

Fae Brauer

**MESMERIC MODERNISM:
FRANTIŠEK KUPKA'S ART AS A MAGNETIC FORCE FIELD¹**

From the time that the French Academy of Medicine denounced Mesmerism as “charlatanry” in 1784, it has been assumed that magnetic practices in France ceased. Yet not only did this rejected knowledge continue to burgeon but by the time that the twenty-five-year old František Kupka arrived in Paris, it was flourishing. Not only was it used extensively by neurologists at the Bicêtre, Salpêtrière, Hôtel Dieu and Charité hospitals, but it was also practiced by many physicists, including Hippolyte Baraduc, the parapsychologist, Colonel Albert de Rochas and occultist physician, Gérard Encausse – better known by his esoteric pseudonym, ‘Papus’ – who served Tsar Nicolas II and Tsarina Alexander as physician and occult consultant.² Given the prevalence of mesmerism during the fin-de-siècle alongside the burgeoning of electromagnetism, this period has been aptly called neo-magnetism.³ As it thrived, neo-magnetism intersected with Spiritism, Theosophy, Neo-Lamarckian Transformism, Bergsonian vitalism and the new sciences of radioactivity and X-rays in the utopian aspirations of attaining a state that Madame Blavatsky called “cosmic consciousness” and that Jules Bois called “superconsciousness”.⁴ Once Kupka’s

¹ The text is published as submitted by the author.

² Papus served Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra as physician and occult consultant in Russia in 1901, 1905 and 1906. During his visit to them in October 1905, he allegedly conjured up the spirit of Alexander III who prophesized that Nicholas II would meet his downfall at the hands of revolutionaries. Papus allegedly informed the Tsar that he would be able to magically avert Alexander’s prophesy so long as he was alive, Nicholas keeping his hold on the throne until 141 days after Papus’s death. In their correspondence, Papus expressed concern about the Tsar’s heavy reliance upon Rasputin and his deference to occultism in deciding questions of government.

³ For ‘neo-mesmerism’, refer Anne Harrington, “Metals and magnets in medicine: hysteria, hypnosis and medical culture in fin-de-siècle Paris”, *Psychological Medicine*, 18, February 1988, No. 1, 21–38.

⁴ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, London 1888, pp. 424–444. The superconscious mind was the subject of Bois’ PhD in Psychology undertaken at the Sorbonne. At the École de Psychologie at the Sorbonne, Bois became Professor of Superconsciousness; refer Jules Bois, “A New Psychoanalysis: The Superconscious”, *Catholic World*, 119, 1924, 582–583.



experiences as a Spiritist medium and Anarcho-Communist coalesced with his study of electromagnetism, radioactivity, X-rays and his experiments with magnetism, a transformation in his praxis ensued. Instead of continuing his dialectical art praxis of Anarcho-Communist graphic illustrations alongside Occultist figurative painting, Kupka consolidated his identity as an artist-magnetizer creating disks of colour to mesmerize his beholder into a state of “cosmic consciousness” and “superconsciousness”. This evolution seemed to culminate in the artwork called “his painter’s credo” exhibited in the “place of honour” at the 1912 Salon d’Automne Cubist Room where it was entitled *Amorpha, Fugue en deux couleurs*.¹ How this happened is the subject of this chapter.

František Kupka,
Amorpha Fugue en deux couleurs (Dvojbarevná Fuga (Amorfa), 1912,
 oil on canvas,
 210 × 200 cm, Narodni
 Galerie, Prague.
 Photograph by
 the author

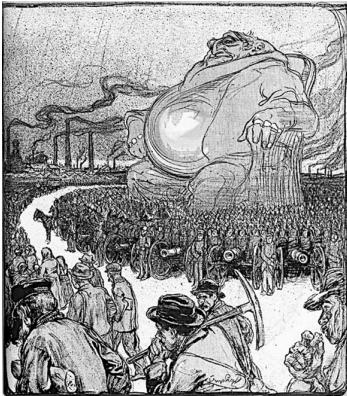
¹ Meda Mladek, “Central European Influences”, *František Kupka, 1871–1956: A Retrospective*, New York 1975, 19; refer also Fae Brauer, *Rivals and Conspirators: The Paris Salons and the Modern Art Centre* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) 359. While pleased with the central placement of his painting at the Salon d’Automne Salle 41, Kupka expressed his concern over its contextualization in his letter to Arthur Roessler on 2 February 1913: “In the last Salon d’Automne I had a beautiful place of honor, unfortunately in the room with the Cubists with whom I am almost on a parallel. It is with me as it was with Degas, who was classified as an Impressionist.”

