

## 21A.211

### Study Questions on Spiritualism Braude's *Radical Spirits* & "Telegrams from the Dead"

What was the relationship of spiritualism to science? Is the relationship of science to religious and mystical belief different today? If so, why? What technologies were especially influential in spiritualism? Are there technologies today that play similar roles as metaphors for non-scientific belief systems?

Why did spiritualism spread so rapidly?

How and why did the media through which the spirits communicated change?

What beliefs and interests already existing in society made spiritualism plausible and acceptable to many people?

From the very beginning of spiritualism, there was great controversy over its validity. What factors might have influenced individuals towards belief or skepticism?

Are there any parallels between the social circumstances of mediums and the circumstances of the possessed in other societies? of the snake-handlers? Braude has most to say about public and professional mediums: what about all the domestic mediums and their role in their families?

What do you think was the physiological and psychological state of most mediums? In what ways was it different or similar to the state of the snake-handlers in "The Holy Ghost People" and the possessed in the videos from Morocco?

How according to Braude did spiritualism make it possible to speak in public? Why was this ability so crucial politically?

Why was the relationship between spiritualism and gender so important yet so contradictory?

Why was the connection with health so important? Why did the medical system affect women's lives so drastically? What was the appeal of spiritualist medicine? Do you see any parallels with alternative medicine today?

How did spiritualists address issues of marriage and sexuality? Do you know of other radical approaches to these issues in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

What caused spiritualism's decline in the long run?

How was 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualism similar to or different from the kind of mediumship and contact with the dead found on television today? from interest in angels?

Braude is most concerned with how Spiritualism was connected with bereavement and with the major social issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What else might be going on in seances of a more personal nature? What was the relationship of mediums and others to the spirits they conjured up? How was the medium same/different from the spirit? responsible or not for what the spirit said and did? Were they playing with fire in some way?