
Spiritism, Violence, and Social Struggle in Late Nineteenth-Century Catalonia

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses different situations concerning the positioning of the nineteenth-century Catalan spiritism towards violence: on the one hand, with regard to capitalist's society's implementation of the industrial process; on the other, in relation to the political use of violence – ‘terror tactics’ – employed by certain anarchist sectors in Catalonia at the close of the century. As we shall see, an understanding of said positioning reveals the spiritist movement's ambiguity in this sphere. To interpret this ambiguity, one must take into account the tremendous crossroads at which its followers found themselves, midway between one society being deconstructed and another that, in statu nascendi, was being prestructured.

INTRODUCTION

Catalan spiritism is first mentioned in the correspondence that José Maria Fernández Colavida established in 1858 with Léon Denizard Rivail also known as Allan Kardec (1804–1869), the Lyon-born French educator who systemized European spiritist theory and practice in 1857. Spiritism was firmly ingrained in Catalonia from the 1860s to 1939 at the end of the Spanish Civil War, the outcome of which triggered brutal repression against the movement's associations and followers. Throughout that period, broad subordinate sectors – in general, workers and artisans – devised a world's view, the organization of social relations and the development of people that embraced all spheres of existence. The presence of certain members of financial means made possible the earliest translations to Spanish, clandestine editions and the diffusion of Kardec's works, for example *The Spirits' Book* (Kardec 1963) (for an over-

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view of all aspects treated, see Horta 2001 and 2004). Spiritism – a contemporary Western adaptation of possession through the forms of mediumship – appeared as an integrally conceptual system which would provide the basis for social projects of an emancipatory nature. The spread of the movement throughout Catalonia can be seen in the intensity of its scope – cultural, political, economic, and even legislative (in the First Spanish Republic) – and in the existence of close to 100 spiritist centres by 1899 (Horta 2004: 321–323); and over 120 during the Second Spanish Republic (Sánchez 1990: 110). One indication of its vast following was the crowd of 7,000 that gathered in what is now Barcelona's Ciutadella Park on October 9, 1899 to commemorate the *auto de fe* held in the same place and on the same date in 1861. At a time when the citadel was the Bourbon army's greatest fortification in Catalonia, 300 French spiritist publications were burnt – confiscated in Barcelona's maritime customs house – under the supervision of religious, civil and military public servants (Barrera 1980: 7).

Undeniably, many periods and societies have seen countless groups and collectives assemble adaptive, legitimizing or transformational models of social order through techniques associated with ecstatic body postures. Thus, through the practice of mediumship, Catalan spiritism expressed the adoption of egalitarian practices that nourished such incipient movements as feminism, antimilitarism and cultural and cooperative associationism. The Barcelona-based spiritist magazine *La Luz del Porvenir (the Light of the Future)* (1879–1936), written and directed by women, became the mouthpiece of the struggle for sexual equality. See the creation in 1891 of the Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres de Barcelona (Autonomous Society for Women of Barcelona) by spiritists, anarchists and freemasons (Sánchez 1990). Only in appearance might it seem paradoxical that, through apparently irrational uses of the body such as possession, models of and for social action could be devised (Geertz 1990: 111–112), on the basis of which the spiritists postulated their rejection of the prevailing Catholic-bourgeois references. Among the subordinate classes, the explosion of this truly popular force (Maffesoli 1990 [1988]: 90–91) conveyed the capacity of spiritism to satisfy the needs of a broad social sector by using the only tool at its members' disposal: their own bodies, within which faith was 'above all, an impulse to act' (Durkheim 1987 [1912]: 434).

Recent research has sought to overcome the inexplicable historiographical invisibilization of Catalan spiritism by turning to countless written sources of the movement (see Horta 2004: 314–320: about 100 books, newspapers and magazines from 1863 to 1899 have been recorded) and its seminal action within the free-thinking, anticlerical context of the republican, democratic, and federalist left of the nineteenth-century anarchist movement. An attempt has been made then to rationalize human behaviours that seemed ‘incomprehensible’ (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 17); and furthermore to establish the rational thread that runs through spiritist yearning by empirically proving the viability of the communication of the living with the spirits of the deceased – and, in parallel fashion, the conceptual integration (of Gnostic origin within the Christian milieu) between faith and reason, – by following collectivist social guidelines. Together with estrangement from the world, the Gnostics of the early centuries of the Christian era maintained that knowledge meant the road to freedom, as opposed to ignorance, which turned human beings into slaves. It was in this form of Christianity promulgated as a space for social justice that the spiritists justified their claim, and hence they referred to Gnosticism in their writings.

When Tylor (1981), one of the forefathers of anthropology, described the new scientific discipline as ‘essentially, a reformer’s science,’ in his *Primitive Culture* in 1871, it coincided with the publication, in March of that same year by the Barcelona free-thinking weekly *La Humanidad (Humanity)*, of a letter submitted by a group of spiritists from the *Revista Espiritista. Diario de Estudios Psicológicos (Spiritist Magazine. Diary of Psychological Studies)* of Barcelona (founded in 1869). The latter defined their movement not as religious but rather as the expression of a ‘new science’ that sought ‘social reform through that of the individual.’ The same nineteenth-century Quaker Puritanism that assumed the principle whereby reason and mystic experience were not opposed but complementary, would be reflected both in Tylor (raised in a Quaker family and familiar with the work of Böhme, Leibniz, Milton and Plato), and in European spiritism, and in the vindications of rationalism that were made. Robert Lowie would harshly accuse Tylor of being ‘rationalist’ in 1924 (Lowie 1976 [1924]).

