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# Magnetism, Spiritualism, and the Academy: The Case of Nees von Esenbeck, President of the Academy of the Natural Sciences Leopoldina (1818–1858)

**Abstract:** Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck (1776–1858) was the president of the Academy Leopoldina in Breslau from 1818 onwards. His professorship was prematurely terminated for political reasons in 1852. Nees von Esenbeck's interest in magnetism and vitalism can be traced back to his time lecturing in botany at the University of Erlangen. Within just four years (1817–1821) he published sixteen texts in the *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*. In his later publications Nees points towards links between North American “spiritualism” and “vitalism”, referring to both as phenomena that are excluded from the scientific system. The present paper examines continuities and discontinuities concerning magnetism, spiritualism, and the academy during Nees' presidentship of the Leopoldina (1818–1858). The role of “religion” and its study are also considered. For Nees, religion, spiritualism, Mesmerism, medicine, and science do not belong to different spheres but to one reality. The best examples of his viewpoints can be found in his “catechism” *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853) and his *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus* (1853). Ultimately, this paper asks what Nees' example means for the emergence of the academic study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*). I argue that the academic interest in spirit and spirits shifted into the study of the exotic or foreign, and thus less dangerous “Other” and that the question of truth was thus separated into the scientific study of nature, on the one hand, and the exotic fields of religion(s), on the other hand.

## 1 Nees, Science, Revolution, and Spiritualism: Preliminary Remarks

Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck (1776–1858) was a prominent member of the German Catholics Movement (*Deutschkatholiken*) and a professor of Botany at the University of Breslau. He was president of the Academy of the Natural Sciences Leopoldina – nowadays the National Academy in Germany –

for forty years (1818–1858), a period that continued even after his professorship at Breslau was prematurely terminated in 1852.

Who owns Nees von Esenbeck? The history of the academy? The scientific history of botany, natural philosophy, and adjacent areas? The history of Mesmerism and medicine? The history of revolutions and the *Vormärz*? The historiography of ecclesiastical-religious dissidents? The modern history of theology and the church? The German Catholics Movement and its history? Research on esotericism and its interest in occultism and clandestine spiritualism? The reception history of Andrew Jackson Davis' *Harmonial Philosophy* and *Spiritualism*? From what point of view can a portrait of a figure like Nees von Esenbeck reasonably be drawn? It hardly seems possible to address all of the various aspects together that are connected or coalesce in such a prominent figure. Nevertheless, I make the attempt here as a historian of religion(s). My starting point in this context is an assertion: complex interconnections between various aspects of science, knowledge, politics, society, and religion, such as those found in Nees' career, are represented neither in the history of science nor in the history of theology or religion. It is almost impossible to articulate all that obviously coincides in Nees in a single sentence. On the one hand, the reasons for this lie in the complex, overlapping, and shifting debates of the (in many ways) revolutionary 19th century, with their mutually inclusive and exclusive dimensions. On the other hand, these overlapping fields tend to be represented in historiography as completely separate areas. It is no surprise that the main line of today's historiography repeats and entrenches this exclusion of complexity. Indeed, it is one of the motivations for engaging in new critical inquiries into the subject.

Alongside his active involvement in the German Catholics Movement in the years around the 1848 revolution, Nees von Esenbeck was also appointed the president of the Berlin Workers' Congress in 1848 and a delegate of the left faction of the Prussian National Assembly in Berlin in the same year. In the end, it was his association with the revolutionary *Arbeiter-Verbrüderung*, or Workers' Brotherhood, which the Prussian state had deemed Communist, that led to his ban from Berlin at the beginning of 1849. Three years later, in 1852, he was banished from the civil service without further pay and relegated to the status of private citizen, although he continued to serve as president of the Academy Leopoldina until his death in 1858.<sup>1</sup> I think Nees, and more generally his life

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<sup>1</sup> Johanna Bohley, *Christian Gottfried Nees von Esenbeck: Ein Lebensbild* (Halle: Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina, 2003). More biographical information and previous considerations on this topic can be found in Daniel Cyranka, "Wofür steht das Jahr 1848? Religionsgeschichtliche Erkundungen im Kontext von Religion, Wissenschaft und Politik," *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 32 (2015): 289–318. and Daniel Cyranka, "Religious Revolutionaries

and career, serve as a prominent example of the kinds of developments that mark the historical shift from science *and* religion to the science *of* religion(s), to *Religionswissenschaft* as I call it in this paper. He stands in a prominent position in the preparatory phase.

The conference on which this volume is based considered the *Birth of the Science of Religion: Out of the Spirit of Occultism*. From this perspective, my interest lies in the debates on magnetism and science, religion and spiritualism, and their sectoral representations in research and beyond. The main aim of this paper is to situate Nees' interest in Mesmerism and spiritualism in the context of the ambivalent positioning of these subjects within the scientific community. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate a number of interesting continuities and discontinuities.<sup>2</sup> While I am only referring to small pieces of the wider puzzle in this study, my overarching concern is with the wider trend of the scientification of religion and the invention of *Religionswissenschaft* in Germany (and elsewhere). An important example for understanding this trend is a book published by Nees in 1853, *Das Leben in der Religion*, which occurs as a form of catechism. I intend to return to this book, and to many of Nees' other publications about religion, in future studies.