“OBSERVING THE WORLD FROM OUTSIDE”: SPIRITISM,
ANARCHO-COMMUNISM AND COSMIC UTOPIA

From his arrival in Paris, Kupka practiced as a medium.¹ 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”. “Yesterday I experienced a state of split consciousness in which it seemed I was observing the world from outside”, he wrote after a Spiritist meeting in 1897. “I was in a great empty space and saw the planets quietly rolling by. After that it was difficult to come back to the trivia of everyday life”.² This clairvoyant vision that purportedly enabled him to transcend the earth and survey the cosmos seems to have been captured in his earliest paintings created in Paris that have been lost, *Quam ad Causam Sum*, *Hymn to the Universe* and *Towards Luminous Heights*, as well as in his 1904–1905 illustration for the cover of Élisée Reclus’ six volume, *L’Homme et La Terre*.³ Propelled by his close engagement with the occultism of Madame Blavatsky and Papus, particularly their writings on Astral Travel, as well as his engagement in Tantric Buddhism, Kupka produced such Occultist paintings on the terrestrial body and the astral soul as *The Path of Silence* and *The Origin of Life*. The planets and circles represented in these paintings signified the need for the terrestrial body in the microcosm and the astral body in the macrocosm

to exist in harmony with one another in order to achieve a state of cosmic utopia. 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 Shuré 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.”⁴ Within the occultist cultures of Buddhism, Spiritism and Theosophy, Kupka’s facility for clairvoyance vision enabling him to see beyond the confines of positivist materialism was esteemed. Yet as a committed Anarcho-Communist, Kupka announced in 1900 that from then on he would devote himself to “democratic media” pursuing “propaganda of the deed” as conceived

František Kupka,
“L’Argent”: “Liberté”,
L’Assiette au Beurre,
no. 41 (11 January 1902)
647. Photograph by
the author



¹ František Kupka, *1871–1956: A Retrospective*, New York 1975, 8; refer also Ludmila Vachtová, *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, New York 1968, 15, who points out that Kupka was introduced to Spiritualism around the age of fourteen when apprenticed as a master saddler in Eastern Bohemia. From the time he was inducted into animal magnetism, Kupka worked as a “successful medium” in Spiritualist séances in Prague, Vienna and Paris.

² Letter, Kupka to Arthur Roessler, 7 February 1897, as quoted by Meda Mladek, “Central European Influences”, *František Kupka, 1871–1956: A Retrospective*, New York 1975, note 53.

³ Pam Meecham / Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction*, London 2005 [2000], 57; Élisée Reclus, *L’Homme et La Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–1908, 6 vols.)

⁴ Édouard Shuré, *Les Grands Initiés: Esquisse de l’histoire secrète des religions: Rama, Krishna, Hermès, Moïse, Orphée, Pythagore, Platon, Jésus*. Paris 1921 [1889], vii.

by the Russian activist scientist, Pieter Kropotkin.¹ Well versed in Kropotkin, as well as Reclus, Georg Simmel, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Kupka created cartoons for *Cocorico*, *L'Anarchie*, *Les Temps Nouveau* and especially *L'Assiette au Beurre* to expose exploitation, oppression and false consciousness alongside Anarcho-Communist concepts of mutualism and free association.

Following Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and Karl Marx's conception of profit as fraud and theft, the capitalist was pictured by Kupka on the front cover of *L'Assiette au Beurre's* issue of "Money" emerging from a bloody swamp as a grotesque frog with his belly bloated with golden coins.² Consistent with Marx's and Engel's theories of the asymmetrical power relations between capitalist and proletariat, the worker is inscribed as penniless and powerless posited literally in the palm of the capitalist's hand. Those callously discarded by the capitalist are depicted struggling to clamber out of the pestilent water onto the letters spelling *L'Argent*. That the worker had no choice but to labour for the capitalist is signalled by Kupka's next cartoon in which their inequality is again emphasized by their gross disparity in scale – the enthroned capitalist with his belly ballooning with profits appearing ten times the size of the worker. Protectively surrounded by the army with canons pointing directly at the workers, the irony of Kupka's title, "Liberté" – the first term in the French Republican triad – is heightened by the workers appearing forced to return to the oppressive factories.³ So popular did this image become with the workers in Russia, as much as in France, that it was turned into an Agitprop poster by the Red Army during the Russian Civil War with the caption, "The Master of the World is Capital: The Golden Idol".

As allegories of enslavement and perversion of the natural order, Kupka cartoons were designed to reveal how the aspiration of workers and families to live in harmony with nature – for which Kupka and his fellow Anarcho-Communists strove – had been constantly thwarted by the capitalist political economy in league with the State's religion. Only in his final cartoon for *Money* does Kupka reveal justice triumphing as signified by the new dawn glowing beyond *Humanitas* and the people mutually aiding one another in their support of medicine, science, humanitarian knowledge and extended families.⁴ Yet Kupka shows that this can only happen once State secularism can prevail and the French allegorical



František Kupka, "L'Argent": "La Science triomphant de l'argent", *L'Assiette au Beurre*, no. 41 (11 January 1902) back cover. Photograph by the author

¹ In 1900, Kupka wrote to the Czech poet, Josef S. Machar, that in future he would devote himself mainly to lithography and graphics as these media are more "democratic"; refer Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Garde Paris* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013) 155.

² Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* [1900], trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London 1978; refer František Kupka, "L'Argent", *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No. 41, 11 January 1902, cover illustration.

³ František Kupka, "L'Argent": "Liberté", *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No. 41, 11 January 1902, 647.

⁴ František Kupka, "L'Argent: "La Science sous l'argent", *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No. 41, 11 January 1902, back cover.



František Kupka,
 "Progrès", black and
 white lithograph, final
 illustration, Élisée
 Reclus, *L'Homme
 et la Terre Terre* (Paris:
 Librairie Universelle,
 1908, vol. 6) 541.
 Photograph
 by the author

figure of Marianne as Athena, has pinioned the bloody head of *Money* to her shield. Following Kropotkin's concept of mutualism and an Anarcho-Communist society able to live in harmony with nature, this new dawn was most clearly imaged in Kupka's illustrations for the five volume treatise by Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*.

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 illustration entitled *Rythme de l'histoire – Vague*, the flow of time is represented by an undulating wave, which is consistent with the oscillations scientifically theorized in thermal energy and Reclus' conception of historical time. Yet to illustrate time in between the beginning and endpoint of human culture, Kupka deployed a vast cosmic arc. 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 scrutinizes the planet. Reappearing as the last image of the book in the chapter entitled *Progrès*, it signifies a new dawn in which men, women 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. Following Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice* in which he describes the evolution of life and consciousness as "an immense wave spreading outwards from a centre", the sweeping arc of these galaxies appears to conjure Bergson's *l'élan vital* – the energies igniting the continual evolution of living organisms that seemed to explain the Lamarckian concept of spontaneous generation.¹ Viewed from this perspective, Kupka's image then seems to embrace both the Bergsonian and Theosophical concepts of cosmic consciousness and cosmological harmony, particularly as the family in the foreground, just like man on Kupka's cover, look towards the galaxies as if heralding an interstellar generation. These two parts of Kupka's dialectical art praxis were designed to synthesize 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 mutually cooperative communities. Yet once Kupka enrolled at the Sorbonne to study the physics of electromagnetism and the latest research in magnetism, he began to explore new ways of imparting Anarcho-Communist harmony and cosmic consciousness.

ART AS A MAGNETIC FIELD: NEO-MESMERISM, VIBRATING COLOUR AND THE BIOMAGNETIC VITAL FORCE

The exploration of gravitational forces upon the movement of fluids through the human and animal body by Franz Anton Mesmer was well known to

¹ Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, Paris, 1907; *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, 1998, 266.

Kupka, including Mesmer's Baquets for 30.¹ From 1876, the mesmerist Victor Jean-Marie Burq, renowned for his use of metallic plates, magnets and electric currents, had been invited by Jean Martin Charcot to Salpêtrière.² Following Charcot's report on the successful experiments with hypnosis and pathological transference that he and his 'Charcoterie' had conducted with Burq's metallic plates and magnets at Salpêtrière, by the time Kupka arrived in Paris, mesmerism had been finally accepted by the French Académie des Sciences.³ So influential was Charcot's research that, as Anne Harrington surmises, it reawakened "interest in the fundamental ideas of biomagnetism as taught by the old mesmerists".⁴ So rapidly did its importance grow in medicine and science that by the 1889 Congress of Physiological Psychology at the Exposition Universelle, presided over by Charcot, an entire section was devoted to magnetism. This section included Charcot's magnets, metallic plates and coloured discs, as well as the experiments conducted by Hippolyte in Nancy with hypnosis, colour and image suggestion. However, it was the experiments conducted by Alfred Binet, Charles Féré and Joseph Babinski with psychic transfer – subsequently referred to as psychic polarization – through the use of magnets and colour magnetism that was the talking point of the Congress, particularly those revealing that hallucinatory reds transferred into blues and greens turned depression into laughter.⁵

Increasingly popular outside the official boundaries of medicine, the French Magnetic Society was founded in Paris in 1887 by Hector Durville. In 1889, this Society convened an International Congress on Magnetism,⁶ at which the magnets used by Jules Bernard Luys at La Charité Hospital's Laboratoire d'hypnologie were shown, particularly those used to draw out diseased 'emanations' or effluvia, as they also called it, and to generate an involuntary convulsion during full magnetic absorption.⁷ At this Congress, the iron

¹ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

² Judith Pintar / Stephen Jay Lynn, *Hypnosis: A Brief History*, London 2008, 81–84.

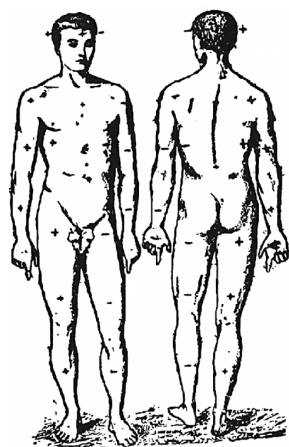
³ Jean Martin Charcot, "Sur les divers états nerveux déterminés par l'hypnotisation chez les hystériques", *Comptes-rendus hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, 94, 1882, pp. 403–405. Twice animal magnetism had been rejected by the Académie. In his paper to the Académie, Charcot focused upon the impact of hypnosis upon the nervous system, firmly eschewing any reference to invisible forces.

