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Heather Wolffram

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Abstract

During the Weimar years, Germany's police experimented with a wide range of new technologies and forensic techniques. Among the more unusual of these was so-called criminal telepathy (*Kriminaltelepathie*): the practice of using a telepath or clairvoyant to shed light on unsolved crimes. Placing the emergence of the criminal telepath in the context of interwar crime and occultism, and the police interest in these occult practitioners in the context of professionalization, this article maintains that the Weimar police's brief flirtation with the occult was consistent with, rather than antagonistic to, their efforts to professionalize through science. This article also explores contemporary critiques of this practice, arguing that the bitter polemics against criminal telepathy by men such as Albert Hellwig and Albert Moll resulted from their belief that the activities of clairvoyants endangered the claims of criminalists, jurists and psychiatrists to expertise in the nascent fields of criminology and criminalistics.

Keywords: crime, criminology, Germany, hypnosis, occultism, police

In October 1921, the periodical *German Forester* (*Deutscher Förster*) — a publication normally dedicated to matters pertaining to forestry — featured a peculiar article involving murder and the occult. Its author, a Berlin-based detective named Busdorf, described his investigation into the murder of a forest warden near the small Saxon town of Mügeln in May 1921. While Busdorf's inquiry had begun in predictable fashion with his team conducting a search of the homes of local poachers, it took a surprising turn after the case faltered for lack of evidence. Although the calibre of the murder weapon, a 7.65mm pistol, was ascertained, Busdorf and his team were unable to locate either trace evidence, such as fibres and footprints, or witnesses, despite the offer of a 3000-Mark reward.¹ Frustrated by the failure of these standard forensic and investigatory measures, the prosecuting attorney sent word to Leipzig summoning Luise Diederich, a clairvoyant, and Marie Hessel, her sister and

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1 Heinrich Hornung, 'Die forensische Bedeutung des Hellsehens und der Gedankenübertragung', *Archiv für Kriminologie* 76 (1924), 262.

hypnotist, who had ostensibly enjoyed success in similar cases. The detective and the prosecuting attorney held four sittings with the sisters in which the clairvoyant Diederich provided a detailed description of the circumstances surrounding the murder, part of the perpetrator's name, the location of his house, information about his accomplice and the whereabouts of the murder weapon.² On investigation of these claims, items belonging to the victim and a pistol of the same calibre as the murder weapon were found in the possession of two poachers matching the clairvoyant's description. Both men were taken into custody to await trial in the district court.³

Busdorf's tale, with its mixture of crime, clairvoyance and modern policing techniques, was by no means unique during the Weimar Republic. So-called criminal telepaths (*Kriminaltelepathen*) — those individuals whose clairvoyant powers putatively allowed them insight into criminal acts — began to appear in Germany following 1918, seemingly materializing from the social, economic and political rubble left in the wake of the war and revolution.⁴ While the magnetic somnambules and spiritualist mediums of the nineteenth century had on occasion titillated their audiences with the details of criminal acts, it was not until the interwar period that occultists began to specialize in detection and that the authorities began to take more than a punitive interest in this and other occult practices.⁵ It is clear, not only from articles in contemporary newspapers and periodicals such as the *German Forester*, but also from the records of police departments throughout Prussia and a number of other German states, that these newly emerged 'occult criminalists' pestered the police, bombarding them with unsolicited information and offers of help. In a 1921 double murder case in Heidelberg, for example, the police and the prosecuting attorney received so many offers of occult assistance that they feared important evidence would disappear in the time spent following them

2 Ibid., 263.

3 Ibid., 266.

4 Criminal telepathy appears to have been a largely German phenomenon. In England, for example, as the Society for Psychical Research told the German jurist Albert Hellwig, there were no well-attested cases of criminal telepathy. See Letter from the Society for Psychical Research to Albert Hellwig, 18 July 1924, Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen allgemein. Korrespondenz, 1919–1929, Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (hereafter IGPP). The English psychical researcher Harry Price noted, however, that there were a small number of English dowers who used their talents to locate bodies and stolen goods: see Harry Price, *Fifty Years of Psychical Research: A Critical Survey* (London 1939), 222. In England, the problem appears to have been the retention of old witchcraft laws, which prevented occultists from setting up in business in the manner they did in Germany. Alexandra Lembert's work, however, has demonstrated that clairvoyant detectives did feature quite prominently in English detective fiction. See Alexandra Lembert, "'Thoughts are Things': Magical Objects, Objective Magic and Sax Rohmer's *The Dream Detective* (1920)", in Elmar Schenkel and Stefan Welz (eds), *Magical Objects: Things and Beyond* (Berlin 2007), 127–44.

5 On the clairvoyance of magnetic somnambulists and spiritualist mediums, see Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, CT, and London 1993), 172–8, 213–29.

up.⁶ While the traditional response of the police to such occult chicanery had been to prosecute its practitioners for fraud or, in the southern states, including Baden, Bavaria and Hesse, to charge them with charlatanry (*Gaukelei*), the interwar period witnessed a strange collision of detection and the occult which led police forces in several German states to carry out tests with clairvoyants in an effort to establish their efficacy in the nascent field of forensics.⁷ Although by any statistical measure the use of criminal telepaths by the Weimar police was insignificant, the fierce critiques of its inclusion in the criminalist's arsenal suggest that occult detection complicated and competed with the claims of others to epistemic authority and professional competency in the area of crime and detection. The study of this strange phenomenon, therefore, might offer the historian a new perspective on the epistemological and methodological tensions surrounding the professionalization of policing and allied fields in interwar Germany.

Busdorf's article, like those briefly mentioned by His-Huey Liang in his work on the Berlin police during the Weimar Republic and by Patrick Wagner in his history of the German criminal police in the interwar and National Socialist eras, provides an intriguing glimpse of the Weimar police's flirtation with the occult and poses a number of interesting questions. What, for instance, was it that criminal telepaths actually did? What set of circumstances precipitated their emergence following the first world war? How should we interpret the use of these occult practitioners by the police? And why did certain contemporary critics become so enraged both by the activities of criminal telepaths and their portrayal in the press? A small group of historians working on the history of crime and policing and the history of occultism in the German context have gone some way towards addressing these questions. Liang, for example, cites the repeated attempts of the Berlin police to employ criminal telepaths and assess their forensic utility as evidence of the force's desire to keep abreast of changing tastes, fashions and technologies.⁸ What Liang points to here are not only the efforts of the Berlin police to forge better relations with the public through greater tolerance and in some cases utilization of popular culture, but also their adoption of the latest techniques and technologies, including putative occult detection, as a marker of increasing professionalism.⁹ Similarly, Wagner connects the police interest in criminal telepathy with the use of nascent tech-

6 Angelika Brieschke, "Ein so klägliches Bild ist von keinem Kriminaltelepathen Bekannt", Ein Helseher-Prozess in Württemberg in den 1920er Jahren', unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Tübingen, 2001, 61.

