

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL  
SARABIANOV CONGRESS OF ART HISTORIANS







STATE INSTITUTE FOR ART STUDIES

HISTORY OF ART  
AND REJECTED KNOWLEDGE:  
FROM THE HERMETIC  
TRADITION TO THE 21<sup>st</sup>  
CENTURY

Moscow 2018

Printed by order of the Scientific Council  
of the State Institute for Art Studies

Reviewers:

EKATERINA SERGEEVNA VYAZOVA, Candidate of Sciences in Art History

ILYA ASKOLDOVICH DORONCHENKOV, Candidate of Sciences in Art History

**History of Art and Rejected Knowledge: From the Hermetic Tradition to the 21st Century.** Essays. Edited by Ekaterina Bobrinskaya and Anna Korndorf; translated from English by Catherine Phillips, Ruth Addison and Ludmila Lezhneva (Moscow: State Institute for Art Studies, 2018), 392 pages, ill.

ISBN 978-5-98287-130-5

For the duration of the history of art, esoteric sciences, magic and alchemy – and also physiognomics, the theory of temperaments and affects and other paradoxical tendencies in European thought – existed alongside the scientific study and artistic comprehension of reality. The nineteenth century introduced a series of esoteric practices which attempted to bring together irrational and scientific means of interpreting the world, such as theosophy. In dedicating this collection of essays to sciences which have fallen out of the purview of contemporary art history we wished to place the accent on problems art history research and examine whether or not the contemporary academic can use esoteric sciences not simply to supplement their historical research with interesting details but to develop the methodological tools at their disposal through research into the interaction between art and rejected knowledge. Which qualities of the art of the New Time does the optic of magic, alchemy, physiognomics and mesmerism allow us to see? Can we revitalise the methodology of art history by using these sciences? Can the idea of renovatio, which lies at the root of esoteric sciences, aid the renewal of the contemporary study of art?

The cover features Sascha Schneider's painting Hypnosis (1904).

The frontispiece features a photograph of Dmitri Sarabianov taken in the early 2010s.

© Tatyana Ignatova-Vezel

ISBN 978-5-98287-130-5

© The authors, 2018

© State Institute for Art Studies, 2018

© I.B. Trofimov, design, 2018

## CONTENTS

<i>Wouter Hanegraaff</i> FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE: ANTI-ESOTERIC POLEMIC AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH	8
<i>Wouter Hanegraaff</i> RELIGION AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION: THE ESOTERIC TRADITION AND POETIC CREATIVITY	34
<i>Monica Centanni</i> SERIO LUDERE. ABY WARBURG'S BILDERATLAS: A ROLE-PLAYING GAME TO STUDY CLASSICAL TRADITION	54
<i>Daniela Sacco</i> ITER PER LABYRINTHUM: PLATES A B AND C OF BILDERATLAS MMEMOSYNE	78
<i>Pavel Nosachev</i> LINKS OF A GOLDEN CHAIN: IMAGES OF THE HERMETIC TRADITION IN ETIC APPROACHES	87
<i>Yuri Rodichenkov</i> THE WORLD OF THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE: ART, IMAGE AND IMAGINATION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF PARACELSUS	97
<i>Ovanes Akopyan</i> MARSILIO FICINO, NEOPLATONISM / HERMETICISM AND ICONOLOGY: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ESTABLISHED STEREOTYPES	104
<i>Anna Korndorf</i> HERMIT VS HERMETISM. HERMITS AND THE HERMETIC TRADITION IN EUROPEAN ART OF THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES	118
<i>Olga Kleshchevich</i> THE ALCHEMICAL "IMAGE OF THE WORLD" IN THE ALLEGORICAL PROGRAMME OF THE GARDENS AND PARK AT PETERHOF	142

<i>Maria Demidova</i> HORAPOLLO'S HIEROGLYPHICA AND ITS POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON DEPICTIONS OF THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE	155
<i>Vasily Uspensky</i> GIOVANNI BATTISTA TIEPOLO'S SCHERZI DI FANTASIA: REJECTING KNOWLEDGE	174
<i>Nikolai Molok</i> AUTOMATA: FROM MAGIC TO SCIENCE AND BACK AGAIN	179
<i>Andrew Simsky</i> THE ESOTERIC CHRISTIANITY AND ARTISTIC LANGUAGE OF ALEXANDER IVANOV	206
<i>Linda Henderson</i> RETHINKING MODERN ART, SCIENCE, AND OCCULTISM IN LIGHT OF THE ETHER OF SPACE: WASSILY KANDINSKY, UMBERTO BOCCIONI, AND KAZIMIR MALEVICH	218
<i>John Bowlt</i> PAVEL FILONOV AND ATOMIC ENERGY	238
<i>Fae Brauer</i> MESMERIC MODERNISM: FRANTIŠEK KUPKA'S ART AS A MAGNETIC FORCE FIELD	251
<i>Ekaterina Bobrinskaya</i> MIKHAIL LARIONOV: RAYONISM AND RADIANT MATTER	267
<i>Elena Klyushina</i> HYPNOSIS IN THE ART OF FERNAND KHNOPEFF	281
<i>Ilona Svetlikova</i> ORPHISM AND THE CINEMA: NOTES ON ANDREI BELY'S PETERSBURG	293
<i>Nicoletta Misler</i> IMAGES OF THE EAST BETWEEN SPONTANEITY AND CIVILISATION: FROM NIKOLAI KARAZIN TO LEV BAKST	305
<i>Tessel M. Bauduin</i> PSYCHIC AUTOMATISM IN EARLY SURREALISM	319
<i>Nina Gurjanova</i> THE POOR KNIGHT AND THE POETICS OF ALCHEMY: THE PHENOMENON OF "CREATIVITY OF THE SPIRIT" IN THE WORK OF ELENA GURO	330

