Regards sur Henri Piéron.
\textsuperscript{58} See Dumas: Traité de psychologie.
\textsuperscript{59} N-rays were a hypothesized form of radiation, described by French physicist René Blondlot in 1903, and initially confirmed by others, but subsequently found to be illusory.
He believed fundamentally in the social functions of psychology, among them the struggle against false beliefs and pseudo-sciences. From 1901 to 1924 Piéron conducted much research on the normal explanations of paranormal experiences or events. Together with the psychologist Nicolas Vaschide (1874–1907) he explained prophetic dreams through paramnesia, telepathic hallucinations through “intellectual harmony”. He was then an active member of the “Société de psychologie” inside the IGP. After World War I he collected some colleagues to organise committees of renowned scientists who studied controversial phenomena, like extra-retinal vision or ectoplasmy. As they did not get any positive results, they concluded systematically to fraud. These conclusions fuelled the media, which became very hostile towards metapsychics in the “Roaring Twenties”, as if they wanted to signify that Richet’s scientific enterprise had lost the “credibility contest”.

This boundary-work of expansion was also very apparent in the journal “L’année psychologique”, of which Piéron became director in 1912. In 23 issues of this yearly journal he established a section “Metapsychique”, where he and his colleagues reviewed a selection of parapsychological studies in France and abroad. They focused mainly on frauds and alternative explanations. Although they sometimes encouraged these studies, usually they simply asserted that the collected evidence could not be taken seriously. Despite this critical attitude, it was the only psychological journal of the time that devoted such a regular attention to this border area.

3 Post World War I

3.1 The “Institut métapsychique international” (1919)

In 1919 the “Institut métapsychique international” (IMI) was founded as a private research foundation devoted to metapsychics. This foundation was mainly the project of Kardecian spiritists who were convinced that their beliefs should be

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60 See Piéron: Grandeur et décadence des rayons N.
61 See Parot: Psychology Experiments.
62 See Vaschide/Piéron: La psychologie du rêve.
63 See Le Maléfan: L’hallucination télépathique ou véridique; Le Maléfan: Les hallucinations tél-épathiques.
64 See Lapicque: Sur une prétendue vision; Lapicque/Dumas/Piéron/Laugier: Rapport.
65 See Sudre: La lutte pour la métapsychique.
66 See Lachapelle: Attempting Science.
based on scientific evidence. The spiritists were extremely disappointed with the approach of the former IGP where psychical research finally occupied only a marginal place compared to the initial project. They wanted to operate in the context of an autonomous institute that did not depend on cooperation with academic psychologists.⁶⁷

Richet joined the project of the IMI, but only as an honorary president at the beginning. The first president was Rocco Santoliquido (1854–1930), an Italian physician and politician who was introduced to spiritism through his family. The first director was the physician Gustave Geley (1868–1924), a former spiritist who showed some skills for experimental research with mediums. The patron was Jean Meyer (1855–1931), a wealthy wine merchant who devoted part of his money to revive Kardecian spiritism. Due to his financial contributions, the IMI could pay one secretary, one director, and mediums from all over Europe. They had an entire building with a well-equipped laboratory, a conference room and a library. The institute immediately obtained the status of public utility, and with this recognition the IMI was full of promises for future years. Its beginnings were internationally welcomed and were followed by numerous collaborations with foreign researchers and subjects.

In the 1920s, metapsychics flourished on both scientific and cultural levels. But its results, published in the “Revue métapsychique”, were mainly discussed in the press (and not in academia). The public still had trouble distinguishing between spiritism and the scientific aspiration of metapsychics.

With the death of its patron Jean Meyer in 1931 the IMI faced the end of its financial support. The institute never regained its balanced budget. The main protagonists were obliged to create a sister-association, the “Society of Friends of IMI”, to collect some financial and human resources. This was achieved by developing a popular approach (through lectures, courses, experiments, and popularisation) over their scholarly approach.⁶⁸ The IMI has survived until today, but with low dynamics in research and only a small network. It is still the expert centre for parapsychology in France. But most of the (French) academics and professional researchers who collaborate (want to) remain anonymous.