⁴ Anne Harrington, "Hysteria, Hypnosis and the Lure of the Invisible: The Rise of Neo-Mesmerism in fin-de-siècle French Psychiatry", Chapter Eight, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 3, eds. William E. Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd (London: Routledge, 1988) 227.

⁵ These experiments were first published in 1885 in Théodule Ribot's *Revue philosophique*.

⁶ Congrès international sur le magnétisme, 21–26 October 1889; Rapport Général, Paris, Carré, 1890; Congrès Spirite, Paris, 1889; Congrès Spirit et Spiritualiste international, Paris, 9–16 September 1889; another in 1902; Congrès international de psychologie physiologique: Première session. Paris, 1890.

⁷ *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 3, eds. William F. Bynum, Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd (London: Taylor and Francis) 235.



Hector Durville,
 "Schéma de la polarité
 du corps humain",
*Histoire Raisonnée
 du Magnétisme et du
 Psychisme pratique*
 (Paris: Hector et Henri
 Durville Imprimeurs-
 Éditeurs, 1895).
 Photograph by
 the author

crown was also shown that Luys had devised as a conducting medium with Papus, to absorb and store patients' morbid thought patterns, hallucinations and psychotic delusions with the capacity to transfer healthy states.¹ So convinced was Papus of the neurological healing power of magnetism that in 1893 he joined the founder of the French Magnetist Society, Hector Durville, to open an *École de Magnétisme* in Paris with its own textbook on learning magnetism.² Attracting such foundational members as Madame Blavatsky, Baraduc and Guiata, Sar Péladan and Albert de Rochas – who had undertaken biomagnetic research at the Charité at Luys' invitation – the French Magnetic Society published its own journal on magnetism and experimental psychism.

So successful was the School, Society and journal that in 1895 Durville launched his *History of Magnetism and Practical Psychism* with an illustration demonstrating how the magnetic poles punctuated every part of the human body, as signified by the positive and negative signs inscribed on the anatomy that could be correlated with the attraction and repulsion of a horse-shoe magnet. While the positive north magnetic pole signifying wellbeing, attraction, passion and compassion is signified by the plus signs on the right hand side of the body indicated in figure, the negative south-pole is indicated by the minus symbols on the left-hand side of the body to signify repulsion and fear, as well as antipathy and hatred. Like Luys' hysterical patients at the Charité, Durville and his colleague, Albert de Rochas, found that their magnetized subjects all claimed to be able to see the magnetic effluvia radiating from human bodies, as well as from such non-human sources as mineral magnets and electric currents. Collaborating with Albert de Rochas, Durville explained in his Treatise how the body could be healed through the manipulation of these magnetic forces, while its creative powers could be expanded.³

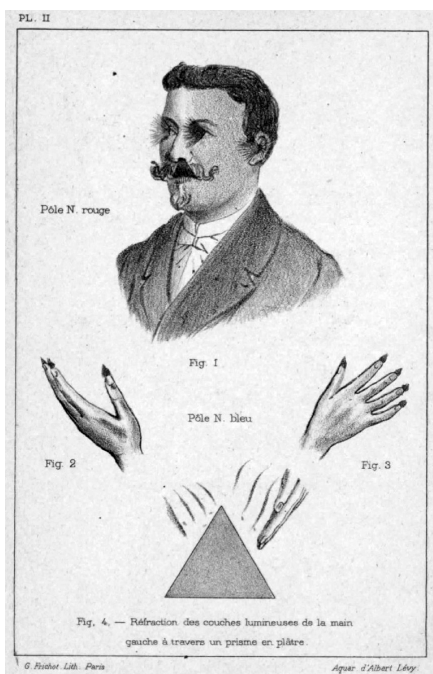
Durville's experiments into the magnetic colours exuded by the body could be traced back, according to de Rochas, to the research conducted by Karl von Reichenbach into environmental electromagnetism and his concept of an 'odic force' emanating from all living substances that functioned in a similar way to Durville's effluvia.⁴ Experiments with magnetism and effluvia

¹ Ibid. Luys and 'Papus' deduced that if pathological states could be absorbed, stores and transferred then so could healthy ones.

² Hector Durville, *L'Enseignement du magnétisme, École pratique de magnétisme et de massage*, Paris: Librairie du Magnétisme, Septembre 1895).

³ *Traité Expérimental de Magnétisme* (2 vols., Paris: Librairie du Magnétisme, 1895–1896).

