

Fae Brauer

Magnetic Modernism

František Kupka's Mesmeric Abstraction and Anarcho-Cosmic Utopia

Introduced to Spiritualism around the age of fourteen when apprenticed as a master saddler in Eastern Bohemia, František Kupka was also inducted into animal magnetism while working as a “successful medium” in both Prague and Vienna in Spiritualist séances.¹ So successful was Kupka that he was able to earn his living as a medium sufficiently to pay for his art classes at both the Prague and Viennese Academies and to support his study of alchemy, astrology and Theosophy.² Adept at going into trances, Kupka was able to perform as a conduit of “psychic energy” purportedly passing between the world of living humans and those of the dead or of spirits. He also seems to have been aware of the ways in which animal magnetism could be used to heal the body, particularly through the attachment of magnets to it and the stretching out of hands above the body to direct magnetic fluid in “passes” in order for “emanation” – a term often used by Kupka – to be discharged. While his experiences as a medium were intensified by Kupka's exposure to Buddhists, Spiritualists and Theosophists in Vienna and Paris, his knowledge of magnetism was able to grow in new dimensions when he came into contact with the intensive investigations of its power over the body and unconscious mind conducted by neurologists, scientists and parapsychologists in Paris at the *fin-de-siècle*.

By the time that Kupka arrived in Paris, far from animal magnetism having long abated, as is so often assumed, the opposite had ensued. Not only was it flourishing at Salpêtrière, Bicêtre, Hôtel Dieu and the Charité, but it was also practiced by the physician and parapsychologist, Hippolyte Baraduc; the astronomer and psychic researcher, Camille Flammarion; the physician who founded the Nancy Suggestion School, Auguste Liébeault, and such parapsychologists as Colonel Albert de Rochas and Émile Magnin. Given its extensive practice alongside the

¹ *František Kupka, 1871–1956: A Retrospective*, New York 1975, 8. See also: Ludmila Vachtová, *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, New York 1968, 15. Vachtová points out that it was the saddle master in Dobruška, Josef Šiška, who introduced Kupka to Alois Studnička, the director of the School for Crafts at Jaroměř. After taking private lessons with Studnička, Kupka entered the Prague School of Fine Arts.

² Vachtová, *Frank Kupka*, 15.

burgeoning of electromagnetism, radioactivity and Flammarion's "cosmic magnetism", this period has been aptly called neo-magnetism. As it thrived, neo-magnetism intersected with Spiritualism, mediumism, Theosophy, Neo-Lamarckian Transformism, Bergsonian vitalism and the new sciences of electromagnetism, radioactivity and X-rays in their utopian aspirations for corporeal regeneration and superconsciousness. It also intersected with Kupka's identity as a Buddhist, Theosophist and medium, as well as an Anarcho-Communist who endorsed Reclus' and Kropotkin's theories of a decentralised political economy, based on mutual aid and Neo-Lamarckian evolutionism, and who pursued a dialectical art praxis based on "propaganda of the deed".

Once Kupka's experiences as an Anarcho-Communist and medium coalesced with his experiments with magnetism, particularly hypnotism, his knowledge of electromagnetism, radioactivity and X-rays, and a realisation of their relationship to "superconsciousness", a transformation in Kupka's praxis ensued. No longer did Kupka produce didactic imagery designed to expose the injustices of industrial capitalism and colonial imperialism. No longer did he produce naturalist painting. Consolidating his artistic position as a medium and as a scientist, Kupka deployed the arts of magnetism to create abstract paintings able to mesmerise the beholder. At the same time, he predicted that art would be replaced altogether by the artist as a medium able to engage directly in magnetic communion with the beholder, as Kupka illustrated in his *Fantaisie physiologique* (Physiological Fantasy; see fig. 12). Following the magnetic hypnotism of such renowned performers as Lina and Magdeleine G., Kupka conjectured that this new art could facilitate the liberation of what Jules Bois called "the superconscious mind" that entailed, according to Bois, the awakening of a higher consciousness in terms of creativity, genius, inspiration, intuition, clairvoyance and heroism.³ It might also facilitate, following Madame Helena P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, integration with one's karma, extrasensory perception and the attainment of a metaphysical evolution able to transcend the limitation of the senses into a state she called "superconsciousness".⁴ In so doing, magnetic modernism, as manifested by Kupka's mesmeric abstractions, seemed able to convey far more directly and emotively than didactic or naturalist art, an Anarcho-Communist utopia and an Anarcho-cosmic one. How this happened is the subject of this article.

³ The subject of the PhD in Psychology undertaken by Bois at the Sorbonne was the superconscious mind. At the École de Psychologie of the Sorbonne, Bois was professor of the "superconscious", see: Jules Bois, "A New Psychoanalysis: The Superconscious", *Catholic World*, 119, 1924, 582–583.

⁴ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, London 1888, 424–444.

Buddhism, Theosophy, Séances and Clairvoyants

By the time Kupka arrived in Paris in 1894, settling there permanently from 1895, Spiritualism and the transcendent role of the medium were being extensively explored in symbolist literature and theatre, as well as through spirit photography and automatic drawings, as illustrated by those executed by James Tissot.⁵ Mediumistic activity and creativity flourished, as demonstrated by the amount of attention the medium, Hélène Smith (Elise-Cathérine Müller), attracted with her spirit travels to 14th Century India and to Mars, particularly amongst Spiritualist communities.⁶ So popular had séances become that they were not just publicly promoted as spectacular forms of entertainment but relished as private social events that had become a meeting point for the “educated classes”, as pointed out by Max Nordau in his book, *Entartung* (Degeneration, 1892):

France is about to become the promised land of believers in ghosts. I am not now thinking [...] of the fine ladies who at all times have ensured excellent incomes to clairvoyants and fortune-tellers, but only of the male representatives of the educated classes. Dozens of Spiritualist circles count their numbers in the thousands. In numerous drawing-rooms of the best society, the dead are called up.⁷

Their popularity was boosted by the large number of high-profile scientists who investigated, as Nancy Fodor succinctly surmises, “the various physical phenomena commonly called spiritualist [...] with an attempt to discover their causes and general laws”.⁸ In 1882 when the Society for Psychical Research was established, it counted amongst its presidents William Crookes, Camille Flammarion and Henri Bergson. Despite Crookes’ invention of the radiometer and his discovery of the element thallium, he had a public “love affair” with the spirit photographs of Katie King.⁹ So highly esteemed was mediumistic art that spirit photography, like the ectoplasm photographed when emanating from mediums, was regarded

5 Serena Keshavjee, “The Enactment of the Supernatural in French Symbolist Culture”, in: Jennifer Fisher (ed.), *Technologies of Intuition*, Toronto 2006, 31–43.

6 Allison Morehead, “Symbolism, Mediumship, and the ‘Study of the Soul that has Constituted Itself as a Positivist Science’”, in: Serena Keshavjee (ed.), *The Visual Culture of Science and Art in Fin-de-Siècle France*, RACAR: Revue d’art canadienne, 34, 2009, no. 1, 77–85.

7 Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, London 1895, 216. The intense interest in Spiritualism in Western Europe at this time was also chronicled by Arthur Conan Doyle, who was “Président d’Honneur de la Fédération Spirite Internationale”. See: Arthur Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, London 1926.

8 Nancy Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*, London 1974 [1933], 351.

9 James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, New York 1973, xi.

by these scientists as directed by psychic forces and analogous to what Bergson called “l’*élan vital*”, “the vital force”.¹⁰

Since Kupka is known to have continued his work as a medium in Paris, he would have been familiar with these manifestations.¹¹ As a medium, he considered himself capable of splitting his consciousness during séances between “inner visions” and observing the world from outside through his so-called “second sight” – a clairvoyant vision that purportedly enabled him to transcend the earth and survey the cosmos.¹² His performances as a medium with clairvoyant vision were propelled in Paris by his close engagement with the writings of Madame Blavatsky and with the Theosophical Society established there in 1881.¹³ They were also complemented by his practice of meditation and immersion in Tantric Buddhism,¹⁴ as manifest in his paintings, *La Voie du silence* (The Path of Silence), *Méditation*, *Âme du lotus* (Soul of the Lotus) and *L’Origine de la vie* (or *Les Nénuphars* – The Origin of Life; see col. fig. 1).

While the lotus is connected to a foetus in a chain of circles to signify, following Tantric Buddhism, the evolution of life on earth,¹⁵ the Buddhist symbolism of the lotus flower and lily pond in *L’Origine de la vie* correlates to the Indian iconography of sacred sexuality that Kupka would have encountered at the Musée Guimet.¹⁶ While the lotus flower was a universal symbol for Blavatsky, the “boundless” circles that punctuate this painting may signify, following *The Secret Doctrine*,

10 Henri Bergson, *L’Évolution créatrice*, Paris 1941 [1907]; *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, New York 1998 [1911].