⁶⁷ See Archives of the “Institut métapsychique international” (IMI), Box 3, File 8.
⁶⁸ See Lachapelle: Investigating.
3.2 Professionalisation of parapsychology and skepticism

At the peak of IMI, Eugène Osty (1874–1938), its second director, complained in 1927 about the heterogeneity of the speakers at the “Third International Congress of Psychical Research” in Paris. Santoliquido, who at that time was working at the League of Nations at Geneva, decided to support Osty’s institutional ambition.⁶⁹ He created the “Centre permanent de conférences et congrès internationaux de recherches psychiques” (1928). It was an attempt to professionalise the field of parapsychology through an improvement of the standards. The Center relied mainly on academics like the Swiss psychologists Carl G. Jung and Edouard Claparède rather than on experts from the field. Osty also attempted to convince the German biologist and philosopher Hans Driesch to participate:

We cannot be perpetually condemned to contend with congresses where anyone can come and say anything, the lack of scientific direction condemning it to incurable mediocrity, under the pretext of competition, schism or other myths. If we want metapsychics to finally be accepted as a science by the scientific world, let us have the courage to create something that is rigorous scientific work. The Genevan creation has the ambition to be a very serious organisation attracting only genuine competencies. It does not replicate what exists. It does not wish in any way that the present congresses be eliminated.⁷⁰

The Center met with resistance and jealousies. Other researchers did not appreciate the competitor from the inside, this new internal boundary: Who was to decide – and according to which criteria – about one researcher being an amateur and another one being professional? Was it necessary to give this responsibility to an elite of researchers who were far from being representatives of the various trends? Finally, the first international congress in the new format was canceled, and the Center was dissolved after the death of Santoliquido in 1930. This step towards (international) professionalisation was premature and was finally made possible only in 1957 with the creation of the “Parapsychological Association” in the United States of America. Such a recursive process of drawing internal boundaries could be seen as a sign of the field’s maturation. Anthropologist David Hess⁷¹ has shown that parapsychologists, skeptics, healers, etc. were systematically using the same rhetorical strategies in their internal demarcation processes, the same models and cultural values, despite all the differences dis-

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⁶⁹ See Osty: Le professeur, 469–470 (translation by R.E.).
⁷⁰ Letter to Hans Driesch (which, although it is not signed, following its diction and handwriting appears to be from Osty), July 14, 1928. In: Archives IMI, Box 21, File 12.
⁷¹ See Hess: Science in the New Age.
played between the groups. This process, by which each group redefines within itself what is true and what is false, what is orthodox and heterodox, reflects external demarcation processes.

Also in 1930, some sceptics founded the “Union rationaliste”, the first group entirely devoted to the criticism of pseudo-sciences.⁷² They received the support of a lot of mainstream scientists, including Piéron and his close colleagues, and even Richet. Soon, the organisation’s membership was growing, with more than 2,000 members after two years.

This new player opened up a new ‘professional’ dimension in the struggle against pseudo-sciences and is the ancestor of many similar groups founded after World War II.⁷³ It helped to enhance the external boundary between scientific psychology and metapsychics. The usual arguments of the sceptics were based on a confusion of all “paranormal” domains: Metapsychics was put at the same level as astrology, chiromancy, hypnotism, and psychoanalysis. Only little research was done, mostly on marginal aspects like astrology or dowsing. Misinforming the public about the state of research and discrediting their proponents were (and are still) common practices.

According to Bertrand Méheust⁷⁴, these sceptical organisations acted like an intellectual police, which established a sanitary cordon to protect the orthodox disciplines and their institutions. It became more and more difficult for researchers in France to simultaneously pursue an academic career and research border areas. This could be seen as a step forward towards the protection of the autonomy of psychology, since this discipline was therefore an integral part of the academic community that denounced pseudo-sciences.