The slogans of the movement, ‘Towards God through faith and reason’ and ‘Towards God through charity and science,’ differed

since 'by enjoying science one falls into incredulity, yet by soaking it up one returns to the faith.' In the words of Amalia Domingo Soler, of Catalan-Andalusian background (1835–1909), who settled in Barcelona's Gràcia district and was taken in by the Llach family (workers and spiritist members), and became, in the last 30 years of her life, the world's leading propagators of the doctrine in Spanish, in the face of extreme material hardship (Domingo Soler 1990). By merging categories such as spirit and matter, faith and reason, spiritism was established as the foundation of a rationalist utopia developing a project that offered an alternative to religion, economics, education, the relationship between the sexes, the socialization of children, medicine and so on. Through a rational linking of means, ends and contexts it challenged the relations between capital and labor (bourgeoisie and proletariat), European political-administrative borders, states, monarchies, the role of the Catholic Church, the use of force in Europe's relations with non-Western societies and in the settling of conflicts between countries, and, of course, it challenged the society in which financial gain became an absolute reference. And the world responded to the mediumistic call by means of otherworldly entities as monstrous as they were beautiful. Yet, unlike the outside world, in the spiritist centres or in their homes – sheltered from institutional persecution (particularly harsh in Catalonia), its members could engage in dialogue with conflict through encounters with embodied supernatural powers (at the same time symbols of all the moral and social categories): a dialogue was produced in which such confusion was ordered according to a logic of its own. Earthly and heavenly planes were joined through conflict, understood as a dynamic means to bring about individual and collective change, since the spiritists assumed the role of guardians of the universal principle of erraticity, mobility and the continuous regeneration of different spheres of creation. Thus, it can be said that, through sometimes contradictory coalescences and dispersions, the guidelines for another type of social evolution were set. This explosion of energy took place within everyday life, meaning that, behind the precepts of homogeneity and centralization of liberal modernity, 'another' liberal modernity was emerging, one that was focused on the plurality, multiplicity and heterogeneity represented by the 'polytheism' of the spiritist pantheon, and by the confederal and horizontal nature of the centers, in contrast to the strongly hierarchical structure

of the occultist organizations. Availing itself of all these conceptual categories, the Catalan spiritist movement sought to transcend the prevailing social order. Hence it did not justify the use of violence as a means to rise above the social structure, but strove instead for a 'responsible moral development' that had to take place within every person – '*Only we ourselves can save us*' (Domingo Soler 1990: 33) – which, in turn, would direct the acceleration of urgent social reform processes. As they stated, it was a question of saving the individual, not society: that 'bastardised system of a world that was mere sham.'

One early paradox involving the use of violence arose with the aborted attempt to restore Catalonia to statehood in 1873. Spiritist support for the federalist movement and democratic and republican principles was exemplified in the public announcement by the Spiritist Centre of Sabadell, according to which all of its members had placed themselves at the disposal of the Junta of Armament and Defence (Castells 1975: 13). A defence the freemasons had already made in France in 1871 through their backing of the Paris Commune during the military conflict (Lissagaray 1971 [1876]: 331–333). However if, particularly in the 1860s and 1870s, the social component of Catalan Spiritism differed substantially from its Spanish counterpart – which had a far greater presence of the wealthy and aristocratic and, comparatively speaking, a certain absence of women. Amalia Domingo Soler, who spent some years in Madrid before finally settling in Catalonia, described the Castilian spiritists as follows:

Who are the men taking part in the propaganda efforts? The majority belongs to the leading social classes, and includes aristocrats from Castile, generals, engineers, doctors of renown, famous lawyers, eminent writers and distinguished diplomats. These men have not experienced poverty; they have yet to know that among the poor there are souls longing for light and who have splendid intuitions: the attendance at the sessions is truly aristocratic, with barely six women dressed as simply as ourselves. And in terms of the men, do remember how, once when a man came in wearing overalls, they all turned to each other in surprise. Being spiritists does not mean we have to abandon the milieu in which we have always lived. This is why the spiritists from here do not heed me as you would like, because the barrier

of our different social positions stands between them and me (Domingo Soler 1990: 114).

The membership of military top brass was curious indeed: General Joaquín Bassols was the honorary chairman of the Progress-spiritist Society of Zaragoza in the early 1870s; and in 1871, the Progress-spiritist Society of Madrid consisted for the most part of officers from the artillery corps, including Bassols himself and the Catalan Viscount Antonio de Torres Solanot, an active participant in the Revolution of 1868 and secretary of the Revolutionary Junta of Huesca (see Abascal 1990: 147; Roca 1986 [1908]: 20). Although no sources have been found that would show opposition to military presence in spiritist ranks, one later discovers radically antimilitarist stances adopted by the movement in Catalonia. The victory of General Martínez Campos's pronouncement led to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1874 and to the renewed repression toward spiritism that burgeoned during the six-year period of democratic revolution known as the *Sexenio Democrático*. Within this context, the spiritists continued to challenge the prevailing rules, and here one finds the structuring sense of spiritism versus the con-substantially anomic process (Durkheim 1995; Duvignaud 1990) which distinguished the Industrial Revolution.

The current historical era offers thinking men a situation that is terrifying to consider. A period of transition and transformation, of renewal and abrupt upheavals, it has all the characteristics of one of those formidable crises that have placed the lives of societies in imminent danger by expelling every one of mankind's Genesiacal days on earth. The struggle of the world being born with the world that is dying; the interests of the future with the secular interests of the past, of ideas budding radiantly toward the fecundating heat of progress with old worn-out ideas, now powerless to fulfil the just aspirations of human understanding. It seems rather that those of us who have been born are being called to witness the outcome of the great drama in which the fates of coming generations are engaged.

A deep malaise that all see, that all feel, that begins in the individual, renders the family asunder and takes perturbation and disorder to the heart of societies, extending its baleful influence over the peoples in which civilization has planted its seeds. The individual seeks his own happiness,

and pinning it on practical egotism, finds he is isolated (*El Buen Sentido [Good Sense]*, No. 1, Lleida, V–1875).