11 Roger Lipsey, *The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, New York 2004, 99. Lipsey indicates that Kupka continued to serve as a medium throughout his life. Czech scholar, Ludmila Vachtová considers this consistent with the long sectarian history of Eastern Bohemia where séances were part of the way of life. Vachtová also points out that the strains of his mediumship led to nervous breakdowns.

12 Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction*, London 2005 [2000], 57.

13 Theosophical periodical culture also flourished in Paris at this time, as exemplified by the monthly *Le Lotus bleu* and the bi-monthly *Theosophical Annals*. See: Mark S. Morrisson, “The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 31, 2008, no. 2 (Winter), 1–22.

14 Colonel Olcott’s *The Buddhist Catechism* was published in Paris in 1891, as *Le Catéchisme bouddhique*; Olcott was President of the Theosophist Society. See also: Léon Rosny, *La Morale du Bouddhisme*, Paris 1891.

15 Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris 1910–1914*, Berkeley 1979, 97.

16 Chelsea Ann Jones, *The Role of Buddhism, Theosophy, and Science in František Kupka’s Search for the Immaterial through 1909*, Austin 2012 [M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin], 21.

“ever-eternal nature, sexless and infinite”.¹⁷ The lotus flowers and the foetus, as Margaret Rowell has observed, may also be correlated to Blavatsky’s conception of the human subject in the microcosm and macrocosm in *Isis Unveiled*: “Man is a little world – a microcosm inside the great universe. Like a foetus, he is suspended by all his *three* spirits, in the matrix of the macrocosmos; and while his terrestrial body is in constant sympathy with its parent earth, his astral soul lives in unison with the sidereal *anima mundi*”.¹⁸ From its emergence in these paintings until *Amorpha, fugue en deux couleurs* (Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours), the circle then signified the need for the terrestrial body in the microcosm and the astral body in the macrocosm to exist in harmony with one another. This harmony could be reached in the eighth and final stage of yoga meditation when a utopian state of cosmic consciousness could be felt, particularly a feeling of oneness with nature and the solar universe. At the same time, these paintings also signal the inadequacy of comprehending this invisible and immaterial reality through the tools of positivist materialism. As Édouard Schuré lamented in *Les Grands Initiés*: “As a result of materialism, positivism, and skepticism, men of the present time have reached a false conception of truth and progress”.¹⁹ Within the “occulture” of Buddhism, meditation and Theosophy, Kupka’s facility for clairvoyance vision enabling him to see beyond the confines of positivist materialism was esteemed, particularly with such publications as Charles W. Leadbeater’s *Clairvoyance*.

In this treatise, Leadbeater defined clairvoyance as “the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight”.²⁰ He considered how inanimate objects became transparent with clairvoyant vision: “The most striking change in the appearance of inanimate objects by the acquisition of this faculty is that most of them become almost transparent, owing to the difference in wave-length of some of the vibrations to which the man has now become susceptible”.²¹ This was captured in the diagram by Claude Bragdon in which the clairvoyant is pictured as seeing not just inside the human body but beyond it to its auras and its fourth dimensionality (see fig. 13).

¹⁷ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, 4. Quoted in: Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920–1940*, Toronto 1992, 102.

¹⁸ H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled. A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, London and New York 1877, 212. Quoted in: Margit Rowell, “Chronology”, in: *František Kupka, 1871–1957*, 80–304, here 86.

¹⁹ Édouard Schuré, *Les Grands Initiés: Esquisse de l’histoire secrète des religions: Rama, Krishna, Hermès, Moïse, Orphée, Pythagore, Platon, Jésus*, Paris 1921 [1889], vii.

²⁰ Charles W. Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, London 1903 [1899], 5. A French translation of the work appeared in 1903.

²¹ Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 30–32.

In enabling human subjects to view invisible worlds, as well as to sense and to feel them through vibrations penetrating what he called “a vast sea of air and ether”, Leadbeater compared the importance of clairvoyancy to the discovery of the X-ray.²² Yet the obsession in Parisian circles with clairvoyance and what the Nobel prize-winning physiologist, Charles Richet, amongst others, called “second sight” had also been ignited, according to Richet by animal magnetism and somnambulism. As Richet explained:

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, after the discoveries of Mesmer and Puységur in animal magnetism and somnambulism, certain somnambulists in France, Germany and England afforded many examples of second sight, a phenomenon that we have called lucidity.²³

Although the relationship of Kupka to the scientific cultures of magnetism remains relatively unexplored, by the time that Kupka had settled in Paris, magnetic hypnosis had become more prevalent than ever. While traceable to Mesmer and Puységur, as Richet indicates, it was used by Jean-Martin Charcot and his *Charcoterie* at Salpêtrière, particularly with magnets, metallic plates and coloured disks to generate emotional transference and polarisation. It was also used by Jules Bernard Luys at La Charité Hospital and in Nancy by Hippolyte Bernheim to demonstrate that imagistic suggestion and transference, particularly of visual material, was the normal property of the brain. In fact, so prevalent had animal magnetism, electromagnetism and cosmic magnetism become in France by the *fin-de-siècle* when Kupka began to live in Paris that this period has been aptly dubbed one of neo-mesmerism, if not neo-magnetism.²⁴

²² Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 8.

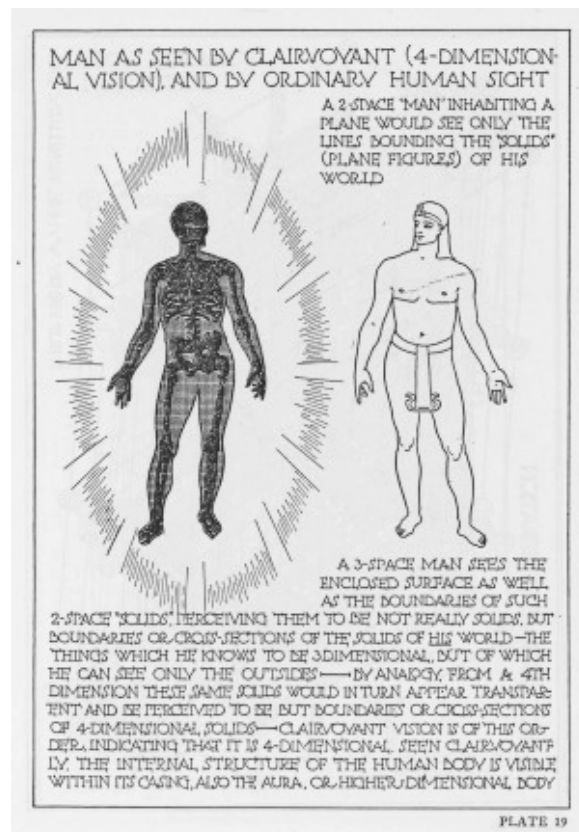
²³ Charles Richet, *Our Sixth Sense*, trans. Fred Rothwell, London 1926, 21.

²⁴ For “neo-mesmerism”, see: Anne Harrington, “Metals and Magnets in Medicine: Hysteria, Hypnosis and Medical Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris”, in: *Psychological Medicine*, 18, 1988, no. 1 (February), 21–38. For “neo-magnetism”, see: Gordon Djurdjevic, “‘Like attracts like’: Some Notions regarding Sympathy, Animal Magnetism and Electromagnetism in Esoteric Scientific Discourse”, in: *Sound Thinking Symposium*, Surrey, BC 2012. See also: Fred Kaplan, “‘The Mesmeric Mania’: The Early Victorians and Animal Magnetism”, in: *Journal of History of Ideas*, 35, 1974, 691–702.

Neo-Mesmerism, Magnetic Energies and Somnambulism

Drawing upon Newton's theory of gravity and his explanation of the movement of tides, Mesmer had explored the impact of gravitational forces upon the movement of fluids through the human and animal body.²⁵ By attaching magnets to the body and by using his hands to direct fluid through the body, Mesmer had discerned that the magnetic poles were as active on the planet as they were upon *Homo sapiens*, as signified by the immense number of plus and minus signs in Hector Durville's 1890 diagram to show how the magnetic poles punctuated the human body (see fig. 14). Immensely popular, Mesmer's practice was nevertheless condemned by a commission drawn from the French Academies of Medicine and Science.²⁶ Undeterred, the Jardin des Plantes naturalist working alongside

Fig. 13: Claude Bragdon, “Man as seen by Clairvoyant (4D Vision) and by Ordinary Human Sight”, in: *A Primer of Higher Space (the fourth dimension)*, Rochester and New York 1913, plate 19. Public Domain.



²⁵ See: Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*, Cambridge, MA 1968.