7 In some German states, most notably Bavaria, Baden and Hesse, occultists faced prosecution under so-called *Gaukelei* (charlatanry) laws, which stated that anyone who accepted money or gifts for occult services could be fined or imprisoned. In other states, including Prussia, occultists tended to be charged with fraud, a conviction for which depended on proving the defendant's bad faith. See Albert Hellwig, 'Helsehen als strafbare Gaukelei', *Archiv für Strafrecht* 71 (1926), 125.

8 His-Huey Liang, 'The Berlin Police and the Weimar Republic', *Journal of Contemporary History* 4(4) (1969), 160.

9 *Ibid.*, 159–61.

nologies. He argues for the existence of a deep-seated ambivalence on the part of many Weimar criminalists about the transition from traditional police work, with its reliance on witnesses, to those new forms of detection and identification dependent on arcane forensic methods.¹⁰ Wagner maintains that interest in and debate over criminal telepathy was a strange excrescence of this uncertainty about scientific methods of identification.¹¹ In this way, the work of both Liang and Wagner suggests that the brief fascination of the Weimar police with criminal telepathy might be best understood in the context of their pursuit of professional status through both technological and theoretical innovation.

Those scholars with an interest in the history of German occultism, a field that has only recently escaped its early preoccupation with the occult roots of nazism to reveal the cultural, political and social plasticity of the modern occult movement, have studied the questions posed by criminal telepathy in somewhat more depth than historians of crime and policing.¹² Angelika Brieschke, for example, in her analysis of the 1924–6 trial of the private detective Friedrich Gern in Württemberg regards the emergence of criminal telepathy in interwar Germany as the result of a collision between two contemporary discourses: that which argued for the scientific status of occultism and that which promoted the young discipline of criminology.¹³ Criminology, she maintains, was still open to new and scientifically unproven methods during the early twentieth century; pragmatism playing a decisive role in determining which techniques were adopted and maintained. In this context, Brieschke argues, many innovations in police science, including fingerprinting and blood group analysis, seemed as mysterious as criminal telepathy when they were first introduced.¹⁴ For occultists, as Brieschke shows, this pragmatism enabled a rhetorical strategy that likened the criminal telepath to the police dog. While occultists conceded that the mechanism through which criminal telepaths gained insight into unsolved

10 Patrick Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher. Konzeptionen und Praxis der Kriminalpolizei in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg 1996), 101–2.

11 Ibid., 102.

12 Those historians who took an interest in German occultism during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s focused on the intellectual and material links between Ariosophy, a form of race occultism developed in Austria by Lanz von Liebenfels and Guido von List, and the nascent NSDAP. See, for example, George L. Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961), 81–96; Wilhelm Daim, *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab. Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels*, 3rd edn (Vienna 1994). During the 1980s, however, Nicolas Goodrick-Clarke's study of the occult roots of nazism demonstrated how tenuous these links were: see Nicolas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology. The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935* (New York 1985). This reassessment allowed a new generation of historians to consider German occultism more broadly and to explore its social, cultural and political plasticity. See, for example, Diethard Sawicki, *Leben mit den Toten: Geisterglauben und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland, 1770–1900* (Munich 2002); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore and London 2004); Priska Pytlík, *Okkultismus und moderne: Ein kulturhistorisches Phänomen und seine Bedeutung für die Literatur um 1900* (Munich 2005).

13 Brieschke, 'Klätliches Bild', op. cit., 59.

14 Ibid., 60.

crimes was unclear, they argued that the same could be said for the ability of police dogs to follow scent trails. This ignorance, occultists were quick to point out, did not exclude police dogs from the investigatory process and neither should it disqualify the criminal telepath.¹⁵ Brieschke's argument, therefore, is that, in the absence of a definitive scientific statement on the transcendental abilities of the human mind, it was reasonable not only for occultists, but also for criminologists, jurists, police officers and psychologists to consider the possible reality and utility of criminal telepathy.¹⁶

Corinna Treitel, whose recent history of German occultism has demonstrated the flexibility of occult belief and practice by highlighting its multiple links to modernist and progressive culture as well as social conservatism and reactionary politics, has treated criminal telepathy as an occult double of applied sciences such as criminology and psychology.¹⁷ Like Brieschke, she has argued that during the interwar period the new forensic terrain had no clearly established boundaries, accreditation procedures or corporate identity, and that public pressure on the police to solve crimes by any means that worked led to a pragmatism that briefly enabled criminal telepathy and modern methods of detection to coexist.¹⁸ Treitel also points to the flipside of this strange legal-occult symbiosis, which saw many criminal telepaths prosecuted for fraud. Such trials, she argues, however, often did more to promote criminal telepathy than they did to dissuade the police and the public from its use.¹⁹

The picture which emerges from the historiography of crime and policing, as well as that of modern occultism, is that following the first world war in Germany ambivalence, scientific uncertainty, pragmatism and the lack of rigid professional or disciplinary boundaries within the fields of criminology and forensics temporarily created a space in which criminal telepathy could be seriously considered by police, criminologists and jurists. In this article I intend to build on this analysis, providing a brief description of criminal telepathy and the circumstances under which it emerged in order to consider the use of criminal telepaths by the Weimar police. I will argue less, as Wagner does, that this dalliance with the occult signalled scientific uncertainty and ambivalence about technology by Weimar criminalists, and more that the use of clairvoyants by the German police formed part of their embrace of new technologies and scientific techniques in pursuit of professional status.²⁰ In the early postwar years, I maintain, the scientific status of clairvoyance and telepathy remained opaque; in fact it was by no means clear that occult and scientific knowledge would prove irreconcilable. As Brieschke and Treitel have shown, pragmatism often

15 Ibid., 56–8.

16 Ibid., 60.

17 Treitel, *Science for the Soul*, op. cit., 132–40.

18 Ibid., 144–6, 154.

19 Ibid., 148–9.

20 On the Weimar police's adoption of the latest technology, see Richard Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalisation and Politics in Weimar Germany', in Clive Emsley and Barbara Weinberger (eds), *Policing Western Europe. Politics, Professionalism, and Public Order, 1850–1940* (New York 1991), 196.

dictated the use of forensic techniques and technologies that had not undergone scientific verification, but which appeared to work. In this context, then, the utilization of criminal telepathy was consistent with, rather than antagonistic to the Weimar police's efforts at professionalization through science. Indeed, criminalists' eventual dismissal of occultism as a forensic tool appears to have been a result of clairvoyance's lack of utility rather than its lack of scientific verification. It was this scientific deficit, however, on which contemporary critics focused, lambasting not only the use of criminal telepathy and its bedfellow, lay hypnosis, but also its sensational and inaccurate portrayal in the press. Such critiques, I will argue, were the recourse of those professionals whose claims to epistemic authority in the nascent fields of criminology and forensics were threatened by criminal telepaths. The aim of their overblown discourse on the dangers of criminal telepathy was thus to make solid those professional and disciplinary boundaries that, however briefly, had enabled criminal telepaths to claim expertise in and authority over crime.