### 4 Post-World War II

With the death of many of its famous proponents (Richet, Osty, Bergson) and the change of intellectual interests, the field of metapsychics retreated to the background. It is worth having a look at the several new arrangements between science, French society, and the paranormal after 1945.

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⁷² See Lagrange: Union rationaliste.
⁷³ For a German example: See Martin Schneider’s contribution in this volume.
⁷⁴ See Méheust: Somnambulisme et médiumnité.
4.1 The “Psyché group”

Immediately after World War II, metapsychics became more and more a taboo science, too subversive to be discussed at an academic level. An example of that is the fate of the “Psyché group”, founded in 1946 in Paris by the psychoanalyst Maryse Choisy. The “Psyché group” developed a syncretism of Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis, occultism and metapsychics. In April 1949, a group of Paris-based psychology students started a rebellion against this “unhealthy and pseudo-scientific literature which causes an unfortunate confusion of psychological science and fraudulent practices”, in a journal which later became the “Bulletin de psychologie”. Choisy made a libel suit, but the students received the support of their professors, including Piéron. She lost her case and many of her supporters. In her memoirs she described how this potentially fertile intellectual alliance with heterodoxy became such a taboo.

4.2 Fantastic realism: cultural reappropriation

Indeed, the exploration of boundary sciences became a matter of marginal researchers. During the 1960s the movement of “Fantastic realism” was launched through the publication of “Le Matin des magiciens” (1960) and sustained in the journal “Planète” (1961–1968, 41 issues). It showed interest in the frontier areas of humanity (and the humanities): super-powers, forgotten civilisations, extraterrestrial civilisations, and heterodox sciences (such as parapsychology), but also fantastic literature, sexuality and eroticism, or social issues were subject matters. The aim was to awaken the curiosity of the public rather than providing a closed dogma.

This eclecticism provided a unique forum for various kinds of researchers and topics. There was no methodological framework: just a kind of “naturalistic journalism of marvelous things”, with its own aesthetics and very few advertising. The book and the journal had a huge and quick success: Five hundred thousand copies of the book were sold in five years (and two million, 

75 Maryse Choisy (1903 – 1979) was an atypical journalist, prolific writer, and psychoanalyst, and ended her life trying to create an alliance of all religions.
76 Quote in: Ohayon: Maryse Choisy et Psyché.
77 See Choisy: Sur le chemin de Dieu.
78 See Pauwels/Bergier: Le matin des magiciens.
79 See Renard: Le mouvement Planète; Cornut: La revue Planète.
until now); the journal “Planète” had a circulation of one hundred thousand in its best years, and many reissues appeared.

Though, the rise of fantastic realism sparked great controversy. People of the “Union rationaliste” claimed it was an intellectual imposture.⁸⁰ In addition to striking errors, the fantastic realistic literature contained fictional inventions mixed with verified information, which maximised the confusion. The critics succeeded in labeling “Planète” and fantastic realism as being heterodox and made it an unsuitable subject for serious (or academic) discussion. Again, the rejection of the subversive discourse of fantastic realism had a defensive function, because it basically attacked all forms of institutionalisation and dogmatism, especially in the sciences. As a result, many of the researchers coming from these institutions used pseudonyms, such as the biologist Rémy Chauvin (1913–2009) who played a key role in a new episode of the interactions between psychology and parapsychology.