The origin of modern spiritualism is often sought in the Hydesville events of 1848 that gave prominence to the Fox sisters. This modern spiritualism is either distinguished from the older cultural strains of such historical phenomena or simply juxtaposed alongside multiple other examples. Almost invariably,

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and Spiritualism in Germany Around 1848," *Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 16 (2016): 13–48

<sup>2</sup> While the rationale that concepts and practices emerged under different, or even divergent, conditions is valid, a line of inquiry centring on the theme of continuities is indispensable and cannot be circumvented, given that spiritualism and spiritism represent the focus of research on esotericism; cf. Michael Bergunder, "What is 'Esotericism'? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 9–36, esp. 30; and Diethard Sawicki, *Leben mit den Toten: Geisterglaube und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland 1770–1900* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), esp. 268–281, where Sawicki, referring to Nees, already indicates the connection between the movement of the German Catholics, socialism, and spiritualism. Karl Baier, *Meditation und Moderne: Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*, vol. 1. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 179–252 and 253–290, focuses on the continuities of Mesmerism and occultism. Ellenberger had already begun to address the subject of continuities at the start of the 1970s; cf. Henry F. Ellenberger, *Die Entdeckung des Unbewussten: Geschichte und Entwicklung der dynamischen Psychiatrie von den Anfängen bis zu Janet, Freud, Adler und Jung* (Zürich: Diogenes, 2005), 133. Here, Ellenberger considers Davis to be the link between Mesmerism and Spiritualism.

most authors focus their interest on figures such as Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), or Justinus Kerner (1786–1862).<sup>3</sup> A significant proportion of the scholarly works on spiritualism both from and concerned with these years make references to two central protagonists – Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910) and Allan Kardec (1804–1869) –, testifying the significant contributions made by these figures.<sup>4</sup> Yet Hydesville is not the objective starting point of spiritualism. Rather, it is a part of a narrative that marks the origin of spiritualism as a passing trend, a trend which, from this perspective, ended just a few years later in revelations of fraud or humbuggery.

## 2 Nees' Interest in Magnetism and Vitalism and His Early Academic Career

That Nees was preoccupied with animal magnetism and vitalism during his time in Erlangen and Bonn is not a matter of dispute.<sup>5</sup> However, the fine-grained details of that preoccupation and his related attitudes are less clear. The first thesis I will advance here is that Nees' preoccupation with animal magnetism did not impact negatively on his academic career. On the contrary, it seems to me that his open-minded way of thinking and studying was one of several reasons underlying his appointment to a professor in Erlangen in 1818, another in Bonn in 1819, and his election as president of the Academy Leopoldina in 1818.

The success of Nees' career serves, in itself, to show that he was not held back by adverse reactions to his interest in animal magnetism. However, after the revolution of 1848 and the beginning of the spiritualistic wave that entered

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3 Peter Gerlitz, for instance, notes that while, from the perspective of intellectual history, spiritualism can be traced back to Swedenborg, Mesmer, and Kerner, the seemingly new spiritualist practices could also be traced back to the same source. Notwithstanding this analysis, 1848 is still regarded as the year of its genesis; cf. Peter Gerlitz, "Spiritismus," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Horst Balz et al., vol. 31, 695–701 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

4 On Davis, cf., for instance, Catherine L Albanese, "On the Matter of Spirit: Andrew Jackson Davis and the Marriage of God and Nature," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992): 1–17. A short overview of the works of Allan Kardec can be found in an article by Christine Bergé, "Kardec, Allen [sic!]," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 658 et seq. (Leiden: Brill, 2006). (However, in the text itself, he is referred to as "Allan Kardec").

5 Cyranka, "Wofür steht das Jahr 1848?" and Cyranka, "Religious Revolutionaries."

German society in 1853, a similar interest went unsupported and was more or less ignored or hidden by the academic community. Nees' later interest in spiritualism, and in the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis, was not appreciated by his peers. He was, on the one hand, still the president of the Academy and an respected academic thinker and public personage. On the other hand, his interest in spiritism and spiritualism was more or less completely concealed.<sup>6</sup> Although his successors as presidents of the Academy – Dietrich Georg Kieser (1779–1862) and Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869) – were very interested in the question of the nature of the soul, as well as in the apparent phenomena of materialisation and divination, Nees' wide-ranging interests in spirits and, especially, in the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis were not discussed by the academic community, although his name was mentioned prominently in this thematic field (for example, in the announcement of the publication of Jackson Davis' writings in German, in which Nees was presented as a central figure).<sup>7</sup> The same is true for other propagators of Davis' works, such as Georg von Langsdorff (1822–1921) and Gregor Konstantin Wittig (1834–1908).<sup>8</sup> Both men were also involved in the 1848 revolution (Langsdorff in Freiburg/Br.)<sup>9</sup> and in the German Catholics Movement (Wittig in Breslau). Furthermore, they were eminent propagators of spiritualism in Germany.<sup>10</sup>

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**6** Bohley, *Nees*.

**7** Cf. Prospectus der von dem amerikanischen Seher und Verkündiger der "Harmonischen Philosophie" Andrew Jackson Davis in der Reihenfolge ihrer Veröffentlichung in Nord-Amerika erschienenen und mit Autorisation ihres Verfassers eines Theils von dem im Jahre 1858 verstorbenen Präsidenten der Kaiserlich Leopoldinisch-Carolinischen Akademie der Naturforscher zu Breslau, Professor Dr. Christian Gottfried Nees von Esenbeck, und andern Theils von dessen Mitarbeiter und Herausgeber Gregor Constantin Wittig, aus dem Englischen in's Deutsche übersetzten Werke, (Leipzig: Franz Wagner, 1867).

**8** Wittig is portrayed here as a private scholar and a scholar of philosophy, philology, and psychology, as the founder and long-standing director of the journal, *Psychische Studien*, and as a researcher working on the poet Johann Christian Günther. As indicated here, he died on the 7th of September 1908 in Leipzig; cf. Biographisches Jahrbuch und Deutscher Nekrolog, vol. 13, 1908, quoted from: Deutsches Biographisches Archiv, part 2, microfiche no. 1419, 257. More detailed biographical notes will be prepared by Martin Emmrich, working within the research project "Spiritualism in Germany: The reception of the American Spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis in the long 19th century. From republicanism, to free religion, and science," funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG); see <http://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/274348785?language=en>, (22.10.2018).

**9** Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 37–39.

**10** Langsdorff, for instance, translated Davis' texts *Culturkampf*, *Tempel*, and *Penetralia*.

Nees' interest in magnetism dated back to his time in Erlangen and Bonn, where he lectured in botany. Within a matter of four years (1817–1821), he had published sixteen texts in the *Archiv für den Thierischen Magnetismus* (*Archive for Animal Magnetism*), the main German series for the academic discussion of Mesmerism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nees' contributions to the *Archiv* included a fragment on dream interpretation, as well as his university lectures in Erlangen on the *Entwicklungsgeschichte des magnetischen Schlags und Traums*, which he republished separately soon after he took up his professorship in Bonn in 1820.<sup>11</sup> The fourteen lectures he gave at the University of Erlangen in the summer of 1818 focus on “magnetic sleep”, or hypnosis in today's parlance (as it is widely known, the term “to mesmerise” has its roots in the temporal and cultural contexts in which animal magnetism and Mesmerism gained in importance). Two aspects of the fourteen lectures can be highlighted here. First, Nees conceives of vitalism as deriving from a life force or from soul, in order to postulate not a difference between organic and inorganic beings but their ultimate unity. Secondly, and this is a critical point, Nees' claims went far beyond these considerations when he referred to “guides”, “good angels”,<sup>12</sup> or “protective spirits”,<sup>13</sup> and to the different stages of clairvoyance.<sup>14</sup> He maintained that the possibility of healing in a condition of magnetic sleep was “an expression of the *vis medicatrix* in the moment of its gaining awareness and becoming louder” – in other words, an expression of the healing power.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst Nees ultimately entered a very peculiar area by invoking the power of “divination” in his penultimate lecture, the main focus across the lectures as a whole is on two basic states of human life, sleep and wakefulness, and, in particular, on their points of intersection and the shifting levels of awareness involved in the transition from one state to the other. Nees describes the condition of hypnosis, or “magnetic sleep”, in terms of ascending phases, to which he ascribes different levels of speaking or speech: 1) general speech, 2) philosophical speech, 3) poetic speech, and 4) treatment procedure and instructions for the treatment, in effect, the speech involved in the Mesmerist or magnetic treatment. Nees then goes on to introduce a fifth and final level – that of divination – in order to

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<sup>11</sup> Christian Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck, *Entwicklungsgeschichte des magnetischen Schlags und Traums*, in *Vorlesungen von Dr. C.G. Nees von Esenbeck, Präsident der Kaiserlich-Leopoldinisch-Carolinischen Akademie der Naturforscher und Professor in Bonn* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1820).

<sup>12</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 93.

<sup>13</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 95–101.

<sup>14</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 102–104.

<sup>15</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 121.

describe the speech generated under the influence of magnetic or hypnotic sensory perception:

But the mind that now has objectively grasped its own actions becomes completely free, released from the finite limits, and becomes, at the moment of its release, common spirit; it sees, hears etc. with the eyes and ears of humanity. Thus, even that which has for all practical purposes separated, seems coeval, i.e. timeless, and that brings forth the so-called divination.<sup>16</sup>

The German term “Divination” bears no relation to “prophecy” or “fortune telling” and Nees essentially uses this term to underscore the principle of “human freedom” and to point to the possibility of a proleptic consciousness of actions, events, and manifestations. As evidence for this, Nees refers to events that lie beyond the scope of human comprehension but within the earthly nexus of cause and effect in which, he claims, it is possible to perceive weather events in remote areas. But Nees’ notion of divination extends further, to a level that involves “recognising such actions whose primary motivation is human freedom, and, in particular, an act of something that has not yet assumed physical reality and thus has not assumed the properties of objective causality”.<sup>17</sup>

Divination, as Nees defines it here in this early lecture on *Entwicklungsgeschichte des magnetischen Schlafs und Traums* (History of the Development of Magnetic Sleep and Dream), refers to purely intelligible, non-material processes that allow actions to be anticipated. In this lecture, given in Erlangen in 1818, he offered a precise description of these levels of consciousness, a description of a kind that Andrew Jackson Davis and others were later able to reclaim for themselves in the 1840s. According to this description, these levels of consciousness consisted in hypnotic or trance-like insights into higher levels that extended beyond causal chains, removed in space and time into the realm of freedom. That Nees was aware that he was transgressing boundaries in his writings is clear from his introduction to the second printed edition of this lecture, dated to 1820 when he just had been appointed professor at the new University of Bonn. He wrote there that:

My intention was to find evidence for such wondrous epiphanies of animal magnetism, and, like a mariner who has to let the anchor fall overboard on the seas yet cannot find

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<sup>16</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 146: „Aber der Sinn, der sein *eignes* Handeln *objectiv* *ergriffen* hat, wird ganz *frei*, wird der endlichen Schranke entbunden und *für den Moment* seiner Entbindung *Gemeinsinn*; er *sieht, hört etc.* mit den *Augen, Ohren* der *Menschheit*. So wird ihm auch das im Aeußeren *Geschiedene gleichzeitig, d. h. zeitlos*, und dadurch die sogenannte Divination möglich.“

<sup>17</sup> Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 146–147: „Erkennen solcher Handlungen, deren erster Bewegungsgrund menschliche Freiheit ist, und zwar ein Act derselben, welcher noch nicht in die Erscheinungswelt getreten ist, und also noch keine objective Causalität gewonnen hat.“



out whether this is the best anchorage but must be content with locating the base or the ground, this is how I envisaged these sensorial activities, the norms and transformations of which were familiar to me through my longstanding involvement with the natural history of the dream, and sought access through it to the deeper world of dreams and the magnetic intuition.<sup>18</sup>

Nees' writings on protective spirits, and even on divination, might perhaps seem "unscientific" and thus depart from a history that aspires to be taken seriously. Unsurprisingly, they have, thus far, been given very little weight by those who have studied his life and works.<sup>19</sup> However, aside from the fact that Nees later (after 1853) published on magnetism in the Academy Leopoldina's journal, *Bonplandia*,<sup>20</sup> it is particularly remarkable that his early co-editors in the *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus* – Kieser, Eschenmayer, and Nasse – were keen to refer to their joint work on this topic as an anti-mystical project of reason. Their willingness to do so did not cast doubt on their reputations as scholars at that time. In the preface to the first issue of the *Archiv* the editors proclaim: "We hereby note only that, in our opinion, the existence of animal magnetism, in its highest forms and its mysterious shape, is beyond doubt [. . .]."<sup>21</sup>

This preface bears the signature of the three university professors – Eschenmayer (Tübingen), Kieser (Jena), and Nasse (Halle) – who edited the new journal along with Nees and several other naturalists with whom Nees had collaboratively published. Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852) was first appointed extraordinarius for medicine and philosophy in 1811 and then, in 1818, professor ordinarius for philosophy at the University of Tübingen. Dietrich Georg Kieser (1779–1862), who had been inducted as a full member of the Academy Leopoldina in 1816, was appointed professor extraordinarius in 1812 and then, from 1824 onwards, professor ordinarius for medicine at the University of Jena.