The term 'criminal telepathy' (*Kriminaltelepathie*), as it came to be used in Germany during the interwar period, referred to the practice of a medium, normally under the guidance of a hypnotist, utilizing their clairvoyant power in order to shed light on an unsolved crime. In a state of trance, the medium was asked by the hypnotist or by an audience to relate what he or she could see of the matter under investigation. These queries tended to result in a series of trance speeches in which the medium, often assuming the role of the victim, perpetrator or witness, described the circumstances surrounding the crime. These utterances typically provided a mixture of quite specific and very vague information, including impressionistic glimpses of the scene of crime, descriptions of criminals' jewellery and clothing and the location of hidden bodies and stolen goods. The stage clairvoyant Walther Höpfner's discourse on the experiences of a reluctant witness in a 1925 case involving the desecration of a corpse provides a good example of such trance outpourings:

What's that you say? A woman on her way. I hear beautiful bells ringing. There are graves. A cross, monument, an angel! There a man. Mother has frightened herself. You need have no fear. Mother says so. You know what the man looks like. You have known for a long time already and should have long ago reported it — He does nothing to you. You are 65 years old . . . You are called Vierwig, Viehrig, you live on a street with 9 letters (after apparent study) Görlitzer Street, it is a big man, a big bastard, he is no longer here. Now you can say it, he carried a big sack in front of his body — grey suit — he is 44, 39–50 years old . . . — hair white on the side, then dark — he was in Leipzig, but did not study — brown leather shoes, has a gold watch, a gold tooth, no ring, wide fingernails. His wife does not know.²¹

Höpfner's insights, conveyed to his audience in an exaggerated stage whisper while he was in a hypnotic trance, were undoubtedly dramatic, but some criminal telepaths took an even more performative approach to their work. These clairvoyants led their employers on dramatic chases through city streets

21 Auszug aus den Akten der Staatsanwaltschaft Bautzen wegen Betruges StA III 1018/25. Kriminal-Posten Tb 650/25. Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen/Fall 'Höpfner', IGPP.

in search of missing goods or persons, crowds of curious onlookers following in their wake. This was the style of clairvoyant investigation favoured by the medium Elsa Günther-Gethers, who in a somnambulistic state raced through alleys and tenements, miming and gesticulating in order to indicate the appearance and occupation of the criminal of whom she was in pursuit.²² In March 1923, for example, an entranced Günther-Gethers walked with closed eyes over a ladder, over a pile of scrap metal and through three different streets in search of the person who had stolen flour and sugar from Frau de la Chaux of Tilsit.²³ In another case in Königsberg, where the police had been unable to find the person responsible for stealing shoes and laundry from the Preukschat family, Günther-Gethers was asked to investigate. Falling into a trance in the victims' home, she retraced the thief's steps until she reached Junker Street, where the noise of the crowd who had gathered to watch her work woke her from her trance. Early the next morning, without the distraction of the crowd, Günther-Gethers repeated her somnambulistic investigation, this time walking to a house on Polnischen Street, where she grabbed hold of the woman within and declared her the thief.²⁴

Other criminal telepaths, including the sisters Diederich and Hessel, tended to prefer a more sedate approach. While in some cases they might insist on visiting the scene of crime, they were just as likely to prefer the quiet of the séance room, which lacked the distractions of the stage or the street. Using a darkened domestic space such as a parlour, such clairvoyants fed off the energy of the séance circle, often using an object belonging to the victim as a means of accessing information about the crime. During Busdorf's investigation into the murder of the Mügeln forest warden, for example, a sitting was held in the murdered man's home during which the hypnotized Diederich described the victim's last moments. Clairvoyantly accompanying the doomed forester on his last patrol, Diederich relayed his discovery of two bicycles at a crossroad and his first glimpse of the two middle-aged men who would moments later kill him. Turning her attention to the two perpetrators, the medium then related both their conversation and their panicked ride to a nearby village where they hid one of their guns.²⁵

While their methods of investigation may have differed, during the Weimar years criminal telepaths of every ilk became embroiled in cases ranging from petty theft to abduction and murder. The hypnotist Paul Hildebrecht, for example, used his medium in 1924 to advise one Frau Bartel of Bernburg that a woman named Grete Böhlend had stolen her gold necklace. The medium, Hildebrecht's wife, described the thief, noting that she had wrapped the necklace in paper and hidden it in the outermost compartment of her handbag.²⁶ In

22 Rudolf Lambert, 'Der Insterburger Prozeß gegen die Hellscherin Frau Günther-Geffers', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie* 4(4) (1929), 232–3.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 234.

25 Hornung, 'Bedeutung', op. cit., 267.

26 Albert Hellwig, *Okkultismus und Verbrechen. Eine Einführung in die kriminalis-*

1922, the same hypnotist informed the parents of a missing toddler that their child had been abducted by gypsies. The boy, who had been sitting in the street crying, had been comforted by a gypsy woman who placed him in her wagon. Hildebrecht claimed that the child was unharmed and would be found in the company of gypsies at a horse market in Güsten.²⁷ Capital crimes such as murder were also investigated by criminal telepaths during this period. These cases, like murder cases in general and sexual murders (*Lustmord*) in particular, were often portrayed in sensational fashion in the press.²⁸ In March 1921, for example, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* carried the story of the hypnotist August Drost, who aided the Bernburg police in their attempt to explain the murder of a shoemaker's wife. According to this article, Drost and his hypnotized medium, who were accompanied by the police commissioner, touched a variety of objects belonging to the victim in order clairvoyantly to reconstruct the circumstances which had led the shoemaker to murder his spouse.²⁹ Similarly in 1925, the *Magdeburger General-Anzeiger* reported that the criminal telepath Höpfner had provided crucial information on the disappearance and murder of a bellhop at Berlin's Café Vaterland.³⁰ According to the paper, the medium had informed the young man's father that he had been attacked by two assailants, who had killed him and buried his body in a shallow grave near a lake.³¹

Although the exploits of mediums such as Höpfner, Günther-Gethers and Diederich provide a picture of what criminal telepathy was and the variety of ways in which it was practised, they fail to highlight the historical circumstances in which this form of occult investigation took place. These contexts, the first of which was interwar crime, will be briefly explored here. While historians have tended to argue for the modernization of crime since the late eighteenth century — as represented by the transition from violent crimes to those against property — the era immediately following the first world war appears to have been an exception to this rule.³² In the years after 1918, as Richard Bessel and others have demonstrated, Germany experienced a surge in both violent and property crime, a result of the economic, social and politi-

tischen Probleme des Okkultismus für Polizeibeamte, Richter, Staatsanwälte, Psychiater und Sachverständige (Berlin 1929), 55–6.

27 Ibid., 57.

28 On the portrayal of sexual violence during the Weimar Republic, see Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

29 Hornung, 'Bedeutung', op. cit., 256.

30 'Der tote Page. Aufklärung durch einen Hellscher!' *Magdeburger General-Anzeigers*, 5 October 1925, Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellschen/Fall Höpfner, IGPP.

31 The story run by the *Magdeburger General-Anzeiger* turned out to be a mixture of exaggeration and fabrication. The bellhop's father had not sought out Höpfner, but was informed four days after the discovery of the body that the location of the corpse had been mentioned in a spiritualist séance. Bericht des Polizeipräsidiiums Berlin. Abteilung IV. Berlin 7/12/25. Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellschen/Fall Höpfner, IGPP.

32 For a good historiographical overview of the modernization of crime thesis, see Clive Emsley, *Crime, Police and Penal Policy: European Experiences, 1750–1940* (Oxford and New York 2007).

cal turmoil that plagued the early Republic.³³ Complaints of first and second degree murder in Berlin, for example, had numbered 146 in 1911, but climbed to 219 in 1922 and 637 in 1924.³⁴ National statistics also reflected this surge in violent crime, with convictions for premeditated murder at 17 per 100,000 in 1911–13 and at 41 per 100,000 in 1920–4.³⁵ Political crime, in particular political murder, also grew rapidly. As the Republic stabilized, however, so too did the murder rate; but, as historians such as Sace Elder and Peter Fritzsche have pointed out, the tendency of the Weimar press to sensationalize murder cases well beyond their statistical significance gave the impression that violent crime remained rife.³⁶

Property crime in Germany also experienced significant growth in the years immediately following the war, reaching its peak in the hyperinflation year of 1923. Demobilization and inflation led to a doubling or trebling of theft in many urban areas and to the spread of crime to the countryside, where soldiers and hungry city dwellers stole food, animals and clothing.³⁷ Again, national statistics show this increase clearly. In the period 1911–14 convictions for simple theft were 171, serious theft 32, robbery 1.5, fraud and embezzlement 65 and swindling 53 per 100,000. In the period 1920–4 convictions for simple theft were 423, serious theft 94, robbery 2.9, fraud and embezzlement 67 and swindling 62 per 100,000.³⁸ Organized crime also became more prevalent, as urban gangs (*Ringvereine*) mobilized to orchestrate rackets in prostitution, pornography, gambling and burglary.³⁹ While the press, popular fiction and film might have given the impression that the Republic was under siege by a host of murderers and gangsters, it was everyday crimes such as petty theft, as confirmed by the statistics, that had made the most direct impact upon ordinary Germans;⁴⁰ after all, their economic survival was largely dependent on the retention of their property and possessions during the years before the stabilization of the Mark.⁴¹

The large numbers of thefts, as well as the surge in interpersonal and political violence that accompanied the end of hostilities in Germany, stretched the

33 Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', op. cit., 193–4.

34 *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin*, 1923, 1924 and 1925, quoted in Sace Elder, 'Murder, Denunciation and Criminal Policing in Weimar Berlin', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006), 412. Richard Bessel also notes that convictions for murder during the early 1920s were roughly twice those of the years immediately preceding the war: Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', op. cit., 194.

35 Eric A. Johnson, *Urbanization and Crime: Germany, 1871–1914* (New York 1995), 127.

36 Sace Elder, 'Murder Scenes: Criminal Violence in the Public Culture and Private Lives of Weimar Berlin', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2002, 4, 25; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA, and London 1996), 159.

37 Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford 1993), 244–5.

38 Johnson, *Urbanization*, op. cit., 136.

39 Anton Kaes, *M* (London 2000), 50–1.

40 Sara Hall, 'Open Your Eyes! Public Ordering and the Policing Gaze', *Modernism/Modernity* 15(2) (2008), 277–8; Sara Hall, 'Trading Places: *Dr. Mabuse* and the Pleasure of Role Play', *The German Quarterly* 76(4) (2003), 381–97.

41 Elder, 'Murder, Denunciation', op. cit., 406.

Weimar police to capacity. In the immediate postwar period the depletion, disorganization and underfunding of law enforcement in many parts of the Republic created the impression of police impotence in the face of this larcenous onslaught.⁴² In this context, where the victims of crime, particularly of theft, believed they were unlikely to achieve a satisfactory outcome through a police investigation, but where stolen items might play a significant role in economic survival, there was an opportunity for those with the wherewithal to fill the demand not met by the police. Those criminal telepaths who took up this challenge were not, as reports in the press might have suggested, primarily or even frequently involved in murder cases; indeed, they were only very occasionally involved in police investigations at all. The bulk of their business, which derived from those members of the public who had failed to achieve satisfaction through an official investigation or had avoided the police altogether, involved crimes against property; mainly the theft of items such as jewellery, bicycles and cash. While small things in themselves, such items were undoubtedly important as a bulwark against economic ruin during the early 1920s.

Like their customers, those people who became criminal telepaths during the Weimar period were frequently motivated by financial desperation. The criminal telepath Günther-Geffers, for example, as her defence counsel Richard Winterberg explained during her 1927 trial for fraud, 'first began the professional evaluation of her paranormal abilities as a result of a loss of assets during the inflation'.⁴³ Her success as a criminal telepath, however, was such that she continued to pursue this profession even after the stabilization of the Mark. This was a pattern that was repeated in the life stories of a significant number of occult practitioners, including Mathilde Gern, Erik-Jan Hanussen and Erich Möckel, who all used occultism to some extent as a means of escaping poverty. In so doing, however, these savvy occultists were not only taking advantage of the opportunities offered by interwar crime, economic instability and the lack of confidence in Germany's over-taxed police forces, but also of the contemporary fascination with the occult.

The modern occult movement emerged in Germany, as elsewhere, during the mid-nineteenth century, manifesting not only in the revival of occult sciences, such as astrology, palmistry and Rosicrucianism, but also in the birth of new forms of occult knowledge and practice, including spiritualism and Theosophy.⁴⁴ While historians have traditionally regarded this movement as evidence of a late-nineteenth-century 'flight from reason' or 'crisis of faith', often linking it with political conservatism and racism, more recent work in several national contexts has suggested that the attraction of occultism for groups from across the social and political spectrum was its flexibility and

⁴² Elder, 'Murder Scenes', op. cit., 33.

⁴³ Richard Winterberg, 'Der Insterburger Hellscherprozess', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie* 3(7) (1928), 417.

⁴⁴ On the modern occult movement see, for example, James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (La Salle, IL, 1974); James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL, 1976).

practicality in the face of the increasing complexity of modern life.⁴⁵ This malleability and pragmatism was apparent in the increase in occult practice that occurred in Germany following the first world war, at which time it served to maintain connections with the war dead, predict economic, social and political events and provide a vehicle for those spiritual and moral beliefs no longer sustainable within traditional frameworks. Jay Winter and others have linked this early twentieth-century surge in occultism, particularly spiritualism, to practices of memorialization and mourning in the wake of the Great War, but there are other explanations for this 'occult wave'.⁴⁶ Treitel, for example, argues that the pre-war lure of occultism became even more compelling after 1918 as traditional sources of authority, most particularly the church and the state, were called into question by Germany's defeat and the turbulent transition to democracy.⁴⁷

Whatever the ultimate cause of this 'occult wave' — probably a complex combination of mass grief, economic deprivation and perceived moral and philosophical decline — there emerged in interwar Germany a thriving market for occult services, which was met by both seasoned occultists and those whose precarious financial situation had led them to occultism as a means of survival. Much of what was on offer in this occult marketplace was familiar; clairvoyant readings and faith healing, for instance, were nothing new, but some occult practitioners gave these services a modern twist, making use, for example, of the mass media and the increasingly efficient postal service to expand their clientele. Other occultists, taking advantage of the contemporary belief that science and rational planning would solve pressing social issues, found that there was profit to be made in creating occult alternatives to the new applied sciences. Occult graphology, for example, competed with scientific graphology in the field of applied psychology, while dowsing offered an alternative to more traditional means of locating water and minerals in the areas of engineering and town planning.⁴⁸ A market for these 'occult doubles' existed among members of the public as well as among those psychologists, doctors, engineers, lawyers and architects who played a central role within the new applied sciences. The interest of both groups in these border sciences can be located in the scientific and popular fascination with the occult, a pragmatic attitude towards new and unproven technologies and techniques, and the inchoate disciplinary boundaries of the nascent applied sciences, which enabled the expression of

45 For older histories which utilize the 'flight from reason' and the 'crisis of faith' analyses, see, for example, Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge 1985); Frank M. Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven, CT, and London 1974). For more recent work that emphasizes the peculiarly modern nature of occultism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London 2004); Treitel, *Science for the Soul*, op. cit.

46 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge 1995).

47 Treitel, *Science for the Soul*, op. cit., 194.

48 Ibid., 137–9, 150–4.

competing claims to expertise. Clearly, it was in this context, as well as that of interwar crime, that criminal telepathy, the 'occult double' of criminology, emerged; a practice that came to be utilized not only by the public, but also by the police in Weimar Germany.

The motivation of Germany's police forces in investigating the claims of criminal telepaths predictably differed from that of the public — who appear to have been driven by a combination of economic desperation and occult fascination in their dealings with clairvoyants — deriving from their commitment to creating a modern force capable of combating crime in an efficient and professional manner. Following the war, the German police undertook a process of reorganization and professionalization that served to distinguish them from the Imperial force that had been their predecessor. As historians of Weimar policing, including Liang and Bessel, have shown, this transformation was in part a result of exigency. The terms of the treaty of Versailles, for instance, which prohibited the organization of the Weimar constabulary along military lines, forced the police to conceive of themselves in a new way: not as an auxiliary to the Wehrmacht, but as a professional law enforcement agency.⁴⁹ While, ironically, as Bessel has demonstrated, this new force was more numerous and better armed than that maintained by the *Länder* prior to the war, recruitment policy and training did change to reflect the new emphasis on professionalism. Policemen began to be recruited from the civilian population rather than from the army, undergoing specialized training in the use of weapons, as well as instruction in the intricacies of the penal code and the structure of the German State.⁵⁰ These new recruits were on the whole younger, fitter and better educated than those of the pre-war years, qualities necessitated by their role as peace keepers on the new Republic's streets and by the increasingly bureaucratic and technical nature of police work.⁵¹ The difficulties associated with policing a modern industrial society also saw both the Schutzpolizei or Schupo (Security Police) and the Kriminalpolizei or Kripo (Criminal Police) adopt a range of new technologies and scientific techniques during the interwar period.⁵²

Cars, teletypes and radio transmitters enabled the Weimar police to move and communicate swiftly, keeping pace with the ever more frantic speed of modern life.⁵³ Motor vehicles in particular were an important asset allowing the Schupo, which acquired a fleet of cars after the war, not only to respond quickly to disturbances, but to regulate the growing volume of traffic on the Republic's streets.⁵⁴ The Berlin murder inspectorate, formed in 1926, also acquired a vehicle in the mid-1920s, equipped with everything that might be required at a murder scene, including a typewriter, a radio and a kit for process-

49 Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', op. cit., 190–1.

50 Ibid., 198.

51 Liang, 'Berlin Police', op. cit., 162.

52 Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', op. cit., 196.

53 His-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley, CA, 1970), 57.

54 Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', 197–8.

ing physical evidence.⁵⁵ Between 1919 and 1927 the criminal police in Berlin, who acted as a model for their colleagues in other major cities, also introduced a range of new forensic techniques, including fingerprinting and ballistic tests, innovations that necessitated the foundation of an institute for police science in Charlottenburg.⁵⁶ These techniques, along with criminal albums, Bertillon measurements, crime scene photography and chemical analysis, which had been introduced at the turn of the century, demonstrated the eagerness of the criminal police to make detection as scientific as possible.⁵⁷ Keen to try anything that might prove useful in their pursuit of criminals, the Kripo also adopted methods derived from the new social and applied sciences, including criminal psychology, sociology and graphology. The use of such theories and techniques, as well as the incorporation of technological advances, was instrumental to the Kripo's claim to be a professional crime-fighting agency. Indeed, familiarity with police science and criminology were a precondition for career advancement.⁵⁸

There were several reasons for this emphasis on science and technology as a means and a measure of professionalization. Clearly, the Weimar police needed to invest in communication technology, weaponry and transportation if they were to maintain order in an increasingly technological society.⁵⁹ They also needed to rationalize and bureaucratize their work and organization in order to remain efficient. In this vein, efforts were made to centralize the criminal police on a national basis. Although this move was ultimately blocked by the states, a central fingerprint record was established in Berlin and missing persons cases began to be organized from Dresden.⁶⁰ Emphasis on professionalism, particularly as represented by scientific and technical know-how, was also a consequence of that school of criminological thought which attributed the bulk of serious crime to the *Berufsverbrecher* (the habitual or professional criminal).⁶¹ In order to gain an advantage over this often technically savvy species of criminal, the police sought not only to specialize according to the most common types of crimes, but also to mobilize new systems of identification, including fingerprinting, to capture these recidivists.⁶² Finally, the desire to incorporate science and technology into police investigations was, according to historians, including Sace Elder, a product of a deep-seated distrust of human

55 Elder, 'Murder Scenes', op. cit., 73.

56 Liang, *Berlin Police Force*, op. cit., 123.

57 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, op. cit., 97–8.

58 Liang, *Berlin Police Force*, op. cit., 128.

59 Elder, 'Murder Scenes', op. cit., 69.

60 Bessel, 'Policing, Professionalization and Politics', op. cit., 193.

61 The idea of the *Berufsverbrecher* (the habitual or professional criminal) was popularized by Robert Heindl in 1926, but was evident in some form among police and criminologists from the late nineteenth century. On the Weimar police's utilization of this concept, see Herbert Reinke, 'Robert Heindl's *Berufsverbrecher*: Police Perceptions of Crime and Criminals and Structures of Crime Control in Germany during the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in Amy Gilman Srebnick and René Lévy (eds), *Crime and Culture: An Historical Perspective* (London 2005), 50–3; Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, op. cit., 20–5.

62 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, op. cit., 80.

sensory observation and memory.⁶³ Although Wagner has suggested ambivalence among investigators about new forensic technology, Weimar criminalists and criminal psychologists seem to have been equally ambivalent about the utility of witnesses. These experts stressed the vagaries of witness recall and observation, which were thought to be adversely affected by gender, class and nationality.⁶⁴ Countless hours were wasted, they complained, following up the tips and statements of people who were not capable of distinguishing between observation and imagination. For many policemen, then, physical evidence collected via forensics was more reliable and more valuable than human observation, but, as Wagner has pointed out, the potential of these new techniques and technologies was not always realized in daily use.⁶⁵

It was in this context, then, in which technological and methodological advance helped form the basis for professionalization, but ambivalence existed about the utility of both forensics and witness statements, that Germany's criminal police took an interest in the claims of clairvoyants, such as the sisters Diederich and Hessel.⁶⁶ Although criminal telepathy lacked scientific verification, pragmatism dictated that this technique might be used until it proved either unhelpful or definitively unscientific. Frequently compared with the olfactory powers of the police dog, new applied sciences such as graphology and modern technologies like the wireless telegraph, it seemed entirely possible in the early Weimar period that clairvoyance might prove to be a useful new forensic tool.⁶⁷ The renowned Berlin detective Inspector Ernst Gennat wrote in this regard:

Clairvoyance as a so-called aid in solving criminal cases appeared on the scene after the war. The Criminal Police who have to apply every legal means of solving crimes, in no way rejected clairvoyance from the outset, rather they set up a special scientific department that checked all cases that were supposed to have been solved through clairvoyance.⁶⁸

In a similar statement concerning the police use of clairvoyants in Essen, Criminal Commissioner Schultz noted that capital cases which were not quickly resolved via physical evidence often provoked private efforts to identify the perpetrator. In such cases, the police were glad of any information these enquiries produced, even when it was derived through the modern methods of clairvoyance and telepathy.⁶⁹

By the mid-1920s the Weimar police had utilized clairvoyants, in their capacity as 'human police-dogs', in several cases, in some instances actively seeking

63 Elder, 'Murder Scenes', op. cit., 80.

64 Ibid., 80–3.

65 Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft*, op. cit., 97–8.

66 Ibid., 102.

67 Otto Seeling, *Der Bernburger Hellseher-Prozeß, mit Bild und Schriftprobe des Lehrers Drost nebst einem Vorwort von Rechtsanwalt Dr. Winterberg* (Berlin-Pankow 1925), 3.

68 'Rechtsprechung', *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 3 (1929), 45.

69 Die Methode der Telepathie und Hellseherei zur Aufklärung von Verbrechen. Von Kriminalkommissar Schultz (Essen). Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen allgemein. Korrespondenz, 1914–1929, IGPP.

out their help and in others attending séances organized by third parties.⁷⁰ For example, in March 1922, at the insistence of the murdered man's friends, the police and the prosecuting attorney in Tilsit brought in the sisters Diederich and Hessel in the hope of solving the October 1921 murder of the hunter Olbrisch, which had occurred near Reisterbruch. Diederich's description of the murderer led to the arrest of a local butcher by the name of Wilhelm T., who later confessed to the crime.⁷¹ Similarly, during the investigation into the murder of a forest warden in Bednarken, Günther-Geffers, who had been hired by a local landowner, provided the police with information about the circumstances surrounding the crime and the identity of a reluctant witness, which ultimately helped convict the man they had in custody.⁷² While these cases suggested that criminal telepaths might play a constructive role in the investigation of certain intractable crimes, the police presidents of cities including Berlin, Leipzig, Königsberg and Kiel remained cautious about their use; in some cases refusing the requests of investigators to consult clairvoyants. Given the lack of scientific evidence for the reality of clairvoyance and the perceived propensity of occultists for fraud, these men felt justified in insisting on an enquiry into every case of criminal telepathy that took place in their jurisdiction.⁷³

The potential of occult detection, should it prove both susceptible to scientific verification and applicable on demand, appeared to be tremendous. Indeed, occult detection appeared to offer a kind of compromise between forensic techniques, which were not always applicable, and witness statements, which were frequently inaccurate; promising to identify traces, albeit psychic ones, left behind by criminals and victims, and to provide first-hand knowledge of places, people and motivations. Mindful of this potential, the German police put criminal telepathy to the test in the laboratory and the field, where it was hoped that success or failure could be measured tangibly in the number of cases solved. The results of such experiments were not, however, quite as unambiguous as the police authorities might have wished. In many cases it remained unclear whether the vague descriptions of people and events provided by clairvoyants actually aided or hindered investigations and whether the more accurate prognostications of criminal telepaths were derived by transcendental means or simply gleaned from newspaper reports and witnesses. This confusion was articulated by the Berlin criminalist Max Hagemann, who noted that despite the large number of spiritualist sittings he had attended, he remained unable to ascertain whether clairvoyance or telepathy existed. He found that much of the information he heard from mediums contained a modicum of truth, but was unable to determine whether the medium had come across this

70 Albert Hellwig an Herrn Ministerialrat Hartung, Potsdam, den 12 November 1925. Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen allgemein. Korrespondenz, 1914–1929, IGPP.

71 Otto Goldman, 'Die sächsischen Hellseherinnen', *Zeitschrift für kritischen Okkultismus* 3 (1928), 129–30.

72 Lambert, 'Der Insterburger Prozeß', op. cit., 235.

73 Albert Hellwig, 'Wahrsagen und Hellsehen'. Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen/Fall 'August Drost', IGPP.

information by natural or supernatural means.⁷⁴ This lack of certainty concerning both the utility and the veracity of the information provided by criminal telepaths ultimately divided opinion among Weimar criminalists over whether criminal telepathy was a valuable addition to the methods of police science or a deliberate and potentially dangerous form of fraud.

The initial open-mindedness on the part of Germany's police towards clairvoyance as an investigative tool became tempered over time by the frequent inaccuracies and ambiguities in the testimony of criminal telepaths. In Düsseldorf during 1929, for example, the police were initially happy to allow those occultists who volunteered their assistance to become involved in the search for the infamous serial murderer known as the Düsseldorf Vampire, but as it became clear that the information provided by these occult detectives was contradictory, they became dismissive of such offers.⁷⁵ Similarly, during the investigation of the Anderheyden sexual murder in Essen the authorities sought the help of a medium who purported to be able to describe the crime in all its particulars. On further investigation, however, the clairvoyant's description of the murder and the circumstances under which it took place were found to bear little resemblance to the facts.⁷⁶ The police authorities in Essen concluded from this experience, as did many other regional police forces during this period, that the powers of clairvoyants were no substitute for laborious police work.⁷⁷

By the end of the 1920s there was concern among police officials not only that criminal telepathy was of little use in the field, but also that it actively interfered with the ability of the Kriminalpolizei to do their job. Their first complaint in this regard was the amount of police time wasted following up the evidence provided by occultists. In Berlin, every major criminal case attracted clairvoyants and astrologers eager to offer assistance to the police. Investigating the leads provided by these occultists, as Ernst Gennat stated, greatly multiplied the criminalist's workload.⁷⁸ Perhaps predictably, Gennat's complaints about criminal telepaths mimicked those that he and other criminalists made about witnesses, whose inaccurate and in many cases irrelevant statements were responsible for both false leads and excess paperwork.⁷⁹ These criminalists complained, furthermore, that the contemporary prevalence of criminal telepaths and their portrayal in both the press and popular culture seemed to encourage the public to seek out clairvoyants rather than policemen when they became victims of crime. This concern was particularly evident

74 Auszug aus dem Vortrag über Moderne Kriminalpolizei von Herrn Oberregierungsrat Hagemann, Vorträge der Polizeiwissenschaftlichen Woche vom 27 Oktober bis 1 Nov. 1924, Berlin, 1925 Seite 137 f.' in Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Korrespondenz 1924–1926, IGPP.

75 Ibid. See also Kaes, M, op. cit., 32; Mel Gordon, *Erik Jan Hanussen. Hitler's Jewish Clairvoyant* (Los Angeles 2001), 167.

76 'Die Methode der Telepathie und Hellseherei zur Aufklärung von Verbrechen'. Von Kriminalkommissar Schultz (Essen), op. cit.

77 'Die Methode der Telepathie und Hellseherei', Hellwig 10/4, IGPP, op. cit.

78 'Rechtsprechung', op. cit., 45.

79 Elder, 'Murder Scenes', op. cit., 85.

during the 1929 censorship hearing on the 'clairvoyant film' (*Hellseher-Film*), which starred the criminal telepath Günther-Geffers.

The screenplay was as follows: Helga is a woman whose tendency to somnambulism is heightened during the full moon. While Helga and her husband are at a sitting with a clairvoyant medium (Günther-Geffers) their estranged son Kurt steals money from his father's desk. That night, after the couple's return and before the discovery of the theft, the husband is murdered. The police, finding Kurt in possession of the money, charge him with murder. Distraught, Helga goes to the medium asking for help. The medium informs Helga that it was she who shot her husband while in a somnambulist trance brought on by the full moon. Helga commits suicide by drinking poison.⁸⁰ Before making his recommendation, the censor sought expert opinions from the Kripo about the utility of clairvoyance as a forensic tool. Inspector Gennat stated that despite all efforts to verify reports of criminal telepathy, the Berlin police had been unable to find convincing evidence for the veracity of even one case. On the subject of the film's release, he warned,

The film itself endangers public order because the conscious comparison of the inadequate police solution and the solution of the clairvoyant will make the public waver in their trust of the police.⁸¹

That Günther-Geffers, whose notoriety had spread as a result of her 1927 trial for fraud in Insterburg, played the lead role in this film, he argued, only served to give this dangerous fiction the appearance of reality. The censor prohibited the release of the film, on the basis that it belittled the work of the criminal police and encouraged in the public the belief that criminal telepaths rather than the police were best equipped to investigate crime, even in capital cases.⁸²

In the same year as this censorship hearing, the Minister for the Interior prohibited the practice of criminal telepathy in Prussia. It had come to his attention, he wrote, that despite profound efforts to educate police officers and the public about the nature and effects of so-called criminal telepathy, many still persisted in their belief that certain people, as a result of paranormal abilities, were capable of helping the police and private citizens solve crimes.⁸³ The minister stressed that, because the reputation, honour, economic existence and freedom of German citizens could depend on the results of police inquiries, it was crucial that only those methods that had been scientifically verified be used in criminal investigations. For these reasons, he wrote, he forbade the police from using clairvoyants and telepaths in their pursuit of criminals.⁸⁴ This decision was applauded by high-ranking police officials, who maintained not only

80 'Rechtsprechung', op. cit., 45.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Otto Seeling, 'Verbot der Beschäftigung von sogen. Kriminaltelepathen', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie* 4(7) (1929), 401.

84 Ibid, 401-2.

that the information provided by criminal telepaths created more work for the police, but that criminal telepathy threatened to undermine their authority.⁸⁵ While this prohibition did not apply to other German states, by 1929 the police forces in most of the *Länder* had also stopped using criminal telepaths, having decided that they were more likely to be a hindrance than a help.

Although the Prussian Minister for the Interior had stressed lack of scientific verification as the major factor prohibiting the use of criminal telepathy, it appears to have been clairvoyance's lack of utility that constituted the real problem; after all, it was pragmatism not scientific status which tended to be the decisive factor in whether new techniques and technologies were tested and retained by the police. The adoption of new forensic tools and methods, including clairvoyance, during the early 1920s had been intended to rationalize policing and make it more efficient. Criminal telepathy, however, which had proven unreliable in numerous tests both in the field and in the courtroom, seemed only to create more work. Furthermore, police use of clairvoyants was problematic, as both the censor's and the Minister's statements had suggested, because it fragmented epistemic authority over crime and policing. This was a frustration not only for Weimar criminalists, who were intent on professionalizing, but also for individuals in fields such as law and medicine who claimed expertise in the understanding of crime and criminals. It was critics of criminal telepathy who derived from these fields, most notably the jurist Albert Hellwig and the psychiatrist Albert Moll, whose articles, opinions and petitions had helped formulate the Interior Minister's prohibition.

Albert Hellwig, a district court director in Potsdam, studied and tested many of the best-known contemporary criminal telepaths, collecting and analysing the articles that appeared on these 'occult criminalists' in the press. Hellwig used this material to guide and advise the police in their dealings with clairvoyants, presenting his findings to police and forensic bodies throughout the country.⁸⁶ In this capacity, he gained a reputation as a virulent opponent of occult detection.⁸⁷ Albert Moll, a Berlin-based psychiatrist who had used his early interest in hypnotism and psychical research to debunk some of Germany's most famous mediums, was also called upon by the Berlin police to test the powers of putative clairvoyants.⁸⁸ Moll boasted in his memoirs that his opinion had directly contributed to the 1929 decision of the Reich Minister for the

85 'Rechtsprechung', op. cit., 45.

86 Die Kriminaltelepathie vom forensisch-psychologischen Standpunkt (Vortrag am 1 October 1929 auf Settiner Polizeipräsidium); 'Die Kriminaltelepathie im Lichte der forensischen Psychologie' (Vortrag in der Forensisch-Psychologischen Gesellschaft im Hamburg am 30 April 1926); Aufklärung von Verbrechen durch Hellsehen (Vortrag in der Humboldt-Hochschule am 9 January 1926); Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen/Fall 'August Drost', IGPP.

87 Hellwig's notoriety in this field was not restricted to occult circles. Kurt Tucholsky, for example, referred to Hellwig as a base materialist and as a man who had 'specialized' in anti-occultism. Kurt Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Mary Gerold-Tucholsky and Fritz J. Raddatz (eds) (Reinbek bei Hamburg 1975), 29.

88 Albert Moll, *Ein Leben als Arzt der Seele: Erinnerungen* (Dresden 1936), 117. For an example of Moll's debunking activities, see Albert Moll, *Der Spiritismus* (Stuttgart 1924).

Interior to prohibit criminal telepathy in Prussia.⁸⁹ Indeed, given the manner in which Moll and Hellwig over-emphasized both the prevalence of criminal telepathy and its putative dangers, the Minister could have been forgiven for thinking that Germany was beset by a veritable plague of clairvoyants.

The critiques produced by these men, who sought to vouchsafe the claims of jurists and psychiatrists within the nascent field of criminology by expelling lay practitioners such as occultists, focused on three main dangers. The first was the threat posed by criminal telepathy to justice. Moll complained in this regard that information obtained from criminal telepaths was likely to mislead or hinder investigations, resulting in wasted time and the defamation and incarceration of innocent people.⁹⁰ Similarly, Hellwig noted that during his career he had witnessed hundreds of people endure accusations, house-searches and arrests at the insistence of criminal telepaths.⁹¹ On this basis, they urged the police to forgo the use of clairvoyants.

The second danger identified by these critics was the threat that occult detection and its portrayal in the press constituted for police claims to professionalism and expertise. This critique — which fed off the widespread anxieties about the role of the Weimar press and its representation of crime that have been identified by scholars such as Sara Hall — was pursued doggedly by Hellwig. In particular, he was concerned at the manner in which the press reported the trials of criminal telepaths for fraud.⁹² Following the 1925 trial of the hypnotist August Drost, for example, the vast majority of the press reported the defendant's acquittal as an affirmation of criminal telepathy, rather than an acknowledgement of Drost's good faith. Hellwig complained that such sensationalism and inaccuracy in crime and court reports, which were some of the most popular and eagerly read columns in the daily press during the Weimar Republic, were both disruptive of the judicial process and detrimental to public welfare.⁹³ He called on the press to remember their duty to their readers and their cultural mission, warning that articles that outlined the success of criminal telepaths, particularly in those cases where a police investigation had met with failure, had the potential to convince the public that clairvoyants rather than the police were the experts in matters of crime and detection.⁹⁴ As evidence of this contention he noted the numerous letters the police had received

89 Moll, *Ein Leben als Arzt der Seele*, op. cit., 117–18.

90 Ibid., 117, 121.

91 Albert Hellwig, 'Wahrsagen und Hellsehen'. Nachlaß Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen/Fall 'August Drost', IGPP.

92 On the anxieties mobilized by the sensational coverage of crime in the press, see Sara F. Hall, 'The Subject under Investigation: Weimar Culture and the Police', PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2000.

93 Ibid., vii.

94 On the contemporary debate over the responsibility of the press to the public and its cultural mission, see Modris Ekstein, *The Limits of Reason. The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (London 1975), 71. For Hellwig's complaints about reporting, see Albert Hellwig, 'Der Hellseher von Rothenstein', *Zeitschrift für kritischen Okkultismus und Grenzfragen des Seelenlebens* 3(1) (1927), 8; Hellwig, *Okkultismus und Verbrechen*, op. cit., 89.

in the aftermath of the Drost trial, which demanded that Drost's collection of clairvoyants rather than the police investigate the correspondents' cases.⁹⁵

According to Hellwig and Moll, the third danger associated with criminal telepathy was its intimate relationship with hypnosis. Most criminal telepaths, as we have seen, performed their clairvoyant investigations in a hypnotic trance, either self-induced, as in the case of Walther Höpfner, or by means of a hypnotist, such as Drost or Hessel. The problems here were twofold. For Moll, hypnosis, or more accurately the dissemblance of it, was used by criminal telepaths to give their performances a certain psychological impression and to avoid responsibility when the information they provided was inaccurate.⁹⁶ Höpfner, for example, during his 1925 prosecution for fraud, claimed that he was completely unaware of what he said while under hypnosis.⁹⁷ In arguing that criminal telepaths' use of hypnosis was a blind for conscious fraud, both Moll and Hellwig suggested not only that clairvoyants were not really able to provide information about crimes, but that they were in fact criminals themselves. The second problem posed by the association between criminal telepathy and hypnosis was its danger to the somnambulist's health when induced by a lay practitioner. Hellwig, for example, argued that lay hypnotists were often ignorant of their subject's underlying medical conditions and the contraindications concomitant with artificial somnambulism, ultimately leading to damage to the subject's health, particularly mental health. Hellwig also mobilized the contemporary popular concern about the sublimation of one's will to sinister or criminal hypnotists, which scholars such as Stefan Andriopoulos and Ruth Harris have pointed to, in order to suggest that the lay use of hypnotism could easily lead to a somnambulist crime wave.⁹⁸ The dangers that lay hypnosis posed for health and public order were both tropes that had been used by medical hypnotists, including Moll, during the late nineteenth century as part of their struggle to gain a medical monopoly over the use of hypnotism. In the context of criminal telepathy, however, they worked to suggest the mental instability of the entranced clairvoyant and the predatory criminality of the hypnotist. While such figures were clearly not suitable to provide expertise in the fields of criminology and policing, they were, critics such as Hellwig and Moll argued, entirely legitimate subjects of legal and psychiatric intervention.

Although doubtless the ambivalence about new technologies and forensic techniques that Patrick Wagner identified in his study of Weimar policing was real, the use of clairvoyants by the German police during the 1920s did not necessarily epitomize this ambivalence. In a context in which the scientific status of the occult remained an open question, and in which pragmatism was

95 Hellwig, *Okkultismus und Verbrechen*, op. cit., 89.

96 Moll, *Ein Leben als Arzt der Seele*, op. cit., 120.

97 'Auszug aus den Akten der Staatsanwaltschaft Bautzen wegen Betruges StA III 10I8/25', Albert Hellwig 10/4 Hellsehen/Fall 'Höpfner', IGPP.

98 On hypnotic crimes in the German context, see Peter Jansen and Stefan Andriopoulos (tr. Stefan Andriopoulos), *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema* (Chicago and London 2008). In the French context, see Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford 1989).

a decisive factor in the techniques and technologies adopted by criminalists, the brief flirtation of the Weimar police with clairvoyance can be seen as part of their dedication to professionalization through science and technology, rather than a rejection of it. As demonstrated by recent studies of modern occultism, which have considered the mobilization of the occult to solve modern social and scientific problems, it is no longer feasible to dismiss any and all forays into occultism as symptoms of technological and scientific atavism. The strange confluence between modern policing and the occult that occurred in Germany following the first world war, then, can be understood as a creative answer to the problems posed by the intersection of rising crime, economic desperation, police overwork, and the desire to prove both the scientific status and social utility of occultism.

This unusual solution seems to have been enabled, in part, by the fact that the disciplinary and professional boundaries surrounding criminology and policing remained in flux during the early Weimar period. For the police, who were intent on using innovations in science and technology to make policing more efficient and more professional, this lack of cohesion allowed experimentation with and discussion of new and scientifically unverified techniques like criminal telepathy. For those professionals, in areas such as law and psychiatry, who wished to lay claim to expertise in criminology and policing, however, criminal telepaths, in spite of their statistical insignificance, represented a fragmentation of their epistemic authority. Determined to expel these lay competitors from their terrain, critics such as Hellwig and Moll alerted the authorities and the public to the myriad dangers associated with occult detection and sought to debunk positive reports of clairvoyance, calling on the media to avoid sensationalism in favour of accuracy and public responsibility. Finally, these critics suggested the criminality and mental instability of criminal telepaths and their hypnotists, as a means of transforming these occultists from competitors into subjects of legal and psychiatric analysis. While Hellwig and Moll may have convinced the authorities of their case, as evidenced by the 1929 prohibition of criminal telepathy in Prussia, criminal telepaths proved resilient in the face of official disapproval, continuing to offer their services to the public until all species of occultism were banned in 1937 under the Nazi regime.

Heather Wolffram

is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for the History of European Discourses at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her book on psychical research and parapsychology in Germany, titled *Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c.1870–1939*, is forthcoming as part of the *Clio Medica: Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine* (Rodopi).