4.3 The “Groupe d’études et de recherches en parapsychologie”

Like many others, initially Chauvin published his parapsychological research under a pseudonym to avoid academic disqualification.⁸¹ But he also tried to attract students to this field of research. In fact, in 1968 Chauvin moved from his position in Strasbourg to become a professor at the University of Nanterre (Paris X), in order to teach students with an interest in experimental parapsychology, which at that time was revived in the United States by J. B. Rhine’s “Parapsychology Laboratory” at Duke University. This growing interest in parapsychology at universities emerged in the context of May 1968, the most important social movement in France in the second half of the 20th century. Launched by a revolt of Parisian students, the crisis was at once cultural, social and political. The movement started at the University of Nanterre, before spreading to other universities. According to sociologist Jean-Bruno Renard,⁸² the fantastic realism of the early 1960s somewhat prepared the cultural contestation of May 1968. And we may see one of its effects in the new parapsychological group developed during this transition period.

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⁸⁰ See Galifret: Le crépuscule des magiciens.
⁸¹ See Evrard: Obituary. Rémy Chauvin.
⁸² See Renard: Le mouvement Planète.
A group of psychology students from the University of Nanterre asked for parapsychology courses. They faced the opposition of their professors who rejected their request on the basis of fallacious arguments and an absolute ignorance of foreign research. After this rejection, the students created a transdisciplinary association with benevolent members: the “Groupe d’études et de recherches en parapsychologie” (GERP, 1971). Rémy Chauvin was extremely important in launching this group. It was rather an intellectual forum than an organisation devoted to experimental research. From 1972 to 1975 Chauvin clandestinely taught courses on “methodologies in parapsychology” at the IMI, in order to shape the minds of these students. But they followed their own paths and went far away from the Rhinean paradigm or academic parapsychology. Many of them later became lecturers or teachers at universities and high schools themselves, but their courses on parapsychological topics were short-lived and still marginal.

4.4 Varieties of organisations

All in all, after World War II many parapsychological groups appeared and disappeared in France. None of the institutionalisation attempts were permanently successful. Most of these groups had a heterogeneous membership of both scholars and laypeople. They remained marginal, regardless of the quality of their work. Almost all of the groups failed to study parapsychology as a whole and focused mainly on one kind of paranormal experience or one aspect of experimental research. Often they developed an alliance with related fields like psychoanalysis, esotericism, occultism, psychotronics etc., which often led to confusions.

In the 1970s the GERP attempted to unite all these groups, which proved difficult because they were too loosely structured. Most people in the scene were unpaid volunteers who were passionate about their subject but mainly treated it as a hobby. All groups had recurrent financial and institutional problems. Therefore, they did not have the power to reverse the academic demarcation and make parapsychology a legitimate science again.

83 Evrard: Parapsychology in France.
5 Conclusion

The professional identity of the young academic discipline of psychology was strongly affected by this geopolitics of psychism. Initially modern psychologists focused on mental phenomena inside the brain and not on other forms of collective, animal, or parapsychological manifestations of the mind, as did an alternative group such as the IGP in the 1900s. Above all, the early psychologists strategically rejected the belief systems that did not fit to the dominating materialist paradigm of their time, in favor of an acknowledgment of their discipline.

We can consider that the institutionalization of psychology is marked by this trend of “orthodoxization” which pushed psychical research to the margins. Originally, in the 1880s until the turn of the century, French psychology was not distinct from parapsychology and therefore I coined the term psycho-parapsychology. But the establishment of internal and external frontiers produced the division that we now know. The creation of a heterodoxy was a great help to enhance the recognition and professionalisation of modern psychology, as several historians have already suggested. But this ‘scarecrow function’ is not the only one played by parapsychology. We can distinguish six functions of heterodoxy, from the most regressive (or conservative) to the most progressive ones, depending on the way it seems to have contributed to science. Additionally, these functions are divided into a ‘negative’ and a ‘positive’ group, depending on whether one perceives heterodox contributions to science as being indirect or direct. Whereas the negative functions are all based on the (widespread) assumption that parapsychology is (indeed) a pseudo-science, the positive function’s underlying message is that the discipline acts (at least) as a proto-science.