²⁶ The Report from the Royal Society of Science was signed on 11 August 1874 by seven scientists that included Benjamin Franklin. The Royal Society of Medicine Report tabled five days later, corroborated this report that the effects produced by Mesmer could be explained by “imitation and imagination”. However it has been pointed out that this report was not unanimous, Laurent de Jussieu publishing a separate report vindicating Mesmer. See: Alfred Binet and Charles Féré, *Animal Magnetism*, London 1888 [2nd ed.] – Reprint: Adamant Media Corporation 2005, 25–26.

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, J.P.F. Deleuze, assembled his *Histoire critique du magnétisme animal* (Critical History of Animal Magnetism) and the booklet *Introduction pratique sur le magnétisme animal* (Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism).²⁷ His detailed descriptions of the magnetiser's techniques, used to manipulate universal fluids, stimulate animal heat and establish a magnetic relationship between magnetiser and magnetised, became the touchstone for all subsequent practices in France, including those used by Rochas and Magnin.²⁸

Stressing the significance of touch as a means of transmitting energy from one body to another, Deleuze recommended that the magnetiser touch the thumbs, arms, shoulders, stomach and legs in "passes" at least five or six times, before raising them to the head.²⁹ With their fingers separated from one another and slightly bent, he also recommended that magnetisers keep their hands at a distance from the body from which emanation could be discharged, so that the magnetised subject could feel heat escaping from the magnetiser's fingers often signalled by bright light. As he explained, this was a means of spreading the magnetic fluid throughout the body and inducing magnetic somnambulism, which was subsequently termed hypnotism.³⁰ By the 1820s, this technique was being applied in Parisian hospitals, particularly at the Hôtel Dieu, Bicêtre, Charité and Salpêtrière.

Compounded by James Braid's experiments in phreno-hypnotism, in 1845 the *Journal du magnétisme* was launched and the question of animal magnetism was reopened by the Academy of Medicine, although this time it was not disputed.³¹ By 1866 the founder of the École de Nancy, Auguste Liébeault, had deployed animal magnetism successfully for ten years before writing his treatise on

²⁷ J.P.F. Deleuze, *Histoire critique du magnétisme animal*, Paris 1813; J.P.F. Deleuze, *Introduction pratique sur le magnétisme animal, suivie d'une lettre écrite à l'auteur par un médecin étranger*, Paris 1819; *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism*, trans. Thomas C. Hartshorn, New York 1884.

²⁸ See: Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment*. See also: Richard Burkhardt, *The Spirit of System: Lamarck and Evolutionary Biology*, Cambridge, MA. 1977, 65–69. Burkhardt mentions Lamarck's investigation of the subtle fluids in the earth and meteorology in relation to changes within the animal's body.

²⁹ J.P.F. Deleuze, *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism*.

³⁰ "The technique entailed holding a bright object above the forehead, about 12 inches from the eyes until the pupils began to dilate. The magnetizer is then instructed to move two fingers from his free hand from the object towards the eyes until they automatically close". J.P.F. Deleuze, *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism*, 120.

³¹ James Braid, *Neurypnology or The Rationale of nervous sleep considered in relation with animal magnetism*, London and Edinburgh 1843.

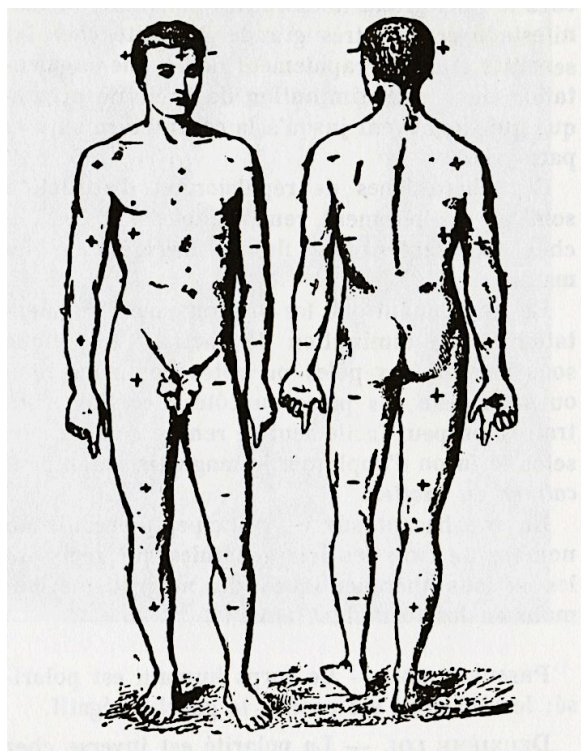


Fig. 14: Hector Durville, “Schéma de la polarité du corps humain”, in: *Pour devenir Magnétiseur*, Paris 1890. Photograph by the author.

it.³² After closely studying Liébeault’s methods, from 1882 Hippolyte Bernheim applied them to patients at the Hôpital de Nancy.³³ Yet as early as 1877, prompted by Richet and Victor Burq, Charcot had been experimenting in the neurology clinic at Salpêtrière with magnetism and the physiological affects of metallic plates and magnets, particularly on transference and polarisation.³⁴ Far from shying away from this contentious practice when vying for membership of the Academy of Medicine, in 1882 he devoted a paper to it, entitled *Sur les divers états nerveux déterminés par l’hypnotisation chez les hystériques* (On the Various Nervous States Determined by Hypnotisation in Hysterics).³⁵

After identifying the three successive states of hypnotism as lethargy, catalepsy and somnambulism, Charcot pointed out that during the second state of

³² Auguste Liébeault, *Du sommeil et des états analogues, considérés surtout au point de vue de l’action du moral sur le physique*, Paris 1866; Auguste Liébeault, *De la suggestion dans l’état hypnotique et dans l’état de veille*, Paris 1878.

³³ H. Bernheim, *De la suggestion dans l’état hypnotique et dans l’état de veille*, Paris 1884. See also: Henri F. Ellenberger, *Histoire de la découverte de l’inconscient*, Paris 1994 [1974], 119–121.

³⁴ Judith Pinter and Stephen Jay Lynn, *Hypnosis: A Brief History*, London 2008, 81–84.

³⁵ Jean-Martin Charcot, “Sur les divers états nerveux déterminés par l’hypnotisation chez les hystériques”, in: *Comptes-rendus hebdomadaires des séances de l’Académie des Sciences*, 94, 1882, 403–405.

catalepsy induced by fixation upon bright light, it was possible to transfer patients' symptoms from one side of their bodies to the other through the use of magnets.³⁶ Magnets were able to polarise perceptions and emotions, he explained, so that complementary colours could be perceived and antithetical emotions experienced, laughter swiftly giving way to anger and depression.³⁷ Such a dominant role did animal magnetism come to play at Salpêtrière that the renowned magnetist, Marquis de Puyfontaine, was invited to Salpêtrière's neurology clinic to teach interns this technique. It was under his direction that their first experiments were carried out, the three stages identified by Charcot being equivalent to those defined by Puyfontaine and other magnetists. This close relationship spawned between hypnotism and animal magnetism at Salpêtrière was highlighted by two of Charcot's followers, Alfred Binet and Charles Féré.

To contextualise Charcot's modern method of hypnotism within the history of animal magnetism, in 1887 Binet and Féré published *Le magnétisme animal* in which they declared:

The history of animal magnetism has shown that if, up to late years, the existence of nervous sleep, and of various phenomena allied with it has been doubted, it is chiefly because the experimenters wanted method [...]. The method which led to the revival of hypnotism may be summed up in these words: the production of material symptoms, which give [...] an anatomical demonstration of the reality of a special state of the nervous system [...]. A revolution has taken place [...]. It is to Charcot that the honour must be assigned of having been the first to enter on this course [...]. The researches of the Salpêtrière School served as a point of departure for a fresh scientific movement, which continues up to the present day.³⁸

By the 1889 Congress of Physiological Psychology at the *Exposition universelle* presided over by Charcot, one of four sections was devoted to hypnotism in which a diversity of research into magnetism was revealed. From his research at La Charité Hospital, Jules Bernard Luys reported that due to the electromagnetic polarity of the body not only was it possible to transfer emotions but also illnesses using magnets, a patient's diseased "emanations" being drawn out of their body by a magnet and into the body of the magnetiser.³⁹ With Gérard Encausse, better known to occultists as Papus, he also reported on the iron crown

³⁶ Charcot, "Sur les divers états nerveux", 404–405.

³⁷ Charcot, "Sur les divers états nerveux", 405. In Binet's and Féré's *Animal Magnetism*, the English translation of Charcot's observation reads: "Hallucinations of the colour red could, for example, be turned into green while fear of snakes could be transformed into love".

³⁸ Binet and Féré, *Animal Magnetism*, 85–86.