*Stepan Vaneyan*

JANTZEN AND SEDLMAYR OR THE MAGIC OF THE DIAPHANOUS.

ON SEVERAL SOURCES FOR MODERN CONCEPTS OF LITURGICAL SPACE

345

*Ekaterina Andreeva*

THE MAGIC OF THE HORIZON: THE ART OF LENINGRAD

AND ST. PETERSBURG FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1980S

382

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

390

Wouter J. Hanegraaff<sup>1</sup>

**FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE:  
ANTI-ESOTERIC POLEMICS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH<sup>2</sup>**

Discourse is a way of speaking about something  
which constructs what that something is.

*Linda Williams<sup>3</sup>.*

Having been involved over the last eight years in editing the two-volume *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, recently published by Brill<sup>4</sup>, it was impossible for me not to be confronted almost daily with basic questions of definition and demarcation. What is it that justifies gathering such an enormous amount of often spectacularly different currents and personalities, from late antiquity to the present, under one and the same terminological rubric? The question has occupied me ever since I first began to be interested in the field<sup>5</sup>, but by the time I had to write the Introduction to the Brill Dictionary, I was surprised at how easy I found it to answer. Having

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> The first version of this paper was presented at the 19th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Tokyo, Japan, 24–30 March 2005. I am grateful to Antoine Faivre and Kocku von Stuckrad for their critical remarks on an earlier draft.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Williams, 'Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the «Frenzy of the Visible»'. London: Pandora, 1990. P. 276.

<sup>4</sup> *Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism (DGWE)*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The development of my ideas in this regard can be traced through *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*: 'A Dynamic Typological Approach to the Problem of «Post-Gnostic» Gnosticism', in: *Aries*. 1992 No. 16 P. 5–43; 'Empirical Method in the study of esotericism', in: *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*. No. 7/2. 1995 P. 99–129; 'On the Construction of «Esoteric Traditions»', in: *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* / Ed. by A. Faivre, W.J. Hanegraaff. Leuven: Peeters, 1998 P. 11–61; 'The Study of Western Esotericism. New Approaches to Christian and Secular Culture', in: *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Vol. I: Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches / Ed. by P. Antes, A.W. Geertz, R.R. Warne. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004 P. 489–519.

briefly discussed the most important terms and categories that have traditionally been used by scholars to speak about the field, I concluded that ...seemingly innocuous terminological conventions are often the reflection of hidden or implicit ideological agendas. Perhaps no other domain in the study of religion has suffered from such biases as seriously as the one to which this Dictionary is devoted, for it covers more or less all currents and phenomena that have, at one time or another<sup>1</sup>, come to be perceived as problematic (misguided, heretical, irrational, dangerous, evil, or simply ridiculous) from the perspectives of established religion, philosophy, science, and academic research<sup>2</sup>.

This simple conclusion—reminiscent, in a way, of James Webb’s concept of “rejected knowledge”<sup>3</sup>—provides the starting-point for the present article. In brief, I will argue that the field of study referred to as “Western esotericism” is the historical product of a polemical discourse, the dynamics of which can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism. Moreover, it is in the terms of this very same discourse that mainstream Western culture has been construing its own identity, up to the present day. This process of the construction of identity takes place by means of telling stories – to ourselves and to others – of who, what and how we want to be<sup>4</sup>. The challenge of the modern study of Western esotericism to academic research ultimately consists in the fact that it questions and undermines those stories, and forces us to see who, what and how we really *are*. Instinctive resistance against the breaking down of certainties implicit in such (self)knowledge is at the very root of traditional academic resistance against the study of Western esotericism.

## 1. POLEMICS AND PROCEDURES OF EXCLUSION

Any polemical discourse, I suggest, is subject to a number of basic conditions:

1. It requires a sense of unrest or threat (in situations of total contentment and security—real or imaginary—there is no motivation for engaging in polemical discourse).