5.1 Scarecrow function

Methodological pitfalls of parapsychology served as an inverted model for psychology. The active criticism of the parapsychological scarecrow became

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84 Coon: Testing the Limits; Marmin: Métapsychique et psychologie.
85 The Scarecrow (Dr. Jonathan Crane) is a fictional supervillain, the type of a mad scientist, appearing in American comic books since the 1940s, commonly as an adversary of the superhero Batman. As a professor of psychology and psychiatry, he uses a variety of fear-enhancing drugs, toxins, and psychological warfare tactics to exploit the fears and phobias of his adversaries.
a foil for psychology. This effect is similar to the “straw man argument fallacy” based on the false representation of an opponent’s argument (parapsychology = scarecrow). This applies clearly to the historiography written by Janet who placed magnetists, spiritists, and psychical researchers in the pre-history of psychology, as a kind of childhood disease or immaturity period of psychological science.⁸⁷

5.2 Function of control group

Allan Crossman⁸⁸ recently discussed parapsychology as a “control group” for science. He recognised that parapsychology may look like a legitimate scientific enterprise and not always as an easy-to-dismiss pseudo-science. But, according to him, even if this discipline accumulates all the attributes of other established disciplines, follows the standards of scientific practice, maintains a self-critical community, publishes in peer-review journals, and so forth – still this would not make it a genuine science. In the eyes of skeptics and advocates of ‘normal science’, this would only show that the scientific system still has flaws, interstices that allow the most skilled and relentless pseudo-scientists to simulate scientific practice.

Crossman implies that the positive results of parapsychology cannot be true because of their supposed “impossibility”, the fact that they are presented as such indicates the existence of these gaps to be filled. He invited conventional scientists to improve their procedures, to achieve a perfection whose validation will require the nullification of parapsychological results through the same procedures. This is one of the reasons why parapsychology has pushed to introduce the double-blind protocol, statistics, randomisation, expectancy and experimenter effects, retrospective and prospective meta-analyses,⁸⁹ and recently, the valuation of the Bayesian approach against too permissive parametric statistical analyses et cetera. This function is slightly more rewarding than the last.

⁸⁷ See Evrard/Sommer: Pierre Janet.
⁸⁹ See Watt: 2005 Presidential Address.
5.3 Function of ‘broom wagon’

In his doctoral thesis the historian Nicolas Marmin presented metapsychics as a “fruitful impasse”⁹⁰ from which psychologists did not return empty-handed. He supposed that metapsychics worked like a broom wagon in a cycling race, in charge of recovering those who are too much behind the pack or forced to give up.⁹¹ According to Marmin, parapsychology retrieves the “objects” that psychology does not want or cannot handle until it is able to do so. For example, “lucid dreams” were studied in a parapsychological framework before becoming a full-fledged object of psychology in the 1980s, with the physiological correlations of lucidity during dreams.⁹² Heterodoxy seems to be the marginal laboratory installed in the border areas, where rejected and premature knowledge intermingle.

5.4 Function of subversion

Among its positive functions, heterodoxy would exist to challenge individuals, to test the supposed acquired knowledge, to destabilise the dogmas in order to encourage scientific progress. The goal is not necessarily to make a revolution by overthrowing orthodox systems, but to avoid the freezing of a body of knowledge. In the words of the Nobel Prize Laureate in Physics Richard Feynman: “Science is the belief in the ignorance of experts.”⁹³ The subversive function of heterodoxy supports the idea that the scientist has to learn from the profane, contrary to the ideology of the Great Divide.⁹⁴ This function is also based on the self-correcting process at the hearth of science and on the belief in the supremacy of facts over theories.