³⁹ J.B. Luys, "Action psychique des aimants, des courants électro-magnétiques, et des courants électriques continus", in: *Revue d'Hypnologie théorique et pratique*, 1890, 74–83, 107–112.

they had devised as a conducting medium to absorb and store morbid thought patterns and psychotic delusions of patients, which could be transferred to other patients.⁴⁰ So convinced was Papus of the success of these experiments that in 1893, he formed an *École de Magnétisme* in Paris with Durville. At the same time at Salpêtrière, the physician and parapsychologist Hippolyte Baraduc experimented with capturing the magnetic fields and psychic energy created by hands impressed on a photographic plate and invented a biometer, based upon the magnetometer, to measure the psychic energy emitted by bodies.⁴¹ With Louis Darget, he also endeavoured to photograph thoughts and dreams, which Bois described as “images of the soul, photographs of thoughts emotions and dreams”.⁴² At the same time a creative dimension was also recognised to arise from magnetism. As Binet and Féré surmised:

These facts show that a somnambulist is far from being [...] an unconscious automaton, devoid of judgment, reason and intellectual curiosity. On the contrary, his memory is perfect, his intelligence is active and his imagination is highly excited. Instances have been given of subjects who could, during somnambulism, perform intellectual feats of which they were incapable in the waking state.⁴³

An avid student of these new sciences, Kupka was not just aware of their experiments with magnetic hypnosis and transference but was inspired to conduct them himself. He was also aware of the ways in which Bois and Albert de Rochas had taken them one step further to explore these “intellectual feats” in relation to *l’art inconscient* and the possibility of superconsciousness. The attainment of superconsciousness was seminal to the political position that Kupka actively occupied in Paris as an Anarcho-Communist.

⁴⁰ J.B. Luys and G. Encausse, *Du transfert à distance à l’aide d’une couronne de fer aimanté d’états névropathiques variés, d’un sujet à l’état de veille sur un sujet à l’état hypnotique*, Clermont, Oise 1891.

⁴¹ Hippolyte Baraduc, *La Force vitale, notre corps vitale fluidique, sa formule biométrique*, Paris 1893.

⁴² Hippolyte Baraduc, *L’Âme Humaine: Ses Mouvements, ses Lumières, et l’Iconographie de l’Invisible Fluidique*, Paris 1896; Jules Bois, *Le Monde invisible*, Paris [1890], 380. See also: Serena Keshavjee, “Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in *fin-de-siècle* France”, in: *Aries*, 13, 2013, 37–69.

⁴³ Binet and Féré, *Animal Magnetism*, 147.

“Propaganda of the Deed”, Neo-Lamarckian Evolutionism and Anarcho-Communist Utopia

Following the application of the Anarcho-Communist concept of “propaganda of the deed” to art, “réveiller la conscience populaire en sommeil”, Kropotkin had called upon artists to take a defiant stand in order to spark the conscience of humanity and engender revolt.⁴⁴ “Narrate for us in your vivid style or in your fervent pictures the titanic struggle of the masses against their oppressors; inflame young hearts with the beautiful breath of revolution that inspired our ancestors”, he wrote. “Show the people the ugliness of contemporary life and make them see the cause of this ugliness. Tell us what a rational life would have been had it not been blocked at each step by the ineptness and ignominies of the present order”.⁴⁵ Yet to activate this shift of consciousness and social change Kropotkin, like Jean Grave and Reclus, did not consider that anarchist artists should only produce an art of direct propaganda. Instead they recognised the need for artists to reveal at the same time an Anarcho-Communist utopia of free association and to evoke what it would feel like to exist in it, Grave insisting that since art was the supreme manifestation of individualism, the artist should not just be an activist but be granted perfect freedom to create his concept of the beautiful.⁴⁶

By being able to reveal on the one hand, the present oppression and on the other, to signal Anarcho-Communist utopia, Kropotkin considered that a dialectical art praxis could mediate this transformation. Following his call, dialectical art praxes had been vigorously pursued by such Anarcho-Communist artists, as I have argued elsewhere, as Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce and Henri Rousseau.⁴⁷ From formation of the French Radical Republic, Kupka pursued this dialectical art praxis in which he produced two distinct forms of art: He exposed false consciousness in one while illuminating an Anarcho-Communist naturist utopia in the other.

⁴⁴ Pietr Kropotkin, *Paroles d'un révolté*, Paris 1885 [Geneva 1879], 65; Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, trans. George Woodcock, Montreal 1992, 81.

⁴⁵ Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, 1992, 13. See: Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium 1885–1898*, New Haven 1961, 157.

⁴⁶ Dana Ward, “Anarchist Culture on the Cusp of the Twentieth Century”, in: Jorell A. Meléndez Badillo and Nathan J. Jun (eds), *Without Borders or Limits: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Anarchist Studies*, Newcastle 2013, 107–122, here 117–119.

⁴⁷ Fae Brauer, “Contesting ‘Le Corps Militaire’: Antimilitarism, Pacifism, Anarcho-Communism and ‘Le Douanier’ Rousseau’s *La Guerre*”, in: *RIHA Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art*, 48, 2012 (July, special issue: *New Directions in Neo-Impressionism*, ed. Anne Dymond and Tania Woloshyn), 1–60.

Well before enrolling at the Sorbonne in 1905 to study the Physics of electromagnetism, Kupka had pursued the Anarcho-Communism of Kropotkin's "propaganda of the deed".⁴⁸ By putting his pen, paintbrush and burin at the service of the revolution, Kupka became what both Anarcho-Communists and Marxist Communists called "a comrade in arms".⁴⁹ Well versed in the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Kupka's cartoons for *L'Assiette au Beurre*, *L'Anarchie*, *Les Temps Nouveaux* and *Cocorico* focused upon exposing estrangement, exploitation and false consciousness. Following Georg Simmel's theory of money and Marx on profit, the capitalist is invariably pictured by Kupka with his belly bloated with money while the worker is inscribed as penniless and powerless.⁵⁰ That the worker had no choice but to labour for the capitalist is signalled by numerous cartoons by Kupka, one of which shows cannons directed at the worker surrounding the belly-bloated capitalist heightened by such ironic titles as "Liberté".⁵¹ While the worker is pictured by Kupka in this cartoon in the palm of the capitalist's hand, in his parody of *Civilisation*, the worker is manacled to and crucified by the wheels and turbines of industrialisation.⁵² With the Boer War revealed as having being fueled by an international band of capitalists, the very issue of peace in 1904 after the Herero tribe uprising in Namibia, is revealed as being manipulated by Jewish-capitalists consorting with Kaiser Wilhelm II, as signified by the pipe of peace being smoked with the Kaiser's crown on the lid.⁵³ After the German army's genocidal obliteration of the Herero and Nama people, Kupka then indicated how

48 One of the first to formulate "propaganda of the deed" was Mikhail Bakunin. In his "Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis" in 1870, Bakunin stated that "we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda". In 1887, Kropotkin pointed out in *Le Révolté* that "a structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of dynamite". For the development of this theory in collaboration with Reclus on its relation to art, see: Marie Fleming, "'Propaganda by the Deed': Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe", in: *Terrorism*, 4, 1980, 1–4, 1–23.

49 For Kropotkin's and Reclus' perception of themselves as "comrades-in-arms", particularly as "comrades armed with pens", see: Dana Ward, "Alchemy in Clarens: Kropotkin and Reclus, 1877–1881", in: Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl (eds), *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, Plymouth 2010, 209–226, here 218.

50 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London 1978 [1900]. See: František Kupka, "L'Argent", in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1902, no. 41 (11 January), cover illustration.

51 František Kupka, "Liberté", in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1902, no. 41 (11 January), 647.

52 František Kupka, "Civilisation", in: *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 1906, 2.

53 František Kupka, "La Bande internationale des capitalistes", in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1991, no. 37 (15 November), centre-spread; František Kupka, "La Paix", in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1904, no. 177 (20 August), front cover.

peace seemed as fictional as a theatre performance, as signified by his cartoon of Punch pushing the theatre curtain over the massacre behind it.⁵⁴

Abhorring the corruption and hypocrisy of Catholicism, by no means was this religion spared, especially in the year of separation of church and state. To show that priests were just as avarice as capitalists, Kupka caricatured them as praying for money to be fed to them in mouthfuls and exhorting their congregations to be as self-sacrificing as Jesus while concealing their pots of money – despite their Franciscan vow of poverty.⁵⁵ Even *Fraternité* is depicted by Kupka as having been sullied by capitalism, the laws written by the people are shown as having been guided by the hand of *Money*, with *Money* only throwing a yoke to a family man desperate for work so that he can join the human toil of pulling *Money*'s rich chariot (see col. fig. 2).⁵⁶

As allegories of enslavement and perversion of the natural order, these cartoons show how the aspiration of families to live in harmony with nature – for which Kupka and his fellow Anarcho-Communists strove – was constantly thwarted by a capitalist political economy. Only in his final cartoon for *L'Argent* (see col. fig. 2) does Kupka reveal justice and *Science* triumphing as signified by the new dawn glowing beyond *Humanitas* and the people mutually aiding one another in their support of medicine, humanitarian knowledge and extended families.⁵⁷ Yet Kupka shows that this can only happen once Marianne as Athena has pinioned the bloody head of *Money* to her shield. While these cartoons for Anarchist journals, particularly *L'Assiette au Beurre*, were his prime vehicle for demolishing the capitalist political economy and the inequalities that he perceived it yielded, Kupka's aspirations for an Anarchist sociological, ecological and cosmological utopia were most clearly imaged in his illustrations for the five volume treatise by Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre* (Man and the Earth).⁵⁸

In his historical and social geography of the earth, Reclus focused upon such Neo-Lamarckian factors as soil condition, climate and what he called “ambiance” to explore the interrelationship between environmental changes and the evolution of species, particularly their consciousness within nature. As Reclus surmised in his preface, “Man is nature becoming conscious of itself”.⁵⁹ In order for communal society to be able to evolve, Reclus investigated how it had lived

⁵⁴ František Kupka, “La Seule!”, in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1904, no. 177 (20 August), 4.