⁴ Albert de Rochas, *L'Extériorisation de la sensibilité: Étude expérimentale et historique* (Paris: Librairie Générale des Sciences Occults, Bibliothèque Chacornac, 1909; 6th edition) 5–6; Karl von Reichenbach, *Odisch-magnetische Briefe* (Stuttgart, 1852); *Physico-physiological researches on the dynamics of magnetism, electricity, heat, light, crystallization, and chemism, in relation to Vital Force* (New York, 1851). De Rochas explains that these experiments were repeated by Durville, who published these results in *Traité expérimental et thérapeutique du magnétisme*, first published in 1886; p. 6.



were also conducted by Luys at the Charité Hospital in Paris.¹ Resembling a flickering flame unleashed from the body, Rochas' patients reported that it could project as far as four to five metres either horizontally or vertically.² When emanating from the positive attractive magnetic pole on the right side of a human body, Rochas showed in his illustrations, as illuminated by figure, how the effluvia was a brilliant blue colour but when emanating from the negative repulsive pole of a magnet in the left side of the human body, it turned a fiery red although he stipulated that the intensity of these colours experienced by the individual depended upon their energy and temperament with few perceiving any in-

Albert de Rochas, Fig. 1: "Pôle N. rouge"; Figs. 2 and 3: "Pôle North bleu"; Fig. 4: "Rétraction des couches lumineuses de la main gauche à travers un prisme en plâtre", 1895, coloured lithograph, *L'Extériorisation de la sensibilité: Étude expérimentale et historique* (Paris: Librairie Générale des Sciences Occults, Bibliothèque Chacornac, 1895). Photograph by the author.

termediary colours.³ As the detail in Rochas' illustrations reveal, these red and blue magnetic energies or effluvia radiated outwards from such key sensory points as eyes, nose, ears and mouth, as well as from the hands and the fingertips, as signified by the colouring of the left side of the hand in red and the right side in blue in figure, and the way in which blue pole energy turning violet seems to be radiating from the fingertips.⁴ That these colours became seminal for Kupka's rendering of the human body after his study of magnetism at the Sorbonne is illustrated by his painting, *Family Portrait*, in which

As de Rochas writes: *Il enseigne, comme le savant autrichien, que le côté droit du corps humain est bleu dans son ensemble et le côté gauche jaune, avec les effluves de couleurs correspondantes lances par les organes des sens (yeux, oreilles, narines, etc.).*

¹ Ibid., Rochas, 7–8.

² Ibid., 26.

³ Ibid., 27: *Mais, lorsque nous disons que la coloration est variable d'un sujet à l'autre, cela ne signifie pas que cette variation s'étend indifféremment sur toutes les couleurs de la spectre. La plupart des sujets perçoivent surtout le bleu et le rouge, plus ou moins purs, et peu ou pas les couleurs intermédiaires; ils voient le plus souvent, dans les corps allongés, un effluve bleu à l'une des extrémités et effluve rouge à l'autre extrémité. ... Il faut bien remarquer que ces trois éléments, longueur, intensité et coloration d'un effluve déterminé variant aussi un même sujet dans certaines limites d'après son temperament, et d'après l'état hypnotique eu il est amené.*

⁴ Ibid., 19: *Il faut en conclure que l'atmosphère de l'extrémité des doigts émet des radiations donnant à L., ... une sensation bleue ou violette; cela est, en effet, vérifié par les descriptions du sujet, qui voit en bleu, plus ou moins violacé, les extrémités des doigts.*



František Kupka,
Family Portrait
(*Rodinná Podobizna*),
1910, oil on canvas,
15 × 11 cm., purchased
1946, Narodni Galerie,
Prague. Photograph
by the author

the garment wrapped around Kupka's wife, Eugénie Straub Broad, is rendered in cobalt blues on the right side and vermilion reds on the left side with the reds continuing to her legs and shoes. In a subsequent painting of his wife sold to MOMA New York entitled *Madame Kupka among Verticals*, her face and upright body appear to dissolve into vertical poles or what Rochas called "les colonnes fluidiques" in different shades of red and blue like those described by Rochas.¹ These colours were also used by the Symbolist artist, Albert Levy, in his illustrations for Luys.

While patients at the Charité had provided drawings and paintings of their experience of magnetism for Luys, Rochas acknowledges that Luys had also been aided in illustrations of these magnetized subjects made by his male hysterical patient, Levy.² Not only had Levy been able to capture the blue and red biomagnetic effluvia radiating from the eyes, nose, ears and mouth of a magnetized young man in his drawings, but also from the body itself in magnetic waves.³ Levy's artwork was able to reveal, according to Rochas,

¹ Ibid., 84.

² Ibid.: *D'après les observations de M. Luys faites à l'aide d'Albert L..., le côté droit du corps humain présente, en general, (2) une coloration bleue.*

³ Ibid.: *Les yeux, les oreilles, les narines, les lèvres dégagent des irradiations de memes couleurs et ces irradiations sont d'autant plus intenses que le sujet est plus vigoureux. Le côté gauche degage des effluves rouges par les organes des sens, et leur intensité varié pareillement avec l'état du sujet.*

that this biomagnetic effluvia and vital force was manifest in two main forms. Its projection in effluvia from the key sensory zones of the body represented its dynamic incarnation while its emanation from the entire surface of the body in radiating waves represented its static form in terms of a biomagnetic vital force. Consistent with the laws of polarization, these “enveloping layers”, as Rochas called them, consisted of luminous colours with blues radiating from the right side and reds from the other. Although seeming to emanate around the body and not to be integral to its flesh and blood, as indicated by Levy’s illustration, when Rochas plunged a needle into these seemingly floating waves, his subjects felt a prick in a corresponding region of their body. This exteriorisation of interior sensibility was even sharper once his magnetized subjects reached the sixth and most profound state of hypnosis.¹

When the magnetiser executed passes across their subject’s bodies in this sixth state, Rochas explained that this unleashed “phantoms” on their left and right-hand sides that united into “a single phantom that one calls a double or astral body generally placed between the magnetiser and the subject”.² As Paul Nadar’s photograph of Rochas and his phantasmatic double reveals, the exteriorisation of his interior sensibility into a fluid magnetic double appeared to take the form of an exterior garment. So powerful was this magnetic fluid that Rochas compared it to an electric current, able to charge the nervous system into unleashing a “superior form of being” with heightened sight, taste, hearing and touch. In this superconscious state, Rochas discovered that magnetized subjects were able to feel musical vibrations and perform to them, as well as perceive places they have never seen before and respond to art that they had never known.³ This state of “superconsciousness” was realized when Rochas magnetized and photographed the artist’s model, Lina (Maria Mayo). Without any training in mime, theatre performance or dance, she was able to perform in highly imaginative and innovative ways to Wagner’s music, Verlaine’s poetry, dramatic images and verbal suggestion.⁴ Yet while Rochas, like Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim, was exploring the heightened sensitivity of magnetized subjects to art, the Henri Poincaré University philosopher of aesthetics, Paul Souriau, was theorizing how fluidic radiation could emanate from art and transform it into “a living magnetic or electromagnetic field for the viewer”.⁵

¹ Ibid., 56; 80.

² Ibid., 81: ... *puis des deux colonnes se réunissent en un seul fantôme qu’on appelle le double ou le corps astral, situé généralement entre le magnétiseur et le sujet...*

³ Lt.-Colonel de Rochas d’Aiglun, *Les Fluides des Magnétiseurs précis des expériences du Bon de Reichenbach sur ses propriétés physiques et physiologiques, classées et annotées par le lieutenant-colonel de Rochas d’Aiglun* (Paris: G. Carré, 1891).

⁴ Fae Brauer, “Magnetic Modernism: František Kupka’s Mesmeric Abstraction and Anarcho-Cosmic Utopia”, *Utopia: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and (Im)possible Life*, eds. David Ayers, Benedikt Hjar-tarson, Tomi Huttunen, Harri Veivo (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) pp. 154–8.

⁵ Paul Souriau, *La Suggestion dans l’Art* (Paris: Félix Alcan, Éditeur, 1893; 1909); Stanislaus Stückgold, “Henri Rousseau”, *Der Sturm*, Berlin, 1913; *Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris*, 2006, 201.

Since the affective powers of visual suggestion were considered to far exceed verbal commands in achieving magnetic states, as long proven by Charcot's and Bernheim's use of coloured disks and images, Souriau argued that the affective magnetic power of a work of art, just like the cerebral state of ecstasy experienced with beauty, had the capacity to capture beholders in a state of hypnosis.¹ *C'est le coup de gong qui brusquement détermine l'hypnose par son choc subit suivi d'une longue resonance. Ici encore, l'admiration est donc un état contemplative, caractérisé par une sort d'immobilité mentale*, Souriau explained.² One of the most favourable places for this hypnotic experience of mental immobility invoked by ambience and imagery was, Souriau emphasized, beneath the rose windows of Nôtre Dame and Sainte Chappelle or in other cathedrals at nightfall where a "mysterious silence" seemed to envelop every part and all sense of the duration of time became lost.³ Yet Souriau insisted that if the same reverence was extended to museums and salons, with art approached in the spirit of aesthetic contemplation, then religious ecstasy could be achieved while a state of hypnosis could be sustained. This could be ignited, Souriau point out, by both the use and illusion of light. As "the professional magnetizers well knew", Souriau explained, it was the eyes that initially responded to hypnosis, guided by light.⁴ In paintings Souriau found that "a burst of sunrays", "small, dazzling points" or "a blast of colours" could produce "caressive flames" to be released from the eyes, the very term that Rochas has used to describe the effluvia that projected from the eyes, nose, ears and mouth of his magnetized subjects. Souriau then considered how the affective power of suggestion triggered by these lights and colours in paintings was able to magnetize its beholders and enable them to penetrate the productive layers of the unconscious where new understandings would be possible.⁵ The hypnotic and unconscious power that Souriau attributed to art seemed to be reinforced by new explorations of magnetism that fluidic radiation could emanate from artworks, particularly paintings with "a blast of colours", able to transform them into magnetic fields.

Given the magnetic power attributed to artwork, images and coloured disks, 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, knowingly or unwittingly, followers

¹ Ibid., 2: *Entre cet état d'hypnose et l'extase du beau, entre ces effets de la suggestion et ceux de l'art, il a y une ressemblance singulière*

² Ibid., 7.

³ Ibid., 8: *La contemplation esthétique, dans la mesure où elle ralentit le mouvement de notre pensée et nous rapproche de l'hypnose, doit donc nous faire perdre conscience de la succession des instants.*

⁴ Ibid., 27: *Le magnétiseurs de profession le savent bien ... Physiquement, l'œil ne brille guère pus qu'un clu d'acier. Mais il a le regard, lumière immatérielle, rayonnement idéal qui le fait briller d'une étrange splendeur.*

⁵ Ibid., 28. *L'œil aimant a une flame caressante ... l'effet d'un éclat de soleil ... L'éclat des couleurs produit les mêmes effets que la lumière. ... A force d'être rouges, certaines fleurs (pivoines, tulipes, géraniums) ne semblent-elles des incandescentes?*

of the latest thinkers”.¹ 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 hypnotizers.”² Aware that magnetic fields and electromagnetism played a key role in the dynamics and evolution of protoplanetary disks, Kupka 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,³ Kupka overlapped two white disks in *Le Premier Pas*, 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 Kupka’s illustration for *L’Homme et La Terre* of Bergson’s analogy of the evolution of life and consciousness as an immense wave spreading outwards, in *Printemps cosmique* 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.⁴ Recasting Sir Isaac Newton’s experiments with seven spinning disks of prismatic colour to produce white light, Kupka painted four main discs in his *Disques de Newton: Étude pour la Fugue en deux couleurs* with the white disc in the foreground indicating that when spinning fast enough, white light is what the disks produce. In his second version, he conveyed spinning rings of colour able to produce the sensations of white light.

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. “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”.⁵ To avoid confusing impressions and uncomfortable sensations, Kupka also considered the need for these vibrations from

¹ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 43: *Les accomplissements de la science exercent, de nos jours, une influence indéniable sur les artistes dont beaucoup – sont à bien des égards – consciemment ou sans le savoir – les disciples des penseurs les plus nouveaux.*

² Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229: *Compte tenu du progrès ... on serait fondé à croire à la possibilité de moyens de communications nouveaux, jusqu’à présent inconnus, disons d’une communications plus directe qui emprunterait la voie des ondes magnetiques maniés par les hypnotiseurs.*

³ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, book 3, ch. 16, 634–640: Cyclical Evolution and Karma.

⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 266.

⁵ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 141: *Le rayonnement de l’énergie vitale dans la nature, celui de la même énergie qui habite en dedans de nous, se manifeste toujours par des rapports entre différentes vibrations et, partant, différent couleurs; l’effet des unes est en quelque sorte multiplié par des autres.*

coloured planes to be of the same frequency, as represented by complementary colours and the juxtaposition of warm and cool hues. Yet for these colours to correlate to the north and south poles of the planet and their correspondence with the positive and negative magnetic energies of the human body, Kupka chose red and blue, particularly the Carmen reds and Cobalt blues that could be found in the rose windows of Nôtre Dame de Paris – one of Kupka's favourite motifs which he visited and sketched regularly and which figured in his painting, *Forme de Jaune (Notre Dame)*. His concern to correlate these two colours with the magnetism inherent in the human body, as demonstrated by Rochas' illustration in figure, is also revealed by Kupka's frequent visits with his students to Chartres Cathedral where they studied the effects of coloured light falling on their bodies through its red and blue stained glass.¹ When these colours and shapes were brought together in *Amorpha Fugue en deux couleurs*, it may appear as if Kupka was trying to capture the magnetic rotation of the planets as a music of the spheres, anticipated by his cover of *L'Homme de la Terre* with man gazing at the planets and his last illustration for Reclus' treatise. However, as the original painting in Prague reveals, there is an immense variation in which the signifiers of these planets and their oscillations are rendered in oil paint.

The two zinc white disks that reappear in *Amorpha Fugue en deux couleurs*, have been rendered with such heavy impasto that they look metallic, following Kupka's analogy, and able to vibrate with specific sounds against the lead black ground. While Kupka was well aware of the correspondences long drawn between colour and sound, *Sons et Couleurs* formed a major component in Souriau's treatise, *L'Imagination de l'artiste*, in which he examined their relationship to vibrations.² "Moving from lights to darks, each colour scale produces a composite impression, where distinct vibrations are juxtaposed", Kupka explained. "It is a game of cymbals, where the metallic disks [...] each vibrate and generate a specific sound."³ By contrast to the metallic dimension of these disks and the ways in which they register optically as concrete objects, the blues and reds are diluted and rendered with an immense variation of intensity. This is signified by my photographs of the intense reds and blues in the lateral oscillations in this painting by comparison to the far more translucent reds and blues in the vertical oscillations. The very translucency and variation in intensity of these reds and blues is like the analogy drawn by Rochas to the flickering red and blue flames of the biomagnetic vital force emitted by magnetized subjects as captured

¹ Mladek, "Central European Influences", 32; Sabine Flach, *Habitus in Habitat I: Emotion and Motion* (Peter Lang, 2010) 230.

² Paul Souriau, "Sons et Couleurs", *L'Imagination de l'Artiste* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1901) 102–119.

³ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 179: *Chaque gamme, allant des clairs aux foncés, produisait une impression composite, juxtaposant des vibrations distinctes entre elles. C'est eu jeu de cymbales, dont les disques métalliques disposés en échelle, vibrent isolément, chacun rendant un son spécifique.*



in figure. Like these flames, they are also indeterminate in shape and form and cannot be tangibly grasped, as signalled by Kupka's title, *Amorpha*. As the beholder can still perceive the metallic white disks through these amorphous and translucent reds and blues, Kupka seems to be conveying the magnetic energy entailed in planetary rotations but emitted from their rotations. Yet rather than being represented as the north and south magnetic poles signifying attraction and repulsion, well-being and fear, security and anxiety, these reds and blues seem to have become so interwoven that they might well represent the biomagnetic vital force, as defined by Rochas and other magnetists, as well as Bergson, as a balance or fusion of magnetic forces intertwined in the rhythm of life.

With his colours reduced to the magnetic poles in the body and the biomagnetic vital force radiation to and emanating from the magnetized body, they also act like the contrapuntal composition in a fugue, as signalled by Kupka's 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".¹ When the fast vibrations emanating from the reds synchronize with the slower vibrations from the blues, Kupka considered they emitted electromagnetic waves of violet light to the spectator and luminous vibrations comparable to the rose windows of Nôtre Dame and of Chartes Cathedral.² "In other words, once one was able to master the luminosity, with the right vibrations", Kupka explained, "its light was

František Kupka,
*Amorpha Fugue en deux
couleurs (Dvojbarevná
Fuga (Amorfa)*, 1912,
oil on canvas,
210 × 200 cm, Narodni
Galerie, Prague; detail
of lateral oscillations.
Photograph by
the author

¹ František Kupka: *A Retrospective, 1871–1957* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1975) p. 184.

² Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 154.



František Kupka,
*Amorpha Fugue en deux
 couleurs (Dvojbarevná
 Fuga (Amorfa), 1912,*
 oil on canvas,
 210 x 200 cm, Narodni
 Galerie, Prague; detail
 of vertical oscillations.
 Photograph by
 the author

able to sing.”¹ 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.² With its reds and blues corresponding to the magnetic energies in the body of the beholder, this painting may have been designed to, following Souriau’s theory, have a hypnotic magnetizing affect upon the beholder and to emit the sensations, indicated in figures, of a planetary perspective and cosmic utopia. Life-size, this seven ft. square painting was also composed to absorb and engulf the beholder in its symphonic emissions with the force of magnetic hypnosis.

In reconceiving 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 ‘mesmeric modernism’ with utopian performativity capable of infiltrating consciousness. This subliminal infiltration was instrumental for Kupka’s cultural politics as an Anarcho-Communist who aspired to an Anarcho-cosmic utopia in which workers and employers could comprehend planetary interrelations and the interconnections of the universe, as well as their place within it. Committed not just to this evolution of consciousness but a revolution into “super-consciousness”, Kupka then regarded this painting, like his following mesmeric abstractions, as paving a pathway to a dematerialized, magnetic artistic

¹ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 154: *C’est dire qu’on peut se rendre maître de la luminosité, chanter la lumière à travers ses propres vibrations.*

² Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 199: *... ses mouvements de dilation et de contraction correspondent au rythme cosmique de la reproduction et du retour.*

communion. In his book planned on “telepathy, psychopathy and psychomacroticity”, Kupka demonstrated knowledge of thought waves and Annie Besant and Leadbeater’s theory in *Thought Forms* that music, colour and artwork could emit vibrations able to transmit emotions and ideas.¹ Yet for Kupka this transmission consisted of magnetic energy and magnetic waves. “The mind has the capacity to intercept waves which another sends into space”, Kupka explained.² This cognitive transference would be, in his words, “a more direct communication, which would draw upon the mediation of magnetic waves by hypnotisers”.³ Artistic creation was then reconceived by Kupka as the telepathic emission and reception of electromagnetic magnetic waves between the artist and beholder, without the need for a tangible art object, let alone his didactic Anarcho-Communist cartoons and paintings, as captured by his woodcut, *Fantaisie physiologique*, in which the artist was reconfigured as an X-ray receptor without an artwork. As he explained:

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 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.⁴

¹ 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 / Linda D. Henderson (eds.), *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, Stanford 2002, 142.

² Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

³ Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

⁴ F. Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, Paris 1989, 229 [Tvorení v umění vytvářením, Prague 1923].