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**18** Nees, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 2: „Meine Absicht war, einen Anhaltspunct für die so wunderbaren Erscheinungen des thierischen Magnetismus zu suchen, und wie ein Schiffer, wenn er auf der See die Anker fallen lassen muß, nicht forschen kann, ob dieß der *beste* Ankergrund sey, sondern schon zufrieden ist, wenn er nur *Grund* findet, so faßte ich die Sinnesthätigkeit, deren Normen und Wandlungen mir durch eine lange Beschäftigung mit der Naturgeschichte des Traums geläufig geworden waren, ins Auge und suchte durch sie einen Zugang zur tiefen Welt der Träume und der magnetischen Anschauungen.“

**19** Bohley, *Nees*.

**20** Bohley, *Nees*, 156.

**21** *Archiv für den thierischen Magnetismus*. In Verbindung mit mehreren Naturforschern herausgegeben von Dr. C. A. Eschenmayer, Professor zu Tübingen. Dr. D. G. Kieser, Professor zu Jena. Dr. Fr. Nasse, Professor zu Halle 1 (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1817), 8: „Wir bemerken hierbey nur noch, daß nach unserer Ansicht das Daseyn des thierischen Magnetismus in seinen höchsten Formen und seiner geheimnißvollen Gestalt außer allem Zweifel ist [. . .].“



Christian Friedrich Nasse (1778–1851) was appointed professor of internal medicine at the University of Halle in 1816 and at the University of Bonn in 1819. He was inducted into the Academy in 1818. Nees first began to lecture in botany at the University of Erlangen, where he was appointed professor in 1817, before, in 1818, being named professor of natural history and botany at the University of Bonn and appointed president of the Academy Leopoldina (8<sup>th</sup> August 1818). Nasse's appointment to the medical faculty in Bonn is attributed to Nees' efforts to bring him there.<sup>22</sup> When Nees moved from Bonn to Breslau in 1830, his interests broadened beyond the scope of general and special botany, forest botany, and natural philosophy to speculative philosophy and speculative anthropology. This orientation may have led to his alliance with German Catholics such as Johannes Ronge (1813–1887) and their political activities in the forefront of the revolution of 1848.<sup>23</sup> Even after 1852, when Nees' ongoing political activities prompted the Prussian government to dismiss him from university employment, whereupon he became a political and academic outcast, he remained president of the Leopoldina until his death in 1858.<sup>24</sup> During this early phase, he collaborated with his successor at the Leopoldina, Dietrich Georg Kieser, to found the journal *Archiv für Thierischen Magnetismus*. Carl Gustav Carus, his successor as president of the Academy, shared the interests and inclinations of both of his predecessors, as evidenced by his responses to such topics as Mesmerism.<sup>25</sup> Nees was thus by no means the sole, or even the last, president of the Academy to be intimately involved in debates on magnetism, Mesmerism, natural philosophy, and other, what are now called, border-regions of the sciences.

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<sup>22</sup> Bohley, *Nees*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> Gregor Constantin Wittig, "Vorwort des Uebersetzers," in Andrew Jackson Davis, *Der Arzt: Harmonische Philosophie über den Ursprung und die Bestimmung des Menschen, sowie über Gesundheit, Krankheit und Heilung*, trans. Gregor Constantin Wittig (Leipzig: Wagner, 1878), xxxii, note.

<sup>24</sup> Bohley, *Nees*.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, "Lebensmagnetismus – Magie," In *Die Gegenwart: Eine enzyklopädische Darstellung der neuesten Zeitgeschichte für alle Stände*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1855), 275–312 (Carus himself indicates in his preface that the year for the next title was 1854). An extended version of the entry that appeared in this Brockhaus Encyclopedia on vital magnetism appeared shortly thereafter: Carl Gustav Carus, *Über Lebensmagnetismus und über die magischen Wirkungen überhaupt*, Unverändert herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Christoph Bernoulli. (1857 repr., Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co., 1925). Cf. for that Peter-André Alt, *Der Schlaf der Vernunft: Literatur und Traum in der Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (München: Beck, 2002), 265–279, esp. 273–275, and Eva Johach, "Kollektiv der Psychographen: Trance und Medialität in den Experimentalpraktiken des Tischerückens," in *Trancemedien und neue Medien um 1900: Ein anderer Blick auf die Moderne*, ed. Marcus Hahn and Erhard Schüttpelz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 253–274, esp. 258.

### 3 Nees' Later Interest in Spiritualism

My second thesis is that Nees' various interests – in philosophy of nature, in science, in religion, and in social, political, and other reforms (and therefore in revolution) – culminated in his reading of Andrew Jackson Davis' harmonial philosophy. He therefore promoted the knowledge and study of both Davis' writings and the spiritualistic wave that spread through Germany from 1853.

One strand of the spiritualist movement in Germany, that which drew chiefly on the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, is indelibly linked to Nees. In his early years, starting in 1820, he had played a significant role, along with his brother, in establishing the Institute of the Natural Sciences and the Botanical Garden of the University of Bonn. He then went on to accept a professorship in Breslau in 1830, where he became politically active in the German Catholics Movement alongside Johannes Ronge, as mentioned above.

Nees' eventful life, his academic accomplishments, and his wide-ranging political activities, can be addressed only briefly here.<sup>26</sup> However, suffice it to say that once he had moved from Bonn to Breslau he began, in the 1840s, to be perceived as a prominent dissenter by the state and the church authorities, in part owing to his involvement in the German Catholics Movement and the Silesian Vormärz. Consequently, his significant publications on religious, philosophical, political, and sociological topics, and even his scholarly preoccupation with Andrew Jackson Davis, tended to fade into the background.<sup>27</sup> At the beginning of the spiritualistic wave in Germany in 1853, when Nees became aware of Davis through his publications in English-language journals such as the *Spiritual Telegraph*, he published a short excerpt.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bohley, Nees as well as Johanna Bohley, "Klopfszeichen. Experiment. Apparat: Geisterbefragungen im deutschen Spiritismus der 1850er Jahre," in *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nichtwissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, et al. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 100–126. According to Bohley, Esenbeck belongs to a school of thought oriented towards natural philosophy. In a way, this reinscription removes him from the "rigid" natural sciences orientation of the discourse on progress. What positions does he represent and in what ways are his notion of "vitalism" inscribed into his religious worldview as a German Catholic? His catechism, published in 1853, might reveal more, for it was written before his intense preoccupation with Davis' works and thus allows the possibility of interrogating continuities even before Nees' reception of Davis.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Treitel, *Science*, 38 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> Nees, for instance, took the introduction from Davis' *The Present Age & Inner Life*, as he found it in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, in *Ostdeutsches Athenäum*, the addendum to the *Neue Oder-Zeitung*. He also published the reprint of the same text in Christian Gottfried Daniel

During this period, when German readers were fascinated by the phenomenon of table turning, Nees occasionally expressed his views on such topics. His response to the question of what value natural history might reap from the latest discoveries of table turning and spirit knockings, appearing in *Ostdeutsches Athenäum* on the 2nd of October 1853, reveals his cautious receptivity. Even as he conceded that their scientific potential had yet to be established and their discovery had not resulted in any tangible benefits, he also left open the possibility that benefits might accrue in the future. Similarly, while acknowledging the disciplinary demarcations between natural history and physiology, which had, by this time, been classified as distinct sciences, he averred that the domains that each occupied had “real links”<sup>29</sup> that were not immediately discernible. The links could be scientifically established only once this unity,

would consciously rise to the pinnacle of all knowledge about nature and if it were possible, as a matter of principle, only to conceive of the unity of humankind and nature, or even better, perhaps of a unity of the so-called inorganic and organic nature within every human being than of a complete system of nature [. . .].<sup>30</sup>

This is how Nees describes the higher unity of nature and the higher unity of the human being within this complex. He further demands that one must,

also consider humankind in its wholeness and only as such situate it in the context of the rest of nature, and, similarly, [consider] the entirety of nature as a living being manifested in human form with body and soul. Human life must not only be understood in theory in reference to the nature extrinsic to it; rather, conversely, the world as a whole must also be understood through the human source and, so to say, be constituted as a rational concept.<sup>31</sup>

According to Nees, natural history and physiology remained irredeemably distinct, with no points of intersection whatsoever,

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Nees von Esenbeck, *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus*. (Bremen: Schünemann, 1853), 128 et seq.

**29** Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131: “in der gesamten Naturerkenntnis mit Bewußtsein an die Spitze trete, und daß bei ihr principiell nur von einer Einheit des Menschen und der Natur, oder richtiger vielleicht, von einer Einheit der sogenannten unorganischen und organischen Natur im Menschen, als von einem vollständigen Systeme der Natur, die Rede sei [. . .].”

**30** Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131: “auch den Menschen in seiner Ganzheit und nur als solchen, auf die ganze übrige Natur zu beziehen und so die ganze Natur als ein Lebendiges aus Leib und Seele in Menschengestalt zu betrachten. Das Leben des Menschen soll nicht bloß nach der Natur außer ihm theoretisch, – sondern es soll auch umgekehrt das Ganze der Welt aus dem Menschen verstanden und in seiner Vernunftidee praktisch dargestellt werden.”

**31** Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131.

because the appropriate point of contact is one that lacks an exterior. To tirelessly point to this is the aim of those who grasp in the trends and signs of our time discussed here the call to contribute to a holistic progress of reason and to its realisation in the scientific system, and who do not assume the responsibility of reducing this dynamic field and its latest findings to the theory of the physical abstract science, let alone grant it legitimacy so that they can be merged into their doctrines and propositions. Using the same laws, or, rather, owing to the same error, it would be wrong to demand of the categories of physics that they be reduced to the categories of Mesmerism.<sup>32</sup>

Nees begins by alluding to table turning as a form of “vitalism” that was “different, but already a rather well known concept that would endure”.<sup>33</sup> He goes on to expound upon this idea, drawing on, as he puts it, the “ingenious work: The Present Age and Inner Life” by Andrew Jackson Davis.<sup>34</sup> The world, as Davis cast it, was still emerging from the darkness of ignorance and superstition. It was possible to see the past, the present, and to get a “glimpse of the latent future”: “From this position, the mind’s eye may not only take a comprehensive survey of the inferior Past as the vast background of the superior Present, but also, now and then, obtain a satisfying glimpse of the still unveiled Future”.<sup>35</sup> For Nees, such matters lay within the bounds of the notion of progress, which his references to the evolution of knowledge affirm. Here he cites Andrew Jackson Davis:

By scanning the fables of the past and comparing them with the realities of the present, we can see that what were considered miraculous and supernatural are now recognized

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32 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 131 et seq.: “denn der *rechte* Berührungspunkt ist eben der, für den es kein Aeüßeres mehr gibt. Auf diesen unermüdlich hinzuweisen, fühlen sich alle Diejenigen gedrungen, welche in den hier besprochenen Erscheinungen und Zeichen unserer Zeit zwar den Aufruf zu einem umfassenden Vernunftfortschritt und zu dessen Realisierung im System der Wissenschaft erblicken, keineswegs aber die Aufgabe, das vitale Gebiet mit seinen neuesten Resultaten auf die Theorie der physikalischen abstracten Wissenschaft zu reduciren oder gar nur so weit gelten zu lassen, als sie in den Lehrsätzen derselben aufgehen. Mit demselben Rechte oder vielmehr mit dem gleichen Irrthum würde man den Kategorien der Physik zumuthen, daß sie sich auf die Kategorien des Mesmerismus reduciren lassen sollten.”

33 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 126.

34 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 128. The most recent study on religion and science between 1800 and 2000 that addresses the topic of “vitalism” makes no reference to Nees von Esenbeck or to Andrew Jackson Davis and almost no mention of Franz Anton Mesmer and Mesmerism. Allan Kardec, first name spelled as “Allen,” appears only once. It might be important in this context to continue exploring further historical links; cf. Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Survey of Discursive Change: 1800–2000* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 64–70, 97.

35 Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 126: “Von einem Standpunkt an der Spitze des Zeitalters aus könne das Auge des Geistes nicht nur einen vollständigen Überblick der *unteren* Vergangenheit und des weiteren Hintergrundes der *oberen* Gegenwart gewinnen, sondern auch hin und wieder einen Schimmer der noch unverhüllten Zukunft erblicken.”

as the ‘matter-of-course’ triumphs of progressive science – as things ordinary and natural to the constitution of matter and principles.<sup>36</sup>

In his 1853 publication on vital magnetism, entitled *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus*, Nees points to the links between North American “spiritualism” and “vitalism”, referring to both as phenomena that are excluded from the scientific system. During a period that marked the beginning of the spiritualistic wave in Germany, Nees defended both concepts, notwithstanding the innumerable allegations of deception and the implication that they could be regarded as mere illusion or fallacy.<sup>37</sup> As he put it, it was clear in how science had approached the phenomena of table turning and rapping sounds that science had not evolved beyond the attitude towards Mesmerism or animal magnetism that it had adopted a hundred years earlier.<sup>38</sup> In its “attempts to fully comply with the dialectics of the world of reason, it had ended up digging itself an open grave right next to it. It was buried quietly, it took its morning nap and it was silenced to death by scholars”.<sup>39</sup> And he points out, it had now been reawakened by the rooster crowing at dawn.

## 4 On the Positioning of Spiritualism in Nees’ Biography

My third thesis is that Nees’ later preoccupations with spiritualism and with the writings of Davis were not well-received, unlike his earlier dedication to animal magnetism. On the contrary, his work on these topics was ignored in the academic world of the 1850s. Nees derives his understanding of spiritualism from his interpretation of vitalism as a harmonial philosophy that postulates a principle of unity. A biography of Nees published in 2003, which describes his long tenure as president of the Leopoldina, interprets Nees’ involvement with spiritualism as ‘senile mysticism’<sup>40</sup> and ‘ambivalent late work’,<sup>41</sup> suggesting that,

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<sup>36</sup> Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 128 et seq. (quotation from the translated German version): “‘Bei Prüfung der Fabeln der Vergangenheit und Vergleichung derselben mit der Realität der Gegenwart erkennen wir, daß das, was für wunderbar und übernatürlich gehalten wurde, jetzt als eine einfache Folge des Fortschritts, die sich von selbst versteht, betrachtet wird.’”

<sup>37</sup> Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 122 et seq.

<sup>38</sup> Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 129 et seq.

<sup>39</sup> Nees, *Beobachtungen*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Bohley, *Nees*, 141.

<sup>41</sup> Bohley, *Nees*, 149.

ultimately, ‘infirmity’ and decrepitude<sup>42</sup> had driven him to take refuge in a pseudo-science.<sup>43</sup> From this point of view, there is no continuity with the academic nature of his early preoccupation with Mesmerism, vitalism, and the like, which had, in turn, spurred on Wittig’s engagement with Davis. Nees wanted to introduce Davis into the Leopoldina as a full member because of a medical description in Davis’ *The Great Harmonia* that bore a stark similarity to a more recent contribution found in the journal of the Academy. As reported by his “last student”, Wittig, whose writings form the basis for Nees’ biography, only “external circumstances” had prevented the planned induction of Davis from coming to fruition.<sup>44</sup> It is of great significance that one of the so-called fathers of spiritualism came so close to a membership in the academy. From a later perspective, this would have seemed at least as great an improbability as Nees’ preoccupation with Mesmerism, vitalism, and spiritualism.

Attributing Nees’ positive reception of spiritualism’s harmonial hypothesis, which he called vitalism, solely to the “lapse in judgment of a decrepit old man” necessarily, and implausibly, implies that Nees must have already begun to suffer from this condition at the young age of about forty. Rather than representing major departures from what was widely considered to be credible at the time, his attempt to link the spheres of science and otherworldly spirits mirrors contemporary debates, in particular those concerning the academic status of what is now generally considered pseudo- or para-science.

It is worth to re-emphasize that Nees, in his position as president of the Academy, wanted Davis to become member. With this in mind, we can ask who bears responsibility for investigating Davis as a spiritualist author and Nees’ preoccupations with spiritualism and the German Catholics Movement around the time of the revolutions of 1848? It seems that this inquiry no longer falls under the purview of a historian of “the sciences” (in the hard sense) and/or of politics, or of any other of a range of related but narrowly delineated disciplines (see my preliminary remarks). It seems rather that this field is currently reserved for people who work as historians of religion and have no real expertise either in the history of the natural sciences or in political history. This question leads to my main and – perhaps rather radical – hypothesis. Representations of Nees alter from depicting him as a legitimate scientist to describing him as an old man who developed a taste for mysticism after the failed revolution in 1848: a picture that largely draws on his post-1853 interest in, and

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<sup>42</sup> Bohley, *Nees*, 159, also see note 788.

<sup>43</sup> Bohley, *Nees*, 155; see also Bohley, “Klopfezeichen,” 117.

<sup>44</sup> Wittig, “Vorwort,” in Davis, *Der Arzt*, xxiv–cli, lxxii – lxxiii.

attempts to study, the spirit-rapping movement. Nees was fascinated by the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis and promoted them with considerable enthusiasm. His own social, moral, and political opinions (including his focus on workers' rights and education and health care for all), for example, in *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853), converge with ideas that appear in Davis' writings. But this much is clear: the topics "spirit(s)", "ghosts", "the occult", "divination", and "clairvoyance" ever since disappeared altogether from the recognised academic and scientific debate, with the erasure of Nees' interests serving as a very prominent example. It seems that these topics only returned later, as part of the exotic field of world(s) religion(s), and of *Religionswissenschaft*.

## 5 *Religionswissenschaft*, Science, and Spirit-Seeing

My fourth thesis is a response to a rather cautious question: Could it possibly be that *Religionswissenschaft* takes the scientifically delegitimised place of occultism and/or spiritualism in the second half of the 19th century? By moving the fields of investigation from the "humbuggery", or what was later to be called the "para-" or "pseudo-" science, of occultism, spiritualism, and table turning – even with regard to their ethical, social, and political dimensions –, and turning instead to exotic oriental or ancient landscapes situated in colonial settings, *Religionswissenschaft* re-established the interest in these fields within the halls of academia. Could it be that *Religionswissenschaft* managed to emerge as a (legitimate) academic field of study on the condition that it tacitly agreed not to disturb the ("hard") sciences in the way that occultists, spiritualists, or "borderliners" such as Nees did?

I suggest that the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 provides a very good example that allows us to see the framing of the upcoming field of *Religionswissenschaft* in such a manner, for here the scientific and exotic strands of the debates about religion(s) can be seen to overlap. When approaching the issue from such a perspective, it is worth noting that Davis' major work on *The Principles of Nature* harks back not only to Charles Fourier's writings but also to Swedenborg's cosmology, not least because of its identification of spirits associated with six spheres while Davis also claims that it was only possible to communicate with those spirits that were in the closest proximity to the earth. This mapping of the cosmos in terms of spheres corresponds to a fundamental, indeed indispensable, concern with the principle of progress and with morality as its underlying condition. In *The Principles of*



*Nature*, Davis also recreates the old (Christian)-eschatological utopia of the Millennial Kingdom. In his later works, he calls this Golden Age the “Summer Land”<sup>45</sup> and his ideas in this area clearly have an eminently political dimension. On the surface, Davis’ work lends itself to being classified along with that of the obscurantists, predominantly owing to its Mesmerist origins and relentless invocation of spirits. From this perspective, spiritualism can be pared down to the practice of spirit-seeing, which was brought into disrepute through the numerous allegations and revelations of trickery and deception attributed to spiritualists, which ultimately destroyed the perceived legitimacy of the field – intellectually, morally, and scientifically. The marginalisation of spiritualism is especially palpable in the extent to which the reception of Davis’ work is intimately linked to the rapping-sounds movement of 1848.

This rather common, and damning, verdict on spiritualism has provided the rationale for either excluding it altogether from the history of religion or, as an aspect of a particular theory of esotericism as “forbidden knowledge” (W. Hanegraaff), for declaring it to be a (rejected) quintessence of religious history. In either case it is often regarded as a para- or pseudo-science. However, the handling of the same fields in the context of exotic, ancient, or simply non-european religion(s) emerged at approximately the same time and this was formed into the new *Religionswissenschaft*, with all its entanglements with the theosophical and other occult, spiritualistic, or comparably “esoteric” movements of the era, as well as with the political and cultural implications associated with these movements.

Comparisons and contrasts drawn between spiritualism and science, and between religion and politics, have only served to highlight the incommensurability and incompatibility of these pairings in the past. However, my main concern in the present paper is to uncover links forged between the aforementioned protagonists and the attendant debates in which they were engaged in order to bring to light the possible interrelations between these apparently incompatible fields in the context of 19th-century Germany.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Jackson Davis, *A Stellar Key to the Summer Land*, vol. 1 (New York: Banner of Light Branch Office, 1867) This volume was reprinted in 1868 and 1873.

<sup>46</sup> These issues are currently explored in the research project mentioned in n. 8 above.

## 6 Nees' Scientific Religion

My fifth thesis is that, after the failed revolution, Nees continued his religious-philosophic and his scientific work and combined the various strands in a political manner in his concept of scientific theology and/or religion. In this theology, outlined in such publications as *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853), he combines various interests which lead to topics such as other worlds, the supernatural as part of the one world, spirit and spirits, “divination” and clairvoyance, and Mesmeric healing. These topics are linked with religion, with social and political reform, with a philosophy of the whole nature, and with science. We can make three general points about the position advanced by Nees: 1) its basic philosophical presupposition and final scientific goal is the overcoming of the distinction between organic and inorganic; 2) its guise is catechism; 3) its aim is political.

The main question that needs to be answered is whether, and if so how, Nees claims to form a new scientific, philosophic, holistic, and non-confessional or non-denominational theology. A further issue is what name he gives to this theology. This new theology lacks the dogmatic (and “fundamental theological”) aspects encompassed in concepts such as revelation or salvation. It is, rather, pure anthropology, cosmology, epistemology, ethics, and a theory of political (revolutionary) change in society. By approaching the issues in this way, Nees overwhelms the borders between materialism, spiritualism, and religion. As far as I can tell, such theologies have, up to now, not been investigated in any great depth, but it is, I suggest, worth treating these texts as “contextual theologies”.

A parallel and historical-critical reading of *Das Leben in der Religion* (1853) and *Beobachtungen und Betrachtungen auf dem Gebiete des Lebens-Magnetismus oder Vitalismus* (1853) makes clear that Nees is interested – in both texts – in the formation of a new scientific concept of religion. This understanding of religion forms part of a holistic, or, as he calls it, “harmonial”, cosmological and empirical view of the world, nature, life, and God. His insistence on “harmonia”, the importance of the organic as the real against the inorganic as mere illusion, the idea of vitalism, and other similar views, clearly show his openness to concepts such as those that appear in *The Great Harmonia* or the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis.

It quickly becomes apparent that Nees' conception of the one nature, his conception of religion, and his views on empiricism and Mesmerism converge in these texts. However, neither his conception of nature, nor his preoccupation with Mesmerism and, later, spiritualism, nor even his religious beliefs found a place in the academic world, for spiritualism was banished from the academy along with occultism and natural philosophy. Nees started his journey down this new theological path at the very same time as he first read Davis' writings, and his interest in

both, in harmonial philosophy and in practical spiritualism, emerged from this moment. Both aspects or developments, the new theological track and the interest in spiritualism, seem to be tightly interwoven with one another.

Clairvoyance – or “divination” – was a simple fact for the young Nees while, for the later Nees, the prophetic aspect became increasingly political through his engagement in the revolution. Interestingly, his religious views are not marked out as part of a separate and distinct field for him. He rather argues on the basis of harmonial philosophy, or, the philosophy of nature. His “prophecy” claims to be both rational and scientific.

The theological track taken by Nees and others led not only to spiritualism but also to the free religious movement that lay outside the field of academic theology and state-sanctioned religion. (It is worth noting that, in the historiography of religions, *Deutschkatholiken*/German Catholics Movement, *Lichtfreunde*, *Freireligiöse*, or *Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften* – in the German case – are all presented as lacking any link to spiritualism or spiritism. The history of religion should, therefore, carefully reread and reinterpret this context.)<sup>47</sup> However, the closely interwoven nature of these contexts clearly shows that the narratives belong to a common framework, and Nees stands as a very prominent example in this historical setting. Although he is in some ways a unique figure, his example is also more broadly illustrative for the overlappings of Science, Revolution, Religion, and Politics, fields which are, I suggest, mutually dependent. The same is true for the historiography of socialism and occultism, as Julian Strube has recently shown with reference to the case of France.<sup>48</sup>

The scientific-natural-philosophical concept of religion was excluded from the framework of state-sanctioned religion and theology in the wake of the German Catholics Movement, which became a source for the free religious movement that was organised in the years following 1859. The academic interest in cosmological, anthropological, and speculative-mystical themes and practices

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47 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Politisierung des religiösen Bewußtseins: Die bürgerlichen Religionsparteien im deutschen Vormärz; Das Beispiel des Deutschkatholizismus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1978) cf. also Jörn Brederlow, “Lichtfreunde” und “Freie Gemeinden”: Religiöser Protest und Freiheitsbewegung im Vormärz und in der Revolution von 1848/49 (München: Oldenbourg 1976); Siegfried Schmidt, “Deutschkatholische Bewegung 1844–1859,” in *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte: Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland*, ed. Dieter Fricke et al., vol. 2. (Leipzig: veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1984), 449–453. and Siegfried Schmidt, “Protestantische Lichtfreunde 1844–1859,” in *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte: Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland*, ed. Dieter Fricke et al., vol. 3 (Leipzig: veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1984), 604–607.

48 Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016.

shifted to the exotic “foreign” religions. These themes and practices were thus pushed out of the field of accepted and established knowledge by associating them with exoticised religious formations, which could then, as “foreign” rather than indigenous concerns, be treated as “non-dangerous” objects of academic research.

## 7 Science, Truth, and the Field of *Religionswissenschaft*

What might these observations and thoughts mean for the topic of a conference on the birth of the science of religion? I now turn back to the question of *Religionswissenschaft*. My sixth thesis therefore modifies Thesis 4: The emerging *Religionswissenschaft* became a new actor on the field of disputes between spiritualism, science, and religion in the political setting, with the new discipline dealing neither with traditional theology nor with the esoteric, occult, or other fringes, but with religion as a supra-cultural phenomenon of exotic shape and a relevance that is detached from science, which can be found, for example, in ancient sources and/or in the colonies. As such, *Religionswissenschaft* transcended the borders of the above-mentioned fields by pushing them to the outside and by othering the matter of interest.

As the academic field that deals with the exotic, *Religionswissenschaft* neither claims the (!) truth, as do occultists, spiritualists, or other supranaturalists in more or less “esoteric” manners. Nor is *Religionswissenschaft* in competition with contemporary theology (neither when it began nor today). *Religionswissenschaft* is “ours” (as European academics) and deals with “the Other”. Battles such as those that Nees and others fought are now a thing of the past. The emerging *Religionswissenschaft* became, in the second half of the 19th century, the critical strand of occultism, insofar as it dealt with traditions and texts that philologists, theosophists, and others delivered from exotic Oriental settings such as India.

*Religionswissenschaft* stands for the “othering” of this “holistic” view, in which people like Nees tried to hold together combatant fields in a concept of *a single* reality, of *one* sort of truth and science rooted in society, politics, and revolution or – at least – reform. This “othering” through exoticism allowed *Religionswissenschaft* to combine fields that were (and are) strictly divided in German and other European settings: the fields of spirit(s), religion, mysticism, “inner experience”, revelation, healing, social reform, gender issues, politics, etc.

The emerging field of *Religionswissenschaft* in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided the discursive setting in which these otherwise divided fields could

continue to be considered together. The name of the discipline under which this remained possible is crucial: *Religionswissenschaft* at this time dealt more or less exclusively with the “non-Western” and, therefore, the “non-Enlightened”. In other words, it dealt with a *different* sort of truth. *Religionswissenschaft* shifts “the ghosts” into the distance and defines itself as non-theology with a broad historical and cultural perspective and a global horizon. Theology, on the other hand, deals more with the claim to truth of the (natural) sciences and thus makes it clear what falls outside its remit. A similar development began to take place within German Protestant theology around 1900, creating a sort of self-immunisation against the “hard” sciences.

This self-immunisation also applies to the relationship between theology and *Religionswissenschaft*: pre-Christian and non-Christian phenomena may appear as religion or religions from this perspective but are not represented as competitors in the “market of truth(s)” at all, appearing instead as exotic or anachronisms that have been surpassed and consigned to the past. On the other hand, contemporary religious and/or esoteric currents are concealed or rejected within this framework by treating them as non-religion and non-scientific. This condition still prevails today, in part at least. Both the sciences and the theologies push the topics of mind/ghost and ghosts away as excluded others, which nevertheless have an eminent (indirect) influence on their own self-image.

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