⁵⁵ František Kupka, “Rélignons!”, in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1904, no. 169 (7 May), front cover; see also page 2: “Dieu de Vatican”.

⁵⁶ František Kupka, “Fraternité”, in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1902, no. 41 (11 January), 649.

⁵⁷ František Kupka, “L'Argent”, in: *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 1902, no. 41 (11 January), back cover.

⁵⁸ Élisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, Paris 1905–1908.

⁵⁹ Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, vol. 1, i.

in harmony with nature and embraced not only mutual aid and voluntary egalitarianism but also the greater family of animals.⁶⁰ The knowledge able to propel this evolution lay, he found, in science, specifically the study of the natural and human worlds for the purpose of furthering the brotherhood of mankind. This integral education, as he called it, would help prepare people for a classless society free from racism, colonialism and superstition, particularly Catholicism, which Reclus considered had only compounded the bourgeois order. In providing an antithetical narrative to that of the Biblical *Genesis*, his environmentalist geography was instrumental to integral education and consistent with Anarcho-Communist “propaganda by the deed”, as were Kupka’s images for it.

In his vision of the history of humanity, Kupka illustrated the flow of time as organic with generations of *Homo sapiens* sweeping through the universe in progressive movement towards an ultimate harmonious unity. In his *Rythme de l’histoire – Vague* (Rhythm of History – Wave; see fig. 15), the flow of time is represented by an undulating wave, which is consistent with electromagnetic waves as well as the oscillations scientifically theorised in thermal energy and Reclus’ conception of historical time, as Kupka explained:

From the beginning of recorded time, the amplitude of the oscillations has never ceased to grow and the thousands of small local rhythms have gradually merged in a more ample rhythm: the more general oscillations of nations succeed the tiny movements of the life of cities, then comes the great world-wide oscillation which makes the entire earth and its people vibrate in a single movement.⁶¹

Yet to illustrate time in between the beginning and endpoint of human culture, Kupka deployed a vast cosmic arc (see fig. 16). Through the dynamic swirl in *Progrès*, an ape with a rock as a tool becomes connected with a contemporary worker who offers his hand to the spectator to join him in a utopian future, the swirl also appearing as a rainbow encircling the Second Socialist International formed in Paris in 1889. Studded with stars and planets sweeping across the night-sky, the cosmic arc is one of the first images in the book to illustrate the preface of Reclus’ mammoth project in front of which a figure like Reclus scrutinises the planet. Reappearing in the image of *Religion*, this cosmic arc re-emerges as the

60 Fae Brauer, “Becoming Simian: Devolution as Evolution in Transformist Modernism”, in: Fae Brauer and Serena Keshavjee (eds), *Picturing Evolution and Extinction: Regeneration and Degeneration in Modern Visual Culture*, Newcastle 2015, 127–156.

61 Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, as translated and quoted by Patricia Leighton in: *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*, Chicago 2013, 166.



Fig. 15: František Kupka, *Rythme de l'histoire – Vague*, “Divisions et rythme de l'histoire” (Členění a rytmus dějin), 1905, black and white lithograph illustration, in: Élisée Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, Paris 1905–1908, vol. 1, 354. Photograph by the author.

last image of the book (see fig. 17). In the chapter entitled *Progrès* it signifies a new dawn in which man, woman and children could live free of clothing, unperturbed by conflict and the destructive forces of capitalism, in harmony with the earth and with one another.

While capturing the Anarchist utopia of a society in harmony with nature and the universe envisioned by Reclus and Kropotkin, Kupka's image also embraces the Theosophical concept of cosmological and universal harmony, particularly as the family in the foreground – just like man depicted by Kupka on this book cover – all look towards the galaxies as if heralding a cosmic generation and a cosmic Utopia. Once he infused his studies of cosmology with the vibratory power of magnetic emanations, Kupka's celestial arc became a dominant motif in his mesmeric abstractions.

By satirizing the conditions of exploitation in his Anarcho-Communist illustrations and cartoons, alongside the brutal colonial abuse and decimation of indigenous people, Kupka's didactic art was designed to awaken his fellow workers

to their oppression in order to liberate them from the yoke of industrial capitalism and colonial imperialism. At the same time his illustrations for *L'Homme et la Terre*, like his paintings of women and girls nude in nature, particularly the wild joy expressed in *Epona-ballade: Les Joies* (Ballad of Epona: The Joys), as well as his painting of a male meditating nude in nature, *Méditation* (Meditation: When Mountain and Valleys are One), all offer a glimpse of a Utopia that appears Anarcho-Communist, Neo-Lamarckian, Spiritualist and Buddhist. These two parts of his dialectic art praxis were then designed to synthesise in the workers' quest for an Anarcho-Communist utopia in which their families could live harmoniously in nature and evolve to a higher being within joyous mutually cooperative communities, as epitomised by Kupka's final illustration for Reclus' *L'Homme et la Terre* (see fig. 15). Yet once Kupka began to study the new sciences, particularly electromagnetism, and to explore the magnetic dimensions of "unconscious art", no longer did he pursue this dialectic. Instead he concentrated upon creating images of Anarcho-cosmic utopias from which workers could feel liberated from the rationalist positivist restraints and corporeal constraints of the Radical Republic and achieve an "ethereal vision" of their position within the cosmos viewed from a great distance and so close that they could realise how they existed in worlds within worlds.⁶² These Anarcho-cosmic utopias were also designed to engender superconsciousness, as Bois and Blavatsky defined it, and individual empowerment. Spurred on by the experiments with magnetic hypnosis and *l'art inconscient* by Rochas and Magnin, "magnetic waves", rather than didactic messages were designed to be emitted from his "mesmeric abstractions", in his words just "like those of an hypnotiser".⁶³

Magnetic Hypnosis, l'artiste inconscient and Superconsciousness

As the nexus between the unconscious and creativity was increasingly explored in the neurological and occult sciences, particularly in parapsychology, so the instances of artists and mediums endeavouring to create in somnambulant, mesmerised or mediumistic states became increasingly prevalent, as illustrated by the paintings reportedly produced during hypnotic trances by the medium

⁶² Meecham and Sheldon, *Modern Art*, 56.

⁶³ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229. The book was originally published in Prague under the title *Tvoření v umění výtvarném* in 1923.

Hélène Smith, including her portrait with her guardian angel.⁶⁴ In an article entitled “Mediumism and Art” accompanied by a reproduction of Rousseau’s *The Snake Charmer*, his paintings were identified with mediumism.⁶⁵ They were also compared with Smith’s, particularly his 1899 double portrait of himself and his lover, Joséphine, entitled *The Present and the Past* (not exhibited until 1907 as *Philosophical Thought*) in which the heads of Rousseau’s first wife and Joséphine’s first husband hover like ghosts in clouds above them. “It’s a little bit spiritualist, isn’t it?” Rousseau admitted to Arsène Alexandre.⁶⁶ As Bois explained in his 1897 article, “L’Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes”, as mediumism provided a way of exteriorising the interior, mediumistic art was not pathological but creative with a definable aesthetic that arose from an absence of control over the will.⁶⁷ Yet from his research conducted with Rochas, Bois recognized that magnetism could also do so with “normal subjects”.