The spiritists warned of a violated civilization, the results of which were not remote from the historical role played by the Church. The spiritist Josep Amigó wrote from Lleida in 1879:

Jesus Christ drove the merchants from the temple with a whip; yet the temple has been invaded once again, this time not by sellers of doves, but by those who, calling themselves heirs and continuers of the mission that brought the founder of Christianity into this world, have made the Gospel the inexhaustible source of their own dominance and profit. Leaning on a doctrine based completely on humility and poverty, they are arrogant and powerful; invoking the kindness and abnegation of He who gave His life for the good of others, they are persecutors and egotists: priding themselves on being the sole authorised interpreters of a purely spiritual religion and its most loyal followers, they have emerged into a cult rich in outer trimmings and ceremonies, one that captivates the senses without improving men's moral conditions (Amigó i Pellicer 1879: 3).

Apart from the fact that no spiritist text consulted questions Christ's use of force in driving the merchants from the temple, another paradox in terms of the discourse concerning the rejection of violence, and also in terms of its practical or theoretical legitimization, emerges within the sphere of relations with the Catholic Church itself. As heirs to the gnostic and later protestant contestation of the rites and ceremonial worship, of the places of worship, liturgies and sacramental formulas, the formalism of which was perceived as a refutation of 'the inner adoration of the Supreme Cause' (*La Unión Espiritista [The Spiritist Union]*, Year II, No. 4, Barcelona, IV–1897), the spiritists rejected the Catholic clergy's monopolization of the ritual efficacy of its acts as the link between the divine order and earthly ordination. Nor did they accept that the efficacy of the sacraments should be based, not on the symbolic level, but rather on the real, on that of nature itself. In accordance with Weber's postulation, the confrontation between the stasis of sacred law with the dynamism of sacred conviction, a process that Delgado (2001) examines in depth concerning the Spanish iconoclastic context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This marks a departure from the iconoclastic interpretation of anti-

ritualism proposed by Mary Douglas (1978 [1970]), to the explanation focused on anti-sacramentalism particularly by Gregory and Mary Bateson (1994 [1987]).

In his *Efemérides Leridanas (Lleida Milestones)*, Pleyan de Porta provided an eyewitness account of how, on 2 October 1879, an anticlerical spiritist demonstration stood waiting for a group of pilgrims returning from montserrat at the Lleida railway station: the spiritists assaulted and dispersed the catholic group by ringing cowbells and jeering, ‘Beeeee, Beeeee, Beeeee!!! (‘Well done, well done, well doooooone!’). Circumstantially, they did so despite persecutions, prohibitions, the closing of centers and publications, fines, episodes of censorship and the banishing of their most outstanding members of the period. Nonetheless, over and above this precise context, one gains an inkling of the pressing urgency with which the Catholic use of religion was challenged, inseparable from a Reform that reverberated in Spain with centuries of delay. The aggressiveness of spiritist texts toward Catholicism, and vice versa, was deeply rooted. One need only glance at this excerpt from one of the papers discussed and approved at the ‘First International Spiritist Congress’, held in Barcelona in 1888 and attended by 70 delegations from all across Europe and America:

The altar of divinity stands in the conscience, in the very soul, in the conscious self and the responsible self. Progress is a moral law that gravitates over us all, constantly, precisely and evenly, and we shall never study it thoroughly enough despite its being based on the loftiest principles of justice and wisdom, constituting, as it were, the faithful in the balance of creation, and thus, of unquestionable influence on peoples and humanities; on societies and men of all times, all ages, all eras and all generations; contrasting with the thousands upon thousands of positive religions for the benefit of the powerful, to whom they promise further reward. Hence, according to this latter perspective, it is not only unsatisfactory, but also false in all the falseness of the law, and likewise its religious and social principles.

[...] If the God we accept is the one described, albeit vaguely; if His temple is the entirety of the work of universal creation, and if the altar stands in one's innermost being, then there is a need to do away with those places of indifference forever, be they temporary or perpetual, that relegate souls to the neglect of the true God (First International Spiritist Congress 1888: 155–156).

Through the destiny of the soul, the symbolic proposals of the spirits – according to the spiritists, sources of their own theorizations – would emphasize the experiential universe and the categories of thought to the extreme of justifying the physical disappearance of churches.

LIMINALITY: BODIES THAT CREATE, BODIES THAT DESTROY

Understanding spiritist faith and reason to be an impulse that triggers action brings to mind Spinoza's notion of bodies and minds acting together to recognize love in reason and thus detonate political squalor completely. Applying Buxó's approaches to passion to the purpose of this study, it was from such a passion, 'producer of joy and misery, pain and pleasure,' that the spiritist medium invalidated the dichotomies of 'mind and body, soul and matter, thought and action,' because this passion flourished as an 'incentive to satisfy the deepest desires,' closer to 'inner feelings than to moral standards' prevailing, rationalizing what reason would understand to be 'contradictory and incomprehensible.' A passion that conferred 'heroes, sages, mystics' – and also possessed – inhabitants of 'the earth with invisible powers, miracles and the marvellous' (Buxó 2000: 9–11), which Duvignaud calls for as an affirmation of life or a pathway for death, the immensity of an infinite virtuality, or also the space of the power that justly places human beings in the world. As Güyük, the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire wrote to Pope Innocent IV in 1246, 'If man is not the power of God, what might he do in this world?' (Hell 1999: 7) Strength of God is in the bodies of the world, repositories of human passion are constituted in factors of destruction and creation. Perhaps, for this reason Walter Benjamin observed in his *Writings* that 'Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the communist manifesto' (in Vinyes 1989: 98–99). A person died in the medium to be reincarnated as another being: throughout the process of separation, threshold and aggregation in the form of rebirth, he might tremble, shout, speak in other languages: in the passage from society to the body being released, 'One dies into nature to be reborn from it' (Turner 1988: 532), shaking off his social conditions and,

thus, his social determinants (nature knows neither forms, nor concepts and hence no species, as Nietzsche would postulate). That is what the ‘danger’ of mediumship consists of. What then is the space of liminality? These are two parallel societies in mutual confrontation, one being prestructured, the other being destructured, both convulsively, in a state of perennial instability. The principle of existence lies in evolution, which embraces opposites: Quoting Hegel, Turner observes, ‘in “yes” and “no” all things consist’ (Turner 1999 [1967]: 107). This expression of the spiritist mystic principle, which almost led to the public burning of Jacob Böhme in 1625 for having affirmed that heaven and hell dwelled in each of us, would show the extent to which trembling became the spiritists' social place. Hence the dialectic of passage oscillates between maintaining systems of thought and social models and, moreover, its own clarification: perpetual openness toward a life in which the old and new would synthesize, the fruit of an ongoing, progressive crystallization, which, out of discord and fission, would aspire to other harmonies, new fusions tending to be unstable and elusive at all times, marked by agitation. Practicing spiritists linked the perpetual mutations to which the universal, mediumistic and human planes were subjected, completely interdependent. To the extent that handling conflicts with the spirits became a guideline for acting with regard to earthly conflicts, the resulting transformations operated on three levels: in the space of the spirits themselves; in that of the spiritists' interior, and in that of their public and private social action. How to expel violence from all these social ebbs and flows? During the First International Spiritist Congress in Barcelona in 1888, Huelbes Temprado, one of the speakers at the third session prompted ‘hearty applause’ by stating:

And moreover, spiritism, as you well know, is not only religious. It is complete, revolutionary, more revolutionary than all that is considered revolutionary in the world, because it includes them all. Pacific, yes; bloodless, that is true; yet spiritism's action in the spheres that existence embraces must be sweeping, overwhelming; we would like to smash this society and organize it again (First International... 1888: 242).

Following the premise that society, at the moment of self-awareness, was conceived as something sacred, and that a fetichization came about in social relations also turned toward change –

deepening the ties that bind the individual and society, there where God appeared as the figurative expression of the latter – the spiritist effervescence denoted the self-transcending capacity of vast collectives through knowledge and experience. Each spiritist center set up a library and gave classes so that workers could learn to read and write. Renewed language, situated in the origin of thought, would generate other ways of ‘conceiving the world’. This was the driving force behind the movement, these were the reasons for its success: it responded to the need to formulate transformations concerning reality – let us recall Durkheim's premise according to which beliefs are not active if not shared. According to the spiritists, knowing oneself meant seeing oneself in the experiences of others: if the path of every person is autonomous, their common destiny unites them: transforming themselves in order to transform the world. Hence the relevance of Mannheim's asking, ‘Must it be assumed that only that is politics which is preparation for insurrection? Is not the continual transformation of conditions and men also action?’ (Mannheim 1987 [1929]: 181) Herein lies the meaning that enabled the shift from individualism to collectivist social projects to take place.

Those latter years of the nineteenth century saw the unleashing of a profound crisis in social integration; society was shifting from a past surmounted to a future as yet unconquered, and yet it lacked a common system of ideas that would solidify and establish the identity of the collective in separated societies – also on an intra-European scale between the colonized and the colonizing. Nevertheless, faced with a desacralized environment, in which the social system did not recognize the sacred, the compensation for the profane, which is the sacred, continued to exist in the everyday world. Through the conceptual spiritist system, a significant part of society could potentially clarify itself, and situate its beginning and end in order to maintain itself as a shared system. The images tossed into the spiritist arena were not, of course, those of the totem, but rather of the spirits that came into contact with the mediums, responding to the spiritist call to society (particular varieties of general operations: classifying reality from its different levels). There were mediums (and charlatans and fakes) everywhere – at least in the making – the demand for the exceptional was extraordinary, and in heaven the spirits ebbed and flowed en masse, at times with great violence. According to the spiritists, it was the same violence

that, stoked by egotism, caused people to tear each other apart so as to obtain a gain understandable only in social spaces in which everything was apt to be commodified. The ‘cooperative republic of work’ and the ‘adoration of the golden calf’ became exclusive paths that magnified the tragedy. Social disintegration was caused more by this irreconcilable antagonism, in the breakdown of the cultural environment of a proletariat subjected to extraordinarily intense processes of dizzying change, from the country to the city, from the farm to the factory (Polanyi 1989 [1944]; Duvignaud 1977), than in an economic exploitation of extremely violent scope. To understand the scope of the implicit costs (material and household precariousness, malnutrition, sickness, death) in the development of the urban phenomenon in Barcelona within the context of the Industrial Revolution, see two classics of the nineteenth: Laureà Figuerola (*Estadística de Barcelona en 1849 / Statistics of Barcelona in 1849*) and Ildefons Cerdà (*Estadística de la clase obrera en Barcelona en 1865 / Statistics of the Working Class in Barcelona in 1865*). Regarding the theory of this in relation to working-class wages and women's labor conditions, see Borderías (2001). Balcells (1984) certifies the increase in the child mortality rate in Barcelona from 1857 to 1882 by 7 per cent (up to 36 per thousand, higher than the Spanish average) owing to boys and girls as young as six years of age being forced to work 10- to 13-hour days in factories, workshops, foundries and mines, thus infringing legislative enactments such as that of 1873.

In contrast, the God of the spiritists was not violent, unlike the periods in which first Catholicism and later Protestantism and Calvinism had exerted an iron-like social grip, identifying the presence of spirits with evil, in a context in which God appeared as an angry, resentful deity (which would guide the accusations of witchcraft by the Inquisition). In contrast, the spiritist claim that God was a god of love and not of vengeance, from whom rage and ire must be mitigated, would imply ‘that the spirits of the dead were attributed with an essentially benevolent nature’ (Wilson 1970: 171). In fact, the spiritists themselves maintained that ‘The God who accepts spiritism is He who creates souls for Progress, not that vengeful God who hurls them into hell’ (First International... 1888: 151). And, despite this, a space was reserved in the spiritist corpus for the ‘basest, most maleficent’ entities, those that occupied the lowest point on the scale of evolution, ‘impure’ souls clinging to

earthly planes even after 'becoming disembodied.' In fact, both Kardec and his French and Catalan continuers of the nineteenth century and the different European propagandists of the twentieth century reported the 'dangers' of the 'perverse uses' of spiritism and the ominous connotations of violence. By establishing a parallel between the gods of a pantheon and the spirits that empowered mediums, it might be worth saying that the invisible entities would work 'as signals which in their reciprocal relations, have for meaning a set of categories by means of which men represent to themselves their own society' (Sperber 1988 [1974]: 17). The specific moral categories attributed to spirits were simultaneously applied to mediums and practising spiritists in general, on the one hand as a dynamic reflection of society, and on the other as a manifestation of the temporal and evolutionary state of every being, from which he must forge his own path, 'True life lies in erraticity,' wrote one of the most outstanding Catalan mediums of the nineteenth century, the Catalan native Miquel Vives (1903: 87). In short, it was a question of ordering the relationships of the supernatural powers (souls and spirits) with human beings, which in itself constitutes the dominance of religious action (Weber 1993 [1922]: 330), in the spiritist case with an overwhelming dynamism.

Taking up Sperber's argument (1988) that a context has to be interpreted in the light of the symbolic phenomena surrounding it, one might wonder why so few mediumistic communications have been found that goad one to literally 'smash society' – often, that same content is expressed otherwise – in order to erect a new society in its place and why, in contrast, the acceptance of the spiritist militancy is massive when these words are pronounced. Perhaps because of many meanings and functions that the devotees gave to the communications: that very multiplicity that lies at the base of symbolic action, even more if understood that symbols alone would have neither definition nor meaning, since it is the meanings surrounding something that make it a symbol. Hence the spiritist reflection that 'All men, whatever their condition and reciprocal relationships, can make rules of exceptional purity and wisdom in spiritist doctrine. Our social stagnation is merely the consequence of the moral malaise; good laws do not exist, morality is nothing more than a fiction, a dogmatic artifice' (Vives 1903: 167). Within a framework extolling tolerance ('How can we love our brothers if we don't even want to tolerate their opinions?') (*Ibid.*), social energy

strives to head in an unquestionably transforming direction. The social environment is the Western world itself, the historical revelation of an appalling journey, a compulsive social museumification of horror, something that takes on a variety of implications here. If the task of trying to understand how people's innateness is expressed proves complex, 'his aptitude for constructing, transforming and reprogramming' (Buxó 1988: 54), it is unsettling to witness the violent displays of such constructions, transformations and reprogrammings, occasionally highly destructive.

Over the earth, blotted with crimes, wafts a halitus of hatred, of anger, of cursedness. In the dark caverns of crime, hearts, like volcanoes, vomit forth streams of lava and each head is a dynamite bomb. Shrapnel lies hidden beneath the skulls. In the subsoil of societies lie ghastly galleries opened by those dreadful miners of hatred. Now and then violent shocks are felt accompanied by muffled stampedes. It is the beast that stirs in the depth of its cavern, Cerberus who barks, Satan who roars (*La dinamita social (Thanatosis) [Social Dynamite (Thanatosis)]. Supplement XVI to Los Albores de la Verdad (The Dawn of Truth)*, Propaganda Committee of 'La Buena Nueva de Gràcia', Barcelona, XII-1904, 1).

VIOLENCE: IN HEAVEN AS IT IS ON EARTH

Spirits also roar. And fiercely, even too fiercely (at least for some). In 1896, France saw the publication of J. Bouvéry's book *Le Spiritisme et l'anarchie devant la science et la philosophie* (Paris, Chamuel), in which the author called for brotherhood, love of goodness and regeneration, yet maintained that 'spirits have the right and the power to annihilate each other.' The idea of a sliding towards devastating violence in the heavenly world that would be reflected in earthly action was contested by spiritists in Barcelona and Minorca, who described the proposal as a 'capital error' (*Revista de Estudios Psicológicos [Journal of Psychological Studies]*, Barcelona, XI-1896?; *La Estrella Polar [The Polar Star]*, Year II, No. 19, Maó, XII-1896). And yet it was those very spiritists who defined the greatest harm, the most painful wound that could be inflicted on a person, to be depriving him 'of following the impulses of his conscience and the dictates of his reason in terms of his relations with the divine' (*La Estrella Polar*, Year II, No. 19, Maó, XII-1896). Later, when the presence of associations that blended

anarchism and spiritism began to burgeon in different areas of Occitania (Lyon, Carcassonne, Narbonne, and Marseille). In 1887, the weekly *Journal des Morts* began to be published with Marie Adrien at the helm; in 1890 *Le Christ Anarchiste*, by Ernest Ferroul, the same person who in 1907 raised the black flag at Narbonne City Hall during the rebellions of wine growers in which the police substation went up in flames (for French spiritism, and the references given here, see Ladous 1992 [1987]: 61–65), which roaring spirits did these men follow? Where were those roars directed? Trapped in the leap into the unknown involved in moving either towards God or the Revolution, their action was decisively undertaken towards a vertigo that was conceived as less risky than a poorly attempted social normalcy accumulating existences pre-condemned wandering owing to the morbid establishment of misery and exploitation. That vertigo contained the germs of the new world, the real world they would announce with messianic overtones, for example, through the following mediumistic communication transcribed in the spiritist journal *La Cabaña*:

Signs of decrepitude in customs and laws that are no longer in touch with modern ideas can be seen everywhere. The old beliefs, slumbering for centuries, seem to wish to be awakened from their secular torpor and are amazed to see themselves surprised by new beliefs emanating from philosophers and thinkers of this century and the previous one. The bastardised system of a world that was mere sham is crumbling before the dawn of the real world, the new world. The law of solidarity has shifted to the inhabitants of nations to vanquish the entire earth; furthermore this law, so sage, so progressive, this, in a word, divine law has not limited itself to this one result; creeping into the hearts of great men, it has taught them that not only is it necessary for the improvement of your mansion, but must also be extended to all the worlds of your solar system, to be spread from there throughout all the worlds of infinity.

This law of universal solidarity is beautiful because it contains this sublime maxim: All for one and one for all (*La Cabaña (The Cabin)*, Year I, No. 6, Barcelona, VI–1887 (an excerpt).

That apology for cosmopolitanism and universal solidarity, capable of citing the very Solar System, was based on a principle that took on greater relevance in view of the Western evolutionary context:

‘There are no savages,’ proclaimed the spiritists in their repeated condemnation of state borders and legal-administrative limits imposed by force:

Everything, then, encourages us to love and protect one another: the need for progress; for opening our souls to every great and noble aspiration; the solidarity that unites us; the need we all have of it; our heart, our reason, even our interest. [...]

In Progress's fight against ignorance, superstition, pride, scepticism, the barbarian attacks by outmoded, decaying institutions, the dogmatism of the official Science, the intolerance of the constituted Churches, the invectives of the foes of freedom of conscience, the taunts of the ignorant and envious, the vile arts of the wretches who spread distrust and hatred between nations, between brothers... (First International... 1888: 156, 161–162)

Catalan spiritism repudiated institutionalized social violence. Yet at the same time it was also faced with a dilemma: though it did not oppose the organized anarchistic response to the economic and military despotism of the bourgeois state over society, it continued to find points in common with the motivations of libertarian activists. The bonds between spiritists and anarchists had been building in Catalonia – also by fits and starts – from the act of faith of 1861 to the post-Civil War period in the twentieth century (question addressed in Horta 2001 and 2004; see Barrera 1980 and Reyes 1933 – for the links among spiritism, freemasonry and anarchism, Sánchez 1990 is essential reading). During that prolonged period, the spiritist siren songs with respect to the libertarians were many:

When I am away from here and meet anarchists, Fenians and nihilists, instead of combating them, I tell them, ‘Come to us; you will find in us the strength you are lacking, the only logical bridge between the abstract reason that moves you and the practical application of your wishes’. [...] to all of the lowly, to all of the disenfranchised, to all of the outlawed, to all of the dreamers we open our arms; our feeling is that he who most suffers is he who most needs our doctrine, because he is most in need of love and solace (First International... 1888: 242–243).

It was the gut despair, the structural disconsolation of a large part of the Catalan proletariat that explained the use of violence

advocated by certain anarchist sectors in the 1890s: libertarian violence sprang up from the merciless situation of impoverished, brutally repressed popular environments. In the 1860s, the development of anarcho-syndicalism among Catalan workers would gradually intensify (in 1867 worker groups in Barcelona sent a message of support to the Second Congress of the International Workers Association (IWA) in Lausanne; three years later the Spanish Regional Federation of the IWA (AIT) was founded in Barcelona): the workers' labor demand was put forward as a means to fight for social revolution, merging Bakuninist thought and social action. In the 1890s, the theoretical and practical structuring of anarcho-syndicalism was incontestable: one postulated apoliticism (rejection of parliamentary action), direct action (negotiation without intermediaries between the forces of capital and labor), and the use of general strike and mobilizations in order to establish a classless society (the bases that explain the creation of the newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* (Workers' Solidarity) in Barcelona in 1907, by the Regional Confederation of Labour of Catalonia of the General Confederation of Labour of Spain, in 1910, and by the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) within a year. The recurrent use of violent actions by certain libertarian sectors responded, more than to 'propaganda for its own sake,' to its powerlessness with respect to social realization of the revolution in a ferociously repressive milieu in which the exploitation of the proletariat was despotic and their villainous conditions for survival, seeing their most basic demands quashed (it is no coincidence that the etymology of the term 'terrorism' refers to an action by the State). Here, we might quote Núñez Florencio (1983: 190–197) in reference to the 'terror tactics' that Catalan anarchists employed as early as 1884. Of the many actions undertaken in the final decade of the nineteenth century in Barcelona, a few of the most significant were those taken against General Martínez Campos (September 24, 1893), wounded by a bomb thrown by the lithographer Paulí Pallàs, who was executed by a firing squad in the fortress at Montjuïc (October 15, 1893); against the audience seated in the stalls of the Liceo opera house (November 7, 1893) by Santiago Salvador, executed in the same manner and in the same fortress together with six of the 27 comrades put on trial (November 21, 1894); and against those attending a Corpus Christi procession (June 7, 1896). All this prompted fierce repression against the worker activists, many of whom were imprisoned in

that fortress – targeted for the systematic bombing of Barcelona throughout the nineteenth century as a reaction by the government to the populace's many demands. One of the Catalan anarchists imprisoned in 1893, despite expressing his antipathy to violent action, was the writer and typographer Josep Lluñas i Pujals (founder of the Catalan-language libertarian magazines *La Teula* in 1880 and *La Tramontana* from 1887 to 1895, author of different pamphlets on the pressing need for social revolution, linked in certain periods to the theatre, music, and acrobatics and gymnastics). Lluñas had previously shown, in 1890, his rejection of the actions of the early 1880s which the government authorities attributed to *La Mano Negra* or The Black Hand the supposed existence of which justified the arrest of 6,000 Andalusian day laborers by 1884, despite there being no proof of their belonging to the supposed organization, which would lead to its being considered by many to be a police frame-up job (see Kaplan 1977: 153–154, regarding the contrasting interpretations by G. Waggoner and C. Lida with respect to the existence of *La Mano Negra*), which he felt jeopardized the struggle by the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region, which banned these actions in 1883.

The legislative of the repression took shape in 1896 in the *Law for the Repression of Anarchism* promulgated by the Spanish government, which occasioned what became known as the Montjuïc Trial: over 400 arrests, tortures (the intensity of which triggered a bitter popular outcry) and the promulgation of eight death sentences, three of which were commuted. The libertarian reaction took place in 1897: the Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, was assassinated to avenge the executions, and in Barcelona an attempt was made on the life of Narciso Portas, a lieutenant in the Civil Guard in reprisal for the torture he had inflicted on the prisoners. The spiritist protest against these executions was absolute, and the revulsion in Europe, widespread:

[Capital punishment] goes against God's Law which states: THOU SHALT NOT KILL. It runs contrary to civilisation and proper conduct, which oppose it. It is contrary to justice, because capital punishment involves carrying out precisely what it prohibits. It is inhumane, because it denies forgiveness, even though through repentance and mending his ways, the prisoner may be worthy of it. And it sows the seeds of hatred and destruction in society; because the act

of vengeance involved in carrying out capital punishment can only stir up violence, by virtue of natural laws, although occult and not well enough known.

[...] are the execution of the wretched Silvestre Lluís, on the 15th of last month and the firing squad shootings of 4 May going to bring about a lowering of the crime rate and calm, peace and serenity to consciences? History and experience would indicate the contrary.

For the good of progress, for the love of mankind and justice, let us propagate the need for the abolition of the death penalty and of all irredeemable punishments. Let us hate the crime, yet pity and protect the criminal (*La Unión Espiritista*, Year II, No. 7, Barcelona, VII-1897).

This was a perception that arose from positions adopted years before. In 1880, Catalan spiritists protested that capital punishment removed its victim from the order, preventing him from evolving and being reintegrated into society, doing away with the possibility of his undergoing 'a regime of purification, of reparation through struggle, work, abnegation,' since – according to spiritist doctrine – one did not die, meaning that the karmic nature of reincarnation would cause any problems not solved in earlier lives to materialize once again in new existences (*La Luz del Porvenir*, no. 32, Barcelona, 30-xii-1880). Spiritist support of the disadvantaged was backed by the prisoners – whose conditions for survival in the jails were harshly criticized in the movement's publications; for example, on March 31, 1891 (the 23rd anniversary of Allan Kardec's death) 54 inmates of tarragona prison who received *la luz del porvenir* free of charge sent a letter to the magazine's editorial board, announcing their support of the spiritist cause (Domingo Soler 1990: 237–250, reproduced the complete text).

The loss of Spain's overseas colonies and the return in piteous condition – many mutilated – of urban and rural workers forced into combat, condemned to a survival as uncertain as it was precarious, revived the spiritist denunciation of slavery, wars and the terrifying violence involved in them. The response by most of Catalan society to the forced mobilization and the war of Cuba was significant: the spiritists organized and took part in public acts together with the progressives, republicans, democrats, federalists, anarchists and freemasons, and through their publications. In 1896, The Universal Brotherhood spiritist society, in Sabadell, called on the Span-

ish government to end the war, and also on the Peace Arbitration League – founded in Barcelona in 1891 under a similar name, as will be immediately seen – for it to intervene so as to resolve conflict through dialogue. The ‘First International spiritist Congress,’ held in Barcelona in 1888, had unanimously approved the project of statutes to create the International Arbitration and Peace Association with the intention of settling conflicts between countries through the use of dialogue (Horta 2004), setting the organizational bases to develop the Catalan pacifist and anti-military movement. On April 14, 1889, with the presence in Barcelona of European progressive representatives (among them, English and Italian parliamentarians), spiritists, anarchists, freemasons and the country's political left assembled in the Novedades Theatre. The spiritist Torres Solanot acted as vice-chairman of the organizing committee, and a freemason, Rossend Arús, as chairman. Amalia Domingo Soler and the aforementioned Josep Llunas i Pujals were also present. A crowd packed the hall to overflowing: the meeting called for the abolition of permanent armies, the establishment of arbitration to settle international conflicts peacefully, the constitution of a federation of free peoples in Europe for the harmonic development of all individual and collective interests. Moreover, the International League for Peace and Universal Brotherhood was created, ‘the most outstanding players were the anarchist and spiritist sectors’ (Sánchez 1990: 340). The spiritists understood that the popular classes, ‘the great mass of labour,’ were the principal victims of the war, forced to act on behalf of the ambition of dominance and exploitation of the minorities that promoted the war, ‘The crowds will be forced to distinguish what kills from what lifts up’ (‘Contra la guerra’ [Against War] in *La Unión Espiritista*, Year II, No. 2, Barcelona, II – 1897). In the words – reproduced in Catalan spiritist publications – of Cuban spiritist members, involved fighting for Independence and in denouncing the Catholic Church's role as yet another colonizing force:

War on war! As spiritists we must all repeat in unison, and do our utmost for the restoration of peace. [...]

To those who take pleasure in war, let us call for peace. We are all brothers so, for God's sake, let's not destroy each other! Let's not destroy each other. [...] Those of you, who are fighting on one side and the other, lay down your fratricidal arms; wave the flag of peace. Be Christian, be human

beings, be men and embrace each another as brothers (*La Revista Espiritista de La Habana*, Havana, 1-I-1897).

While rejecting war by defying government repression, the spiritists defended the creation of a Society of Nations that settled conflicts through dialogue and recognized all peoples' right to be free. In 1899, the spiritists of the Barcelona Centre for Psychological Studies took up a petition requesting that the mayor of the city 'ensure a pension for the capital's repatriated citizens rendered incapacitated for work, and jobs for the partially incapacitated' (*La Unión Espiritista*, Year IV, No. 4, Barcelona, IV-1899). Given Barcelona City Council's silence, the response by *La Unión Espiritista* was firm, 'How unfortunate it is that matters of this nature do not deserve the attention of our representatives and yet they prove so diligent with regard to other matters of no importance whatsoever. That is why everything goes so well.' The demand for insurance for those home from the overseas colonies was part of the spiritist project of organizing mutual aid and development societies as an economic model. Today this is a spiritist labor cooperative in Catalonia and another in Andalusia: the former succeeded the spiritist association *La Voz del Alma* (The Voice of the Soul), founded in Barcelona in 1904. But, returning once again to the spiritist perception of violence and its many manifestations, Josep Costa, a spiritist member from Capellades, summarized the question thusly in 1897, 'We cannot understand how, as long as the disastrous divorce between capital and labour exists, the true peace and harmony can be possible, which engender that longed-for happiness.' According to Costa, ignorance ('a moral shadow causing individual and collective darkness'), the economic yoke ('which robs the worker of his dignity'), wars ('Blots on humanity, products of hatred'), political-administrative borders ('the reason for divorce between peoples'), and the separation of capital and labour ('making peace and harmony impossible') (Josep Costa i Pomés, 'Les nostres aspiracions' [Our Aspirations], *La Unión Espiritista*, Year II, No. 11, Barcelona, XI-1897), it was all real and, yet, could be surmounted by individual and collective action. In the words of Rogelio Fernández Güell, 'Those official massacres known as wars have their ardent defenders, and those who are horrified by the explosion of a bomb [by anarchist attacks] burn with eagerness to find out the details of a bloody battle.' Reflecting a feeling that could be extended to the

Catalan spiritists on the whole, 'There are anarchists who neither preach hellfire nor throw bomb,' while other criminals, protected by the law, are guilty of practising another type of what he describes as '*terrorist anarchism*.' Who?

The millionaire who quibbles over giving a beggar a crust of bread [...]. The miser who prevents money from circulating [...]. The priest who neglects the teachings of the sublime master and covers himself with glory by exploiting people's gullibility [...]. The judge who sells his conscience for a handful of coins [...]. The head of state that deprives his citizens of their freedom and squanders public funds [...]. [And, unquestionably, opposition to violence included violent anarchist enterprises]. A dynamite bomb may explode; yet society merely goes on; events follow their natural course. Give the chariot of progress the speed of light; humanity will have fallen behind, and it is she who you must overtake.

It is not dynamite that makes peoples move forward. There is no more powerful combatant than the sister of charity nor is there any more sublime revolutionary than the schoolmaster [...]. Humanity will not be saved by shouts of anger or explosions of hatred (*La dinamita social [Thanatosis]*, 1904: 1–2).

A few months after the publication of this text, in May 1905, a failed assassination attempt against King Alfonso XIII took place in Paris; and in Madrid on 31 May 1906, Alfonso XIII and his bride Victoria Eugenia were the targets of a bomb attack from which they emerged unharmed. Both actions were blamed on the Catalan anarchist Mateu Morral, who was aided in his escape from the police by the republican journalist José Nakens, born in Seville but a resident of Madrid. Nakens was sentenced to nine years in prison and issued a pardon after two years. Both the historiography of anarchy and that of a more general slant fail to mention that Nakens was a former collaborator of the Christian-Spiritist circle of Lleida and its mouthpiece *El Buen Sentido*, in addition to writing regularly for republican and Catalan publications such as *La Campana de Gràcia* and *La Publicidad* (see Horta 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

In Catalan spiritism one witnesses the rebuttal of violence in all its forms: state, economic, individual, and also heavenly: hence the dis-

agreement between spiritists in Barcelona and Minorca with respect to the affirmation by anarcho-spiritist members in Occitania concerning the spirits' powers to annihilate each other. At the same time, in terms of the use of violence by libertarian groups, the understanding of their reasons – since their acts took place and were the result of an environment rife with injustice, – and the staunch defence of their authors once imprisoned. Yet the breaking away of a sector of anarchism towards violent actions would be counterbalanced by the spiritist call to abandon them, even though the actors themselves would be supported in that, despite fulfilling themselves socially through expressions of anger and hatred, at the same time they would be the first victims of a society founded precisely on anger and hatred. What may be useful, when interpreting the libertarian violence and that which arose within the margins of state monopoly, is the proposal synthesized by Delgado (1999: 85–91), who conceives violence as an available cultural option, and indeed as a social tool for a new sociability. Obviously, the spiritists did not assert their view of anarchist violence in such terms, in other words, they did not state that violence might become a potential factor for generating social change; on the contrary, they believed that it would delay the transformation processes. Even so, they established a causal link between a social environment based on violence and the resulting actions by certain anarchists, and then found an explanatory framework for that very libertarian practice which they eschewed.

To render such a degree of complexity understandable, perhaps greater insistence should be made on the use of trance configuring the cults of possession in the spiritist mediumship as a complete and integral social fact, which because of its nature could perform as many functions as the structural processes of the society being projected. The dynamic of Catalan spiritist trance would take those functions and structures to inconceivable limits: does not smashing society and organizing it again echo the 'all or nothing' slogan of the anomic manifestation, thus challenging all that has been instituted? The spiritists reproached the political parties for having only sought to modify people's 'earthly' conditions, whereas they intended to continue the transformations, even in the 'heavenly' states of existence. The smashing of society, thus, would not refer to nihilism, but rather to the creative force of destruction. Are not the demands of the Russian anarchist Bakunin, initiated in freema-

sonry, the same as those of the Murcian-Catalan anarchist Anselmo Lorenzo (Sánchez 1985: 25–33) and influenced by perceptions concerning time and eternity originating in ancient Gnostic contexts, which have so nourished Slavic culture?

A movement with followers who belonged to the army (in Spain) ended up becoming the vanguard of antimilitarism; those who rejected the use of arms placed themselves at the disposal of the Junta of Armament and Defence in the name of federalism, social conquests and democracy; one provided support so that those whom the State deemed ‘delinquent anarchists’ could be socially reintegrated and one worked side by side with the libertarians in the different fields of the social sphere, calling on them to take part in the very spiritist movement. It might be said that in anthropological terms, violence, like reason, appeared, not as an immutable substance, but rather as a means to an end, the symbolic expression of the intersection point of an evolutionary path... whatever it might be, perhaps another. Out of the magnitude of that ambiguity and out of the complexity with which countless maskings of contemporariness concealed heterogeneous forms of violence, one might gather that the Catalan spiritists glimpsed, perhaps inadvertently, that in the last analysis violence would mean an atrocious yet effective and unquestionably real link among members of society. A link that would have to be reversible, in accordance with its fraternal conceptions, although living dramatically in its present and in theory temporarily, yet a link nevertheless. Surmountable only through a non-violent smashing of society in order to build a new world. The fruits of their action would emerge vehemently in the Second Republic, which, despite its renewing its victory in the election of 1936, only an unconstitutional military uprising would, once again, defeat. Among its victims, once again, spiritists and anarchists, or the chronic impossibility of Spain's being capable of integrating, peacefully and democratically, ‘another’ sociability.

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