<sup>1</sup> Note the importance of this qualifier. It would be far from me to claim that all currents and phenomena that are nowadays gathered under the umbrella of “Western esotericism” were always perceived as problematic; in fact, the opposite is true, and an important task for the study of Western esotericism is to point out that many of its basic ideas and currents used to be part of normal acceptable discourse and of general Western culture, and came to be regarded as “other” only in later periods and as a result of specific historical developments (see e.g. the Enlightenment).

<sup>2</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff ‘Introduction’, in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff . et al. Dictionary. Op. cit. XIII.

<sup>3</sup> James Webb, ‘The Occult Underground’. Ann Arbor: Open Court, 1974. P. 191. An important pioneer in the academic study of Western esotericism, Webb was also a child of his time, and his discussion of the occult as representing “the flight from reason” (o.c., ch. 1) still strongly reflects the polemical discourse which I criticize in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> It is basic to my argument that the generic “we” includes ourselves as contemporary scholars of Western esotericism: assuming that it is only “them” who tell those stories means missing the point altogether.

2. It requires that the source of threat be not entirely clear and readily accessible (if the enemy is standing on your doorstep threatening to kill you, you do not polemicize against him but seek to attack or defend yourself).

3. It requires a target (if, in contrast to the previous point, there is no enemy—real or imagined—that can be attacked, polemical discourse dies still-born, from pure frustration).

4. It requires an audience (if nobody is interested in your polemics, the discourse never develops beyond the stage of mere monologue).

5. It requires simplicity, i.e. the discourse must be based on simple oppositions (complex arguments, with plenty of room for nuance and qualifications, are polemically ineffective).

Politicians know these things instinctively, and my points can easily be demonstrated at the example of the Bush administration's rhetoric about international terrorism. The climate that made it possible was created by the acute sense of threat (1) caused by the 9–11 attack. Although the source of the threat was quickly identified as Al Qaida and Islamic terrorism generally, these faceless networks of groups and individuals were not readily available for retaliation (2). In order for a polemical discourse to develop against this background, an attackable target was needed (3): hence the political rhetoric came to focus first on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, then on Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. Since the sense of threat was widely shared, the discourse found a receptive audience (4). And finally, its effectiveness relied on simple dualisms of unambiguous good versus unambiguous evil (5): "you are either with us or with the terrorists", the "axis of evil" stands against "the land of the free", the choice is between tyranny or democracy, and one may even have to choose between French fries or Freedom fries<sup>1</sup>.

To prevent misunderstanding: the fact that any polemical discourse needs to "create" a target enemy does not, of course, imply that this enemy is wholly imaginary and constitutes no real threat. It does mean, however, that—whether there is a real enemy or not—a polemical discourse needs to make it look real *at least* in the imagination. And in order for this to happen, even the most concrete enemy needs to be simplified: the reified "other" in any polemical discourse is therefore always an artificial creature, juxtaposed against a no less artificial "self". By simplifying the "other" as unambiguously bad, polemicists simultaneously create a simplified identity for themselves as unambiguously good. In order for a polemical discourse

<sup>1</sup> For Bush's rhetoric, see the excellent (and very disturbing) article by Urban, 'Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration'; on page 6 Urban quotes a speech before the FBI on September 25, 2001: 'I see things this way: The people who did this act on America...are evil people. They don't represent an ideology, they don't represent a legitimate political group of people. They're flat evil. That's all they can think about, is evil. And as a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down, and we're going to find them, and we will bring them to justice' (Hugh Urban, 'The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration', in: *Religious Studies Review* 34(4). December, 2008 P. 6 Quoting from Bush G.W. 'We Will Prevail'. President George W. Bush on War, Terrorism and Freedom. New York: Continuum, 2003. P. 22).



to be effective, these two artificial entities and the clearcut opposition between them must take the place, on the screen of the human imagination, of the much more complex and messy realities “out there”. The effectiveness of the discourse is proportional to the extent in which it succeeds in *confusing* its participants, so that they mistake the categories of their imagination for descriptions of reality<sup>1</sup>.

Now, precisely such a reification of imaginary constructs by means of polemical discourse over many centuries, or so I will argue, is at the bottom of the modern and contemporary perception of “Western esotericism” as a separate tradition or field of research rather than as merely a dimension of Western culture generally. This is not an argument for discarding any such concepts; but it is an argument for not confusing our constructs with historical reality<sup>2</sup>.