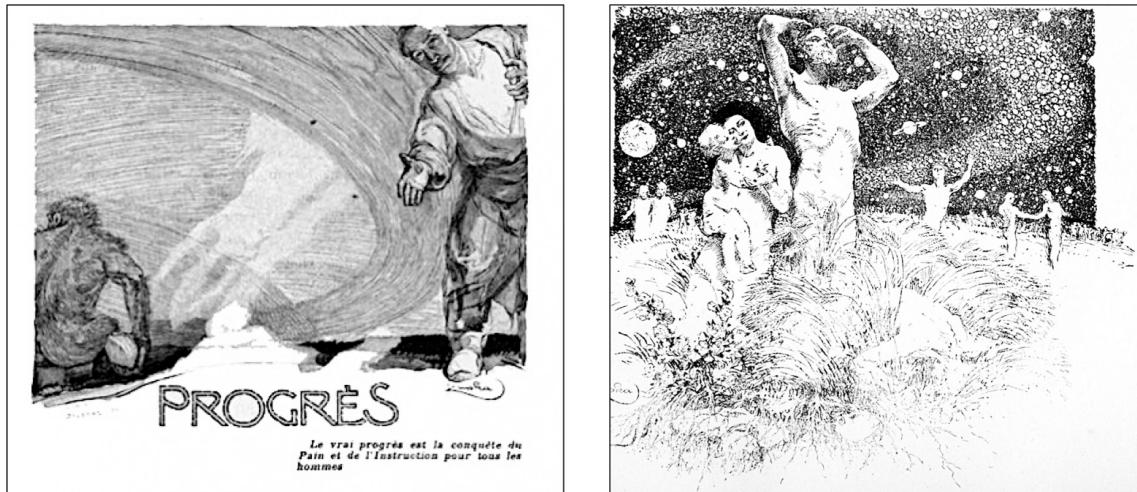


Fig. 16 (left): František Kupka, “Progrès”, 1905–1908, black and white lithograph illustration, in: Élisée Reclus, *L’Homme et la Terre*, vol. 6, 501. Photograph by the author. **Fig. 17 (right):** František Kupka, “Progrès”, 1905–1908, black and white lithograph illustration, in: Élisée Reclus, *L’Homme et la Terre*, vol. 6, 541. Photograph by the author.

⁶⁴ This is reproduced in: Morehead, “Symbolism, Mediumship, and the Study of the Soul”, p. 78.

⁶⁵ “Le Mediumnisme et L’Art, *La Vie mystérieuse*, 69, 10 November 1911, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Arsène Alexandre, “La Vie et l’œuvre d’Henri Rousseau, peintre et ancien employé de l’Octroi”, in: *Comœdia*, 19 March 1910 – quoted in: Pascal Rousseau, “The Magic of Images: Hallucination and Magnetic Reverie in the Work of Henri Rousseau”, in: Frances Morres and Christopher Green, *Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris*, London 2005, 190–205, here 194.

⁶⁷ Jules Bois, “L’Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes”, in: *Revue des Revues*, 20, 1897 (January–March), 405–420.

By publication of *Les États profonds de l'hypnose* (Profound States of Hypnosis) in 1892,⁶⁸ Rochas was recognised as one of France's leading parapsychologist and the magnetist most committed to the concept of *fluide magnétique*, as divulged in his open letter to Bois:

The facts prove the existence of diverse emanations from nature generally encompassed by the name of *magnetic fluid*, and they accord with theories by Orientals, ancient Greek philosophers and the first fathers of the church on the *fluid body* or soul acting as an intermediary between the spirit and the body.⁶⁹

Struck by the profound emotions unleashed at La Charité by Luys' use of magnets and magnetism, as well as the differences in "acute sensibilities" disclosed by Pierre Janet's somnambulist studies, Rochas explored how magnetisers could unleash the "supernatural faculties" of relatively "sane subjects".⁷⁰

In his treatise, *Les Fluides des Magnétiseurs* (The Fluid of Magnetisers), Rochas explained how the magnetic fluid inducted by magnetism was able to act directly upon the nervous system.⁷¹ So powerful was this magnetic fluid that he compared it to an electric current or electromagnet able to charge the nervous system into unleashing a "superior form of being" with heightened sight, taste, hearing and touch, as signified by the rays emanating from the left and right eyes, ears, mouth and hands in Rochas' diagram (see col. fig. 3).⁷² Given that the electromagnetic polarisation of the body was premised upon the North and South Pole having opposite properties, if not antithetical psychologies, these rays of super-sensibility were coloured by Rochas either red or blue, according to their polar correspondence, and likened to flames.⁷³

Following his friend, Richet's theory of the "sixth sense" in psychophysiological states of telepathy, Rochas considered that when externalised sensibility became heightened in magnetised subjects, they could not just experience thought at a distance but also stimuli. This meant that when a certain spot was

⁶⁸ Lt.-Colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun, *Les États profonds de l'hypnose*, Paris 1892.

⁶⁹ A. de Rochas, *Les Frontières de la Science*, 2e série. Lettre ouverte à M. Jules Bois, vol. 2, Paris 1904, 26.

⁷⁰ Rochas, *Les États profonds de l'hypnose*, 94.

⁷¹ Lt.-Colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun, *Les Fluides des Magnétiseurs, précis des expériences du baron de Reichenbach sur ses propriétés physiques et physiologiques, classées et annotées par le lieutenant-colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun*, Paris 1891.

⁷² Rochas d'Aiglun, *Les Fluides des Magnétiseurs*, 93.

⁷³ Sophie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychological Research and Metaphysics in France, 1853–1931*, Baltimore 2011, 56.

pinched or pricked away from their body, pain could still be felt.⁷⁴ Externalised sensibilities also enabled magnetised subjects to feel the environment, Rochas likening the luminous energy or auratic effluvia emitted by magnetised bodies to “a garment” of the extroflected inner double when the senses surpass flesh and take on spectrality.⁷⁵ No clearer demonstration exists than Paul Nadar’s photograph of Rochas himself with his interior sensibility exteriorised into a fluid phantasmatic double or “astral body”. Phantasmatic doubles were also accessed by Rochas through experimental séances conducted not just at Camille Flammarion’s apartment but also in his own home where he recorded Eusapia Palladino being lifted up in her chair and carried onto a table.⁷⁶

Fusing the art of the medium with the magnetiser and Janet’s concept of “automatisme psychologique”, Rochas hired the petit-bourgeois artist’s model, Mademoiselle Lina [de Ferkel] to investigate the “exteriorisation of sensibilities” in performances designed to embrace Bois’ concept of “l’esthétique des esprits” (see fig. 18).⁷⁷ Directing the “life force fluid and radiation” of effluvia with magnets and his hands to magnetise Lina, Rochas then deployed suggestibility through poetry, plays and music. Recording their sensory impact in his book, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste* (Sentiments, Music and Gesture), “for the first time”, Bois proclaimed: “hypnotism has been pressed into the service of art and a peculiarly sensitive medium. [...] For the first time art is life”.⁷⁸ At the same time in his open letter to Bois, Rochas cited hypnotism and musical suggestion in art being concurrently explored by the magnetiser, Émile Magnin, on the young Magdeleine G., and photographed by Magnin’s Swiss brother-in-law, Fred Boissonnas (see fig. 19).⁷⁹

A well-known practitioner of animal magnetism, Magnin was Professor at the École de magnétisme of Paris when Magdeleine G. was referred to him for headaches “with a neurasthenic origin that treatment had been unable to cure”.⁸⁰

74 Lt.-Colonel de Rochas d’Aiglun, *Extériorisation de la Sensibilité*, Paris 1895, 211.

75 Rochas, *Extériorisation de la Sensibilité*, 212–214.

76 Albert de Rochas, *La Lévation*, Paris 1897. This levitation was witnessed by Director of *Annales des sciences psychiques*, Dr Dariex. These séances were followed in 1898 by the series of well-publicised séances with the famous medium Eusapia Palladino organised by Flammarion who invited Bois, Jules Claretie, the playwright Victorien Sardou, and Charles Richet to attend.

77 Bois, “L’Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes”.

78 Albert de Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, Grenoble 1900, 19.

79 Rochas, *Les Frontières de la Science*, 12.

80 Émile Magnin, *L’Art et l’Hypnose. Interprétation plastique d’œuvres littéraires et musicales*, Geneva 1906, 1–2. See also: Émile Magnin, *Devant le mystère de la névrose. De la guérison de cas réputés incurables*, Paris 1920.



Fig. 18: “Mademoiselle Lina’ performing, during magnetic hypnosis, Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre*”, in: Albert de Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 1900, part 3: *Les Suggestions musicales. Action de la Musique sur les Animaux*. Photograph by the author.

Under magnetic hypnosis, not only did she appear to lose all hysterical symptoms but she appeared capable of reacting spontaneously to art and music. Once magnetised, this 30-year-old mother born at Archinard in Georgia and named Emma Guipet, was transformed.⁸¹ Although appearing blissfully ignorant of modern composers, dance and theatre, Magnin reported how intensely she expressed the emotion states conveyed by Chopin’s *Marche Funèbre* and Richard Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, her entire body exuding empathy to fuse actor with audience.⁸² In private séances and in the studios of Auguste Rodin and Albert Besnard, she performed the compositions of Franz Schubert, poems of Paul Verlaine, Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and improvisations executed on the piano.⁸³

Seeking to study the movement and gestures of this “artiste inconscient” in nature and in an environment that crystallised Classical culture in its supposedly “pure” state – a state in which dance and trance as personified by *Terpsichore* were perceived as integral to everyday life – Magnin travelled with Magdeleine

⁸¹ See: Céline Eidenbenz, “L’hypnose au Parthénon. Les photographies de Magdeleine G. par Fred Boissonnas”, in: *Études photographiques*, 2011, no. 28 (November), 200–237.

⁸² Magnin, *L’Art et l’Hypnose*, 9.

⁸³ Magnin, *L’Art et l’Hypnose*, 9–10.



Fig. 19: Fred Boissonnas, Magdeleine G. performing, during magnetic hypnosis, *Chevauchée de La Walkyrie* at the Acropolis, 1903, Cyanotype, taken at the Acropolis under the direction of Émile Magnin. Photograph by the author.

G. and Boissonnas to the Acropolis.⁸⁴ Spurred on by Boissonnas' photographs of the Parthenon taken from 1900, including its frieze; Horace and Ovid's descriptions of Dionysian maenads dancing ecstatically and tirelessly under magnetic hypnosis at Bacchanales, and the theory that hypnotic suggestion had been used by Phidias and Praxiteles "to perfect their sculpture", Magnin aimed to recapture this source of magnetism in order to regenerate modern culture.⁸⁵ It was on the Acropolis that Magdeleine was then magnetised by Magnin and photographed performing for his book, *L'Art et l'Hypnose* (see fig. 19), her silhouette appearing like a Greek vase figure on its cover. Once magnetised, "inhibitions were case aside", concluded Alfred Kerr; "her innermost being seemed to be turned inside out. She is [...] utterly emancipated".⁸⁶ The same observations were made of Lina when extemporizing scenes, striking poses and performing dances under Rochas' magnetic hypnosis.

⁸⁴ Magnin, *L'Art et l'Hypnose*, 182. See also: Jacqueline Carroy, *Hypnose, suggestion et psychologie. L'invention de sujets*, Paris 1991, here 96.

⁸⁵ Magnin, *L'Art et l'Hypnose*, 392.

⁸⁶ Alfred Kerr [Alfred Kempner], "Magdeleine G." [8 February 1905], *Gesammelte Schriften. Das neue Drama*, vol. 5: *Das Mimenreich*, Berlin 1917, 486.

Referring to the passionate gestures depicted by Le Brun, Lavater and Duchenne de Bologne, Rochas maintained that hypnotism confirmed most of their ideas of the unconscious.⁸⁷ This was demonstrated by his photographs of the arm and hand gestures, body movement and intense facial expressions of the hypnotised Lina while performing poetry and plays. Yet while Rochas closely scrutinised the impact of visual and verbal suggestion upon Lina's gestures, he considered that music carried the additional vibratory force of magnetism, a phenomenon he had observed affecting animals as much as humans.⁸⁸ Musical sensations and vibrations seemed able to jolt all her nerve fibres and sensibilities, Rochas claimed, penetrating her unconscious sensibilities far more directly as epitomised by her dancing of *Extase* and her dramatic performance of Wagner's *Die Walküre* (see fig. 18).⁸⁹ However when asked her impressions afterwards, all she could offer were such vague responses as: "This is gay or sad; it makes me either want to dance or to cry".⁹⁰ Lina's "ordinary personality and everyday soul was pleasant, kindly but in no way remarkable", explained Bois. Under the spell of animal magnetism, he explained how it transformed:

Once swept by the hypnotic influence, a second personality awoke in her subconscious, profound, very old, for her ancestors must have created it; very new, for she had all the charm of youth, all the surprises, all the divine inexperience of instinct. [...] But her control of judgment and will had vanished. This genius did not know what she did. [...] Awake, she was but moderately fond of music and poetry. She could not dance. In trance – such is the term used – she executed the most difficult steps of Europe and Asia. She gave expression to every form of beauty and of horror, to every sentiment and every passion, now tragédienne, now comédienne. Presentations that would have called for long practice on the part of the most experienced artists she executed spontaneously, without effort or hesitation.⁹¹

Drawing upon the theory of associative correspondences, Rochas considered how her reflexes from audio sensations were triggered by other sensory organs "not of thought nor of the intervention of will".⁹² Magnetic hypnosis had purportedly led to an "exteriorisation of sensibility".⁹³ While Bois maintained that this unleas-

⁸⁷ Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 19–48.

⁸⁸ Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 126.

⁸⁹ Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 163–164.

⁹⁰ Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 264.

⁹¹ Jules Bois, "Lina, in Hypnotic Sleep, Rivals Dance of Bacchantes: Remarkable Case Reported from Paris by Scientist Fulfills Wagner's Conditions", *The New York Times*, 1 September 1907, 3. With a double personae subject such as Lina, said Bois to Rochas, "one is able to absorb a panorama of nations, customs, sentiments and emotions admirably rendered by gesture".

⁹² Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 181.

⁹³ Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste*, 202; see also chapter four: "Action de la musique sur le corps astral", 259–270.

hing of the unconscious could lead to *l'art inconscient*, both Bois and Rochas concluded that it could release the “supernatural faculties” to generate super-consciousness.⁹⁴ The performances of Lina and Magdeleine G. then seemed to prove unequivocally the existence of a higher consciousness of creativity, genius, inspiration and intuition, as well as a super sense of reason and morality.

Electromagnetic Waves, Luminous Vibrations and Magnetic Modernism

By the time that Kupka enrolled at the Sorbonne to study the physics of electromagnetism, the potency of imagistic suggestion and transference had been well established alongside the vibratory power of magnetic emanations to unleash the unconscious and unlock creativity. Following Charcot's and Bernheim's experiments with coloured disks and signs demonstrating how the affective powers of visual suggestion far exceeded verbal commands in achieving magnetic states, Bernheim's colleague, Paul Souriau, had endeavoured to theorise how the affective power of a work of art could capture beholders in a “state of hypnosis and ecstasy”. Due to the affective power of suggestion triggered by an artwork, Souriau explained in his book, *La Suggestion dans l'Art* (Suggestion in Art), how beholders could reach the productive layers of the unconscious where “new combinations of images are possible”.⁹⁵ At this point, Souriau envisaged that “a scene of hypnotic sleep will engage through a simple imitative phenomenon, a reflex of suggestibility that propels the gaze into an ecstatic relationship with the image”.⁹⁶ The unconscious power that Souriau attributed to art seemed to be only reinforced by new explorations of magnetic theories stretching back to Braid that fluidic radiation could emanate from an artwork and transform it into “a living magnetic or electromagnetic field for the viewer”.⁹⁷

Rather than performing as a magnetiser, Kupka began to explore how magnetism could be performed by painting. “The accomplishments of science, exercise an undeniable influence upon artists”, he explained, “many of whom become,

⁹⁴ See: Colonel Albert de Rochas, “The Regression of Memory: Case of Mayo”, *The Annals of Psychical Science*, 2, 1905 (July), 1–52.

⁹⁵ Paul Souriau, *La Suggestion dans l'Art*, Paris 1893 [1909], 2.

⁹⁶ Souriau, *La Suggestion dans l'Art*, 2.

⁹⁷ Stanislaus Stückgold, “Henri Rousseau”, in: *Der Sturm*, 1913 – quoted in: Rousseau, “The Magic of Images”, 201.

knowingly or unwittingly, followers of the latest thinkers”.⁹⁸ Kupka then expounded on the impact of these new sciences upon communication: “Through its progress [...] it is possible to believe in the possibility of new forms of communication hitherto unknown, let’s say a more direct communication that would imitate the way that magnetic waves are emitted by hypnotisers”.⁹⁹ This interconnection of magnetism with art and superconscious creativity proved instrumental for Kupka’s cultural politics as an Anarcho-Communist who endorsed Reclus’ and Pëtr Kropotkin’s theories and who also aspired to an Anarcho-cosmic Utopia in which workers would comprehend planetary interrelations and the interconnections of the universe.

Aware that magnetic fields and electromagnetism played a key role in the dynamics and evolution of protoplanetary disks, Kupka had explored the movement of balls and disks in his figurative paintings. To correlate the cyclical movement of life with that of the planets, as conceived by Blavatsky,¹⁰⁰ in *Le Premier Pas* (The First Step) two overlapping white disks are circumscribed by an arc of smaller disks with faint halos around them to suggest the cyclical movements of a solar system in which planets turn on their own axes. Following *L’Évolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution) in which Bergson described the evolution of life and consciousness as “an immense wave which, spreading from a centre, spreads outwards”, in *Printemps cosmique* (Cosmic Spring) and *Création*, Kupka created an illusion of waves and crystalline arcs which turn in an indefinable space and forms that seem to melt into a centre of lava, and fungi.¹⁰¹ Recasting Sir Isaac Newton’s experiments with seven spinning disks of prismatic colour to produce white light, Kupka painted four main disks in his *Disques de Newton: Étude pour la Fugue en deux couleurs* (Disques of Newton: Study for Fugue in Two Colours) with the white disk in the foreground indicating that when spinning fast enough, this is what the disks produce. In his second version, he conveyed spinning rings of colour able to produce the sensations of white light.

Yet from his study of electromagnetism, Kupka appeared not to be merely exploring the sensations of primordial light but the electromagnetic waves within the visible spectrum and the ways in which material orbiting around a central body causes material in the disk to spiral inwards toward the centre producing magnetic field lines, while emitting electromagnetic radiation and vibrations.

⁹⁸ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 43.

⁹⁹ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

¹⁰⁰ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, 634–640 (chapter 16: “Cyclical Evolution and Karma”).

¹⁰¹ Bergson: *Creative Evolution*, 266.

“The vital energy of rays in nature is the same energy that lives inside us all”, Kupka explained, “always manifest by the rapport between different vibrations and, hence, different colours; the effect of one is in some way multiplied by the others”.¹⁰² To avoid confusing impressions and uncomfortable sensations, Kupka also considered the need for these vibrations from coloured planes to be of the same frequency, as represented by complementaries and the juxtaposition of warm and cool colours epitomised by the Carmen reds and Cobalt blues in *Notre Dame*.

When Kupka’s two white disks seem to reappear in *Amorpha Fugue en deux couleurs*, they appear to be metallic and, following his analogy, able to vibrate with specific sounds (see col. fig. 4). “Moving from lights to darks, each colour scale produces a composite impression, where distinct vibrations are juxtaposed”, he explained: “It is a game of cymbals, where the metallic disks [...] each vibrate and generate a specific sound”.¹⁰³ Yet with his colours reduced to the primaries, red and blue, they act like the contrapuntal composition in a fugue, as signalled by his title. “I believe I can find something between sight and hearing”, Kupka explained, “and I can produce a fugue in colours as Bach has done in music”.¹⁰⁴ When the fast vibrations emanating from the reds synchronise with the slow vibrations from the blues, Kupka considered they emitted electromagnetic waves of violet light to the spectator and luminous vibrations comparable to the rose windows in *Notre Dame*.¹⁰⁵ “In other words, once one was able to master the luminosity, with the right vibrations”, Kupka explained, “its light was able to sing”.¹⁰⁶ The sweeping linear movements of dilation and contraction comprised what Kupka called its “cosmic rhythm” which, with the vibrations emanating from its colours, constituted its cosmic symphony.¹⁰⁷ Life-size, this seven ft. square painting was then composed to absorb and engulf the beholder in its symphonic emissions with the force of magnetic hypnosis.

Committed not just to the evolution of consciousness, but its revolution into superconsciousness, Kupka regarded this painting, like his following mesmeric abstractions, as paving a pathway to a dematerialised, magnetic artistic communion. In his book planned on “telepathy, psychopathy and psychomatrocity”, Kupka demonstrated awareness of Edwin Houston’s telepathic theory of thought

¹⁰² Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 141.

¹⁰³ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 179.

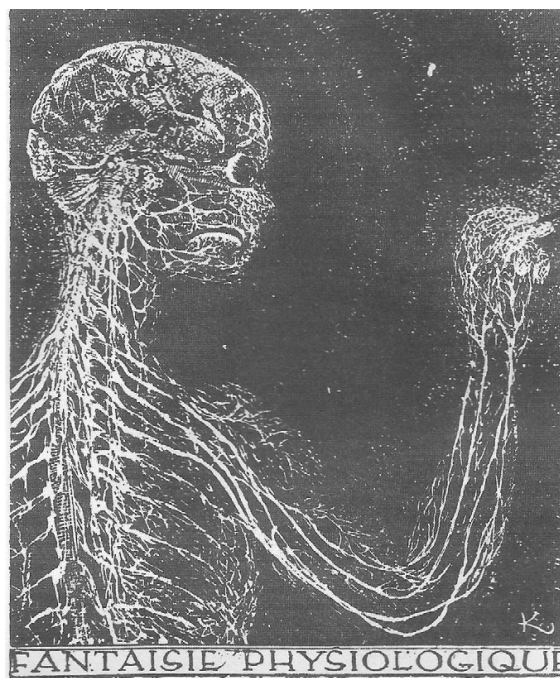
¹⁰⁴ František Kupka, 1871–1956, 184.

¹⁰⁵ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 154.

¹⁰⁶ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 154.

¹⁰⁷ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 199.

Fig. 20: František Kupka, *Fantaisie Physique* 1923, illustration, in: *Tvoření v umění výtvarném (La Création dans les Arts Plastiques)*, Prague 1923, Art Bohemia. Photograph by the author.



waves and Annie Besant and Leadbeater's theory in *Thought Forms* that music and colour could emit vibrations able to transmit emotions and ideas.¹⁰⁸ "The mind has the capacity to intercept waves which another sends into space", he explained.¹⁰⁹ This cognitive transference would be, in his words, "a more direct communication, which would draw upon the mediation of magnetic waves by hypnotisers".¹¹⁰ From this perspective, Kupka then considered how artistic creation could be reconceived as the telepathic and telegraphic reception and emission of electromagnetic waves between the artist and beholder, without the need for a tangible art object to be produced, as captured by his woodcut, *Fantaisie physique*, included in the 1923 Czech publication of his treatise, in which the artist is reconfigured as an X-ray receptor without an artwork (see fig. 20). As Kupka explained his vision:

Taking progress into account [...] we would have grounds to believe in the possibility of new means of new communication, unknown to date, let's say a more direct communication

¹⁰⁸ Houston, "Radiation cérébrale", in: Rochas, *Extériorisation de la Sensibilité*, 201–202. Quoted in: Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space", in: Bruce Clarke and Linda D. Henderson (eds), *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, Stanford 2002, 126–149, here 142.

¹⁰⁹ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

¹¹⁰ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

that could make use of the path of magnetic waves employed by hypnotists [...]. We will be able to expect the invention of an X-ray capable of reading the most subtle activity, presently invisible or unclear, both of the exterior world and of the soul of the artist. It would settle whether magnetism can replace painting. The communion would be absolute, art useless, the universe decipherable at will. And the artist would be, in the strictest sense of the word, a medium.¹¹¹

As Philippe Dagen surmises: “He postulated that magnetism would be able to replace painting. Communication would be complete, art unnecessary”.¹¹² In drawing upon his knowledge of electromagnetism and X-rays, his experiences of magnetism and mediumism, as well as his position as an Anarcho-Communist, Kupka then envisaged what art would be like when the future artist deployed the arts of magnetism as a medium:

We shall be able to expect the invention of an X-graphics, capable of revealing the subtlest of events, presently invisible or dimly lit, as much from the outside world as from the soul of the artist. In perfecting more and more the technical means at their disposal, artists will probably one day succeed in sharing with the spectator the richness of their subjective life without being constrained by the laborious need of making a painting or sculpture. For their part, the spectators will no longer have to make their eyes work [given] the understanding established without any need of material mediation. The elimination of traditional means will facilitate the task for art lovers as much as for the artist.¹¹³

Once the artist was reconceived as both a medium and a magnetiser, a receptor and an emitter of electromagnetic signals, Kupka considered that thought, emotions and emanations beyond corporeal boundaries could be directly transmitted to others, particularly in a trance-like state. This could, in turn, mediate the liberation of what Bois called “the superconscious mind” and what Blavatsky identified as a metaphysical evolution able to transcend the limitation of the senses.¹¹⁴ Hence the so-called “cosmic rhythm” created by Kupka’s disks, waves and crystalline arcs in his illustrations for *L’Homme et la Terre* and in his mesmeric abstractions, alongside his “cosmic symphony” of colours, were composed to engulf the beholder in their vibratory emissions and absorb them with the force of magnetic hypnosis. In conceiving of his paintings as “living magnetic or electromagnetic fields” able to generate vibrations of thought and emotion in the beholder while acting as forms of magnetic hypnosis, Kupka vested his “magnetic

111 F. Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

112 Philippe Dagen, “Préface”, in: Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 11–37, here 36.

113 Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

114 Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, 424–444.

modernism” with utopian performativity capable of infiltrating consciousness. In subliminally infiltrating consciousness, without the spectator ever being aware of it, Kupka’s “magnetic modernism” may then have been deemed far more efficacious than didactic cartoons or representational painting in generating superconsciousness of an Anarcho-Communist and an Anarcho-cosmic utopia.