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⁹⁰ Marmin: La métapsychique.
⁹¹ The broom wagon (“voiture-balai”/“Besenwagen”) is the name for the vehicle that follows a Cycle Road Race picking up stragglers (or ‘sweeping’ them up) who are unable to make it to the finish of the race within the time permitted.
⁹² See LaBerge/Gackenbach: Lucid Dreaming.
⁹³ Feynman: What is Science, 317.
⁹⁴ See Lagrange: Une ethnographie de l’ufologie.
5.5 Function of touchstone

Louis Favre, a psychologist and parapsychologist from the IGP, showed that research in heterodox areas is relevant for testing the strengths and shortcomings of available scientific methods of orthodox fields. Being confronted with heterodoxy would be an “excellent training”, a touchstone, for the formation of scientific thought. It would reveal if a genuine scientific attitude is applied or if extra-scientific biases distort it. Favre observed that many established scientists failed to apply a rigorously scientific perspective in these areas because of personal, economic or social prejudices. What is happening in this zone of turbulence reflects the psychological and social investment of orthodoxy. This function helps to see what is really behind the usual rhetoric of openness, truthfulness, and disinterested and dispassionate scientific practice. It is not uncommon that deep personal beliefs are hidden behind masks of scientism; so science is also the home of many worldviews and ideologies.

5.6 Function of pathfinder

The most progressive function of heterodoxy would not situate parapsychology as a field of knowledge as such but as the front line of the orthodox domain, or even the scout, the pathfinder, penetrating enemy lines. Favre, again, redefined parapsychology as the scientific study of all anomalies. This study should not focus only on new revolutionary phenomena, but also on pathologies, illusions, frauds etc., which might explain these strange phenomena. This study, now called “anomalistics”, must retain its subversive dynamic, its principle of innovation that leaves the door open to exceptions, which should not be perceived only as nuisances. This is the price to be paid for integrating the study of anomalies into the process of scientific discovery, despite the resistances and dogmatic trends of “normal science”. “Anomalistic psychology”, currently developing outside France, often has this pathfinder function.

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95 See Favre: Pourquoi il faut étudier les phénomènes psychiques.
96 See Favre: La place de la Métapsychique.
98 See Watt: 2005 Presidential Address.
5.7 Six functions of heterodoxy

Ultimately, these six functions of heterodoxy can be schematically opposed in pairs, depending on whether one considers the contributions of heterodoxy to orthodoxy to be ‘positive’ (direct) or ‘negative’ (indirect) and its functions to be more or less ‘progressive’ or ‘regressive’ for the further development of science. These functions deal with three fields (knowledge, practices, and domains) where the negative view creates a strong demarcation or hierarchy while the positive view defends compatibility instead of demarcation.

Thus, the function of “scarecrow” highlights orthodox knowledge through its demarcation from heterodoxy, while the function of “subversion” plays with the same demarcation to show the heuristic value of heterodox knowledge. The function of “control group” is based on the assumption of the pseudo-scientific nature of heterodoxy, while the function of “touchstone” is based on the fact that nowhere the scientific practice is better than a researcher’s scientific behaviour in a heterodox field. Finally, the function of “sweep vehicle” describes the negative role of recycling abandoned phenomena, while the function of “pathfinder” praises this exploration of margins, beyond the known, because it can result in the introduction of the jewels of anomalies, of new subjects in the canon of common knowledge.

At each level heterodoxy is considered either to be incompatible (negative contributions) or compatible (positive contributions) with orthodoxy. Each side may represent what Lakatos called a positive heuristic (what to look for and by which methods) and a negative heuristic (the areas where one should not look and the methods one should not use). Depending on the chosen perspective, parapsychology can be in one or the other position with respect to psychology.

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99 See Lakatos: Falsification.
However, with hindsight, these two heuristics appear to form a unique research program, that of a psycho-parapsychology having the mind as its object of study.

These six functions of heterodoxy must not cover all possibilities – parapsychologist Mario Varvoglis even described parapsychology as an “epistemological transformer”¹⁰⁰ that can change the very way of designing the rules of the scientific method, as with the inclusion of the “psi experimenter effect” – but they show the wide variety of approaches at these issues, respecting the symmetry between the regressive and progressive views on this topic.

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