To understand the emergence of “Western esotericism” as a field of research, we need to look not only at the dynamics of polemical discourse, but also at the various procedures of exclusion that function within such a discourse. Michel Foucault has famously distinguished between three such procedures: prohibitions, the opposition of reason against madness, and the opposition of true against false<sup>3</sup>. I intend to slightly complicate this list by distinguishing between *two* kinds of prohibition; and it seems to me that Foucault ignored the difference between *reasons for* exclusion and *strategies of* exclusion. Thus I end up with four kinds of objection against the “others” in polemical discourses, and two kinds of strategy:

<sup>1</sup> I realize that the implications are far reaching. If I claim that polemical discourse creates confusion between imagination and reality, and argue (as I will do in the rest of the article) that it is the task of scholarship to criticize such confusion and call attention to the complexity of historical reality, some critics will object that this may be academically correct but politically naive and even dangerous, because it blurs the distinction between good and evil and ends up defending moral relativism. I maintain that the commitment of academic scholarship in the Enlightenment tradition is to the truth, by means of critical research and reflection (even though any such “truth” is always limited, conditional and provisory); obscuring the truth in the interest of “morality” is far more immoral than facing up to the fact that any moral commitment is indeed a commitment, not a logical inference from unquestionable metaphysical truths (cf. on this point my discussion of relativism in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff ‘Prospects for the Globalization of New Age: spiritual imperialism versus cultural diversity’, in: Religion and globalization: critical concepts in social studies. Vol. 2 Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research (AIHR): Routledge, 2011 P. 43–56). ‘Prospects for the Globalization’).

<sup>2</sup> As argued at length in my ‘On the Construction’ (Wouter J. Hanegraaff, op. cit.). Confusion of this kind is demonstrated particularly clearly by the multiple cases of authors who have used Antoine Faivre’s famous definition of Western esotericism (in terms of four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic variables) as a litmus test for deciding whether person x or movement y “is” esoteric or not. See my discussion of this problem in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’. Op. cit. P. 508.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘L’ordre du discours’. Paris: Gallimard, 1971 P. 11–23 (‘L’interdit’, ‘l’opposition raison et folie’, ‘l’opposition du vrai et du faux’ [i.e. ‘la volonté de vérité’]).

reason for exclusion	positive alternative	preferred strategy
danger	– safety	prohibition
immorality	– morality	prohibition
irrationality	– reason	ridicule
error	– truth	ridicule

Let me take some examples. Harddrugs are prohibited because they are considered dangerous, but not because they induce immoral behaviour; and polemical discourse concerned with “the war on drugs” addresses a sense of threat to public safety by reducing a complex compound with fuzzy boundaries to a simple generic concept<sup>1</sup>. Attempts to restrict or prohibit pornography, in contrast, are typically defended with moral arguments (its “dangers” being presented as dangers to morality); and here, again, the category is highly artificial<sup>2</sup>. Such attempts at prohibition make no reference to reason

<sup>1</sup> “Drugs” is a nice example of an “artificial enemy” created in the collective imagination by means of simplification. For example, in the Netherlands the “party drug” XTC is considered an illegal hard drug, whereas alcohol use is accepted. The facts are that alcohol is physically addictive and its misuse frequently causes serious violent behaviour, whereas XTC is not physically addictive and makes its users feel soft and loving instead of aggressive. While too much XTC can be dangerous to one’s health, the same goes for too much alcohol. Including under illegal “hard drugs” a substance like XTC but not alcohol is therefore highly artificial, and difficult to defend rationally. The simplified entity “drugs” as it functions in popular discourse in fact refers to a multifarious collection of psychoactive substances that differ greatly in their effects, their health hazards, and in being addictive or not; as a result, addictive and dangerous substances such as e.g. heroin are incorrectly lumped together with e.g. various non-addictive herbal brews containing dimethyltryptamine (Ayahuasca, Jurema etc.), which present no danger to health and whose psychoactive properties can even have demonstrable healing effects.

<sup>2</sup> This is demonstrated with particular clarity in the classic study of pornography by *Walter Kendrick*, ‘The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture’. Oakland: University of California Press, 1996. Likewise, *Bette Talvacchia* in her splendid study of Renaissance eroticism formulates very precisely how and why pornography is an artificial polemical construct: ‘the creation of pornography... comes from targeting particular objects, images, and texts as offensive to morality and therefore unacceptable, so that a pornographic object cannot exist without the discourse that identifies it. In this view, there is never any inherently pornographic nature in any cultural production; rather, certain kinds of sexual representations are singled out and argued to be pornographic’ (*Bette Talvacchia*, ‘Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture’. Princeton: University Press; 1st edition, 1999; mutatis mutandis – i.e. by replacing the term “pornography/pornographic” by “esotericism/esoteric” and “sexual” by “religious” – exactly the same argumentation can easily be applied to the category of Western esotericism). As is well-known, pornography was singled out as a target of polemics by feminist activists, with *Andrea Dworkin* as perhaps the most notorious example; their militant pro-censorship arguments have been countered by anti-censorship feminists such as notably *Linda Williams* (for this distinction, see *Linda Williams*, ‘Hard Core’. Op. cit. P. 16–30).

or truth. Western esotericism or its associated components (e.g. “magic”, “astrology”, “the occult”, etcetera), in contrast, tend to be a frequent focus of mild ridicule by contemporary academics; they are not considered immoral or dangerous to society, but are simply dismissed as irrational and false. One does not take such things seriously; for if one does, one risks finding one- self excluded from acceptable discourse<sup>1</sup>. At first sight an attitude of ridicule may hardly seem to qualify as a “polemical” strategy, but I will argue that, on the contrary, its historical roots as far as Western esotericism is concerned are polemical in the extreme. It is only because the “other” in question is no longer believed to pose a serious threat today, that prohibition and persecution have been replaced by the milder—but not necessarily less effective— strategy of ridicule.

## 2. THE GRAND POLEMICAL NARRATIVE

I hardly need to emphasize that an analysis within the space of a few pages of a polemical discourse that (as I announced above) ‘can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism’ can only be sketchy in the extreme. Therefore the following overview is in no way intended as an empirically adequate description of historical reality, but merely intends to sketch the outlines of a possible heuristic approach to it, in view of specific questions that the study of Western esotericism cannot afford to ignore.

## 3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF PAGANISM: MONOTHEISM VERSUS IDOLATRY

It is natural to assume that the polemical target of monotheistic discourse consists in “polytheism”, but in fact that opposition is a relatively recent phenomenon. The term “polytheism” was introduced by Philo of Alexandria<sup>2</sup>, but came to be used by other authors only since Jean Bodin in 1580<sup>3</sup>, and the term “monotheism” was coined by Henry More in 1660 as a counter-term against polytheism. After Philo and up to the end of the 16th century, the basic opposition was another one: that of worship of the one true God versus idolatry. The discourse that pits “monotheism” against “idolatry” goes back, of course, to the Hebrew Bible, which codifies it in the Second

<sup>1</sup> A perfect example at which one can study this dynamics is Immanuel Kant’s polemics against Emanuel Swedenborg, in his *Träume eines Geistersehers* of 1766. For an analysis, see the section on Kant in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Swedenborg’s Magnum Opus’ (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Francis Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms: Degeneration or progress?’, in: *History and Anthropology* Vol. 3, 1987 P. 9–60. 10 and 52 nt 1 (with reference to Philo of Alexandria: ‘De mutatione nominum’, 205; ‘De officio mundi’, 171; ‘De ebrietate’, 110; ‘De confusione longuarum’, 42; 144; ‘De migratione Abrahami’, 69 [kharazar.skeptik.net/books/philo/metonomg.htm](http://kharazar.skeptik.net/books/philo/metonomg.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Schmidt, ‘Polytheisms: Degeneration or progress?’, Op. cit. 10 and 52 nt 2 (Jean Bodin, *La démonomanie des sorciers*. Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1580. Bk I, ch V).

Commandment, and is of absolutely basic importance to how Jews, Christians and Muslims have construed their identities. As formulated by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, 'The prohibition against idolatry is the thick wall that separates the non-pagans from pagans'<sup>1</sup>.

As brilliantly argued by Jan Assmann, underneath this distinction is an even more basic one. Western monotheism he describes as the space severed or cloven by the distinction between true and false in religion<sup>2</sup>. This distinction, although first drawn by Akhenaten in the 14th century B.C., he refers to as the "Mosaic Distinction" because it has come to be linked to the name of Moses in the actual mnemohistory of Western civilization. It created the new phenomenon of what Assmann refers to as "counter-religion": a type of religion that does not function as a means of intercultural translation (the gods of one pantheon being considered translatable into those of another) but as a means of intercultural estrangement, and which defines itself by rejecting and repudiating the gods of other and earlier peoples—in other words, by a polemical discourse:

Narratively, the distinction is represented by the story of Israel's Exodus out of Egypt. Egypt thereby came to symbolize the rejected, the religiously wrong, the "pagan". As a consequence, Egypt's most conspicuous practice, the worship of images, came to be regarded as the greatest sin. Normatively, the distinction is expressed in a law code which conforms with the narrative in giving the prohibition of "idolatry" first priority. In the space that is constructed by the Mosaic distinction, the worship of images came to be regarded as the absolute horror, falsehood, and apostasy. Polytheism and idolatry were seen as the same form of religious error. The second commandment is a commentary on the first... Images are automatically "other gods", because the true god is invisible and cannot be iconically represented<sup>3</sup>.

The mosaic distinction, then, takes concrete shape in the form of the *true* religion of the one invisible God, defined by its rejection of the *false* religion of idols.

Idolatry as the rhetorical "other" of monotheism often came to be associated with danger and immorality, but clearly the more basic procedure of exclusion relied on the opposition between truth and error. There is no obvious danger in worshiping idols—quite the contrary, pagans would consider it dangerous to neglect such worship—, and it must have been very puzzling to pagans that Jews and Christians often described it in moral terms as "whoredom"<sup>4</sup>; such associations naturally followed, however, in the wake

<sup>1</sup> Moshe Halbertal & Avishai Margalit, 'Idolatry'. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994 P. 236

<sup>2</sup> Jan Assmann 'Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism'. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 P. 1–2. Cf: Jan Assmann, 'Die Mosaische Unterscheidung: oder der Preis des Monotheismus'. München: Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Assmann 'Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism'. Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> The connotations of idolatry with sexual transgression and immorality (e.g. infidelity, prostitution, nymphomania) are pervasive in the Hebrew Bible, and are discussed in detail in the first chapter ('Idolatry and Betrayal') of Moshe Halbertal & Avishai Margalit, 'Idolatry'. Op. cit.

of the prior perception, basic to monotheism, of pagan idolatry as false belief<sup>1</sup>. And this category of error, which in contemporary Western society is sanctioned by no more than ridicule, became the object of grave prohibitions in the original Jewish context and later throughout the history of Christianity. Simply to be wrong constituted a capital offense<sup>2</sup>.

The construction of a “pagan other” is the first crucial move in the Grand Polemical Narrative by which mainstream Western culture has been construing its own identity. It is easy to demonstrate that, as a matter of historical fact, ideas and traditions integral to paganism have nevertheless been essential components of Christianity from very early on<sup>3</sup>, and have continued to exert an enormous influence throughout the history of Western culture: obvious examples are Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, but also Hermetism and even Zoroastrianism in elite culture, or the enormous variety of pagan practices that have always continued to thrive in popular culture<sup>4</sup>. But in the

<sup>1</sup> Which became considerably worse if it happened not out of ignorance, but was seen as a conscious choice and commitment; hence the strong association in the Hebrew Bible of idolatry with sexual infidelity. As explained by Halbertal and Margalit, ‘[t]hrough the root metaphor of marriage, God’s relationship to Israel is construed by the prophets as exclusive. Within the marriage metaphor God is the jealous and betrayed husband, Israel is the unfaithful wife, and the third parties in the triangle—the lovers—are the other gods. Idolatry, then, is the wife’s betrayal of the husband with strangers, with lovers who had no shared biography with Israel, the other gods whom Israel never knew’ (*Moshe Halbertal & Avishai Margalit*, ‘Idolatry’. Op. cit, 237; cf. detailed discussion on 9–36).

<sup>2</sup> I cannot here go into the juridical aspects of this development. For an excellent discussion focused on the case of astrology, see *Kocku von Stuckrad*, ‘Das Ringen um die Astrologie’. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011 P. 782–797. What was perceived as the irrationality or insanity of heretical and “pagan” belief (see e.g. the Edict of Emperor Theodosius, quoted in *Kocku von Stuckrad*, ‘Das Ringen um die Astrologie’, Op. cit. P. 797: ‘Dementes vesanosque... haeretici dogmatis’) could be sanctioned by prohibition and persecution.

<sup>3</sup> The only way in which anyone can possibly deny this, is by reverting to the concept that “Christianity” consists only of “true Christianity”. Such an approach is obviously unacceptable from any historical and academic perspective; nevertheless it has been basic to traditional Church history, and occasionally this is even openly admitted by Church historians themselves (see the representative case of Bakhuizen van den Brink discussed in my ‘The Dreams of Theology’: *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*, ‘The dreams of theology and the realities of Christianity’, in: *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*. Eds. Haers. J. & de. Mey. P. Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The cases of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism are too well known to require bibliographical support. As for Hermetism, see e.g. *Claudio Moreschini*, ‘Storia dell’ermetismo cristiano’. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2000; *Roelof van den Broek*, *Paolo Lucentini*, *Vittoria Perrone Compagni*, and *Antoine Faivre*, ‘Hermetic Literature I, II, IV’, in: *Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (DGWE). Op. cit. P. 487–499. For Zoroastrianism the standard reference is *Michael Stausberg*, ‘Faszination Zarathushtra: Zoroaster und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit’. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998. For popular culture, among a flood of studies see e.g. *Dieter Harmening*, ‘Superstitio’. München: Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co KG, 1979; *Valerie Irene Jane Flint*, ‘The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe’. Princeton University Press,

imagination of Christians this factual omnipresence of paganism in Christianity has been obscured with remarkable success by the power of polemical discourse<sup>1</sup>. This discourse rested upon an imaginal construct: the ideal concept of the Church as the “pure”, “uncontaminated”, “healthy” body of Christ which continuously needs to be defended against the danger of “attack”, “contamination”, “infection” and so on, by its enemies. Few Christians would deny that such contamination often did take place—after all, any claim that the historical (rather than the ideal) Church was entirely pure and healthy would amount to denying the presence of sin and the need for redemption. But the ambiguities, complexities and general messiness of historical reality made it all the more necessary to uphold the clarity of the ideal.

Accordingly, our concern here is not with the unavoidable gap between spiritual ideal and earthly realities, but with the common confusion between those two in the practice of *historiography*, which has consistently sought to exorcize the paganism integral to historical Christianity by presenting it as “other”. Theologically such a rhetorical procedure was not only understandable but necessary: as a “counter-religion” born from the monotheistic rejection of idolatry, Christianity would not have been able to define its own identity otherwise. Nevertheless, from a consistent historical perspective – which defines its very identity (!) by opposing demonstrable facts against pious rhetoric, contingency against providence, diversity against unicity, complexity against simplicity, and indeed relativity against dogmatic truth-claims<sup>2</sup> – such procedures do confuse myth with reality, and are simply incorrect.

In sum: I suggest that the construction of a “pagan other” has been the first step—and arguably the most crucial one—in the development of a “grand narrative” of Western religion, culture and civilization. This narrative of “who,

1991, or *Keith Thomas Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Oxford University Press, 1971. With the possible exception of Aristotelianism, the “idolatrous” dimension of the traditions was quite obvious: one thinks of the practice of *telestikè* (animation of statues) in Neoplatonic theurgy, the criticism (since Augustine, and greatly emphasized by William of Auvergne) of Hermetic idolatry as evident from Asclepius 23-24/37-38, the traditional status of Zoroaster as the inventor of magic (inseparable, as will be seen, from idolatry), and the generally “idolatrous” nature or implications of many “folklore” traditions in Christianity (e.g. use of talismans, veneration of statues of saints).

<sup>1</sup> For a longer development of this point, see: *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*, ‘The dreams of theology and the realities of Christianity’. Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Hence historians should beware of creating their own polemical simplifications. One could argue that the present paper, and my ‘Dreams of Theology’ article (op. cit), are themselves examples of a polemical discourse. Although I do not wish to construe “theologians” as an artificial enemy, it is true that they are indeed a target insofar as they confuse myth and reality; and although the simplification necessary in any polemical discourse is explicitly incompatible with the very position I am defending, I cannot avoid it altogether if I want to make myself understood. If this proves anything, it is that me and my opponents find ourselves in the same predicament, insofar as none of us can claim the virtue of an “uncontaminated purity” as opposed to the “error” of our opponents. Which is, in fact, exactly my point.

what and how we want to be” relies upon a concept of who, what and how we do *not* want to be: pagan, or associated with anything pagan. But regardless of such wishes, as a matter of historical fact paganism is and always has been part of what we *are*: it is an integral part of Western religion, culture and civilization, and cannot be separated from what lived Christianity has been from the very beginning. This fact, however, could not be openly acknowledged, or even be allowed to surface into conscious awareness; and as a result, a “space” was created in the collective imagination that was occupied by the pagan “other”. In the course of a long development, this space eventually developed into what we now refer to as Western esotericism.

#### 4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF HERESY: CHRISTIANITY VERSUS GNOSTICISM

All the later stages in the development of the Grand Polemical Narrative are to some extent variations on the basic opposition of pagan versus nonpagan, which is in its bare essence an opposition of error versus truth. But they added new rhetorical twists to it, which variously emphasized the variants of “danger”, “immorality” and “irrationality” (or “madness”); and they added a wealth of new contents, in the form of various ideas and beliefs that had not been present in the original imaginary of “paganism” or had remained implicit rather than overt.

“Gnosticism” is a particularly clear example of an artificial construct that came to be reified by means of polemical discourse—so successfully, in fact, that almost all academic specialists throughout the 19th and 20th centuries have assumed that it referred to a historically identifiable current or movement. It is sobering to realize that the very term “gnosticism” was invented as late as 1669 by (again) Henry More, as a pejorative umbrella concept for what polemicists like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Hippolytus of Rome and Ipphianus of Salamis had rejected as heresy in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Significantly, in view of the previous section, More’s primary focus of attack was Catholicism, described as ‘a spice of the old abhorred Gnosticism’ and a false prophecy that seduces true Christians into (guess what ...) idolatry!<sup>1</sup>

In one of the most important recent studies in the field, Michael Allen Williams has explained in detail why “gnosticism” is in fact a ‘dubious

<sup>1</sup> See *Henry More*, ‘An exposition of the seven epistles to the seven churches together with a brief discourse of idolatry, with application to the Church of Rome’ (1669). Ann Arbor: EEBO Editions, ProQuest, 2011 P.99 (‘...to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to Idols, which is a chief point of that which was called Gnosticisme’), and for the formulation quoted in the text, see *idem*, ‘Antidote against Idolatry [unpaginated]’, included as an appendix to the Exposition. For the complete original quotations, see *Bentley Layton*, ‘Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism’, in: *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O.L. Yarbrough. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995. P. 348–349 (=Appendix: Henry More’s Coinage of the Word Gnosticism).



category' that creates a distorted picture of historical reality and therefore should be 'dismantled' as soon as possible<sup>1</sup>. And Karen L. King has provided useful discussions not only of how "gnosticism" was construed as the fundamental heresy, but also of how the heresiological polemics of the 2nd and 3rd centuries have provided modern scholarship with its basic terminological conventions and theoretical assumptions<sup>2</sup>. Her discussion provides detailed confirmation of my basic point that "gnosticism" is an artificial polemical construct that has always consisted in the imagination rather than in historical reality, and could be created and kept alive only by means of simplification. King's conclusion says it all: ...the polemicists have reigned supreme for most of the twentieth century; scholars have tended to evaluate Gnosticism negatively, and on nearly the same grounds as the polemicists did heresy. Gnosticism has been described as theologically inferior and ethically flawed; as an artificial and syncretic parasite; as an individualistic, nihilistic, and escapist religion incapable of forming any kind of true moral community. Scholars have included an increasingly wide range of diverse materials under the category of Gnosticism, and yet they have chafed at the problem of defining its essential characteristics. But above all, we have been mistakenly preoccupied with determining its origin and tracing its genealogical relation to orthodox Christianity because we have unwittingly reified a rhetorical category into a historical entity<sup>3</sup>.

As in the case of paganism, "gnosticism" was rhetorically excluded primarily as being based upon theological "error"; hence its usefulness for defining the polemicists' identity as representatives of "orthodoxy" – upholders of the right doctrine. Other negative features followed as a matter of course: "gnosticism" is "dangerous" because it stimulates individualism and hence division, that is to say, it undermines legitimate authority; those who lack a solid grounding in the truth are bound to lapse into "immoral" behaviour, and of course examples (such as the well-known accusations of sexual libertinism) are readily found; and their rejection of philosophy as a sufficient way towards divine knowledge could be used to present the gnostic emphasis on "gnosis" as demonstrating their lack of rationality. Furthermore, as with "paganism", it is striking how frequently one encounters the language of purity and contamination.

As I emphasized earlier, the imaginary nature of "gnosticism" does not mean that it did not correspond with anything real. But instead of any

<sup>1</sup> Michael Allen Williams, 'Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category'. Princeton University Press, 1999; and see discussion in: Roelof van den Broek, 'Coptic Gnostic and Manichaean Literature 1996–2000', in: Mat Immerzeel M, Vliet J. (eds.) Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium I: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies, Leiden, 27 August–2 September 2000 Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters & Departement Oosterse Studies, 2004. P. 673–676.

<sup>2</sup> Karen L King, 'What is Gnosticism?' Kambridge: Belknap Press; Revised ed. edition, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Karen L King, 'What is Gnosticism?' Op. cit. P. 52.



well-defined “current”, “movement”, or even “religion” of gnosticism<sup>1</sup>, what we do find in the Roman empire during the later hellenistic period is a diffuse and complex type of religiosity, based upon the pursuit of gnosis or salvific esoteric knowledge<sup>2</sup>. It included not only what Williams would like us to call “biblical demiurgical” traditions, but also Christians such as Clement of Alexandria and the currents that inspired the hermetic literature; and as those examples readily demonstrate, it ignored religious boundaries and could manifest itself in pagan and Christian, as well as in Jewish contexts. This fluidity and flexibility may have been one reason why the polemicists felt threatened by it. The construction of heresy, as explained by King, ‘was only one part of the larger rhetorical enterprise of establishing the boundaries of normative Christianity, which also had to distinguish itself from other forms of belief and practice, notably Judaism and paganism’<sup>3</sup>. The basic polemical strategies were similar in all these cases, but the targets were recognizably different. Hence it made sense for polemicists to reduce the problem of gnosis to its manifestations that called themselves Christian. By and large, this is what became the heresy later called “gnosticism”. Other manifestations of gnosis could be subsumed under the umbrellas of Judaism and Paganism, and refuted as part of relatively separate polemics.

## 5. THE CONSTRUCTION OF MAGIC: CHRISTIANITY VERSUS DEMON-WORSHIP

The term *magiké* (the art of the *mágoi*, or Persian priests) originated with the Greeks, who used it to indicate ‘a ritual practitioner occupied with private rites whose legitimacy was contested and often, at least in later times, marginalised and forbidden’<sup>4</sup>. From the beginning, *mageia* was an imprecise but generally negative term, referring to what was seen as the opposite of legitimate and overt religious practice<sup>5</sup>. There were many equivalents to *magiké* or aspects of it, such as the Greek *góes* (someone who communicates with the dead, hence *goeteía*), *pharmakeútria* (a woman using herbs and drugs) or *analutés* (a specialist in undoing binding-spells), and the Latin *saga* (witch), *veneficus* (poisoner) or *maleficus* (evildoer)<sup>6</sup>. Early Christian authors in the Roman empire inherited the concept of *magia* and its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the famous title by Hans Jonas, ‘The Gnostic Religion. Boston: Beacon Press’; 3rd edition, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Wouter .J. Hanegraaff, ‘Introduction’, VII-VIII (with reference to Roelof van den Broek. ‘Gnosticism I: Gnostic Religion’ in: Wouter .J. Hanegraaff et al. Dictionary. Op. cit. P. 404–416).

<sup>3</sup> Karen L King, ‘What is Gnosticism?’ Op. cit. P. 21.

<sup>4</sup> As formulated by Fritz Graf, ‘Magic in the Ancient World’: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997 P. 719.

<sup>5</sup> For Greek and Latin understandings of the term “magic” and its cognates, see also Albert De Jong, ‘Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek And Latin Literature’. Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997 P. 387ff.

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Graf, ‘Magic in the Ancient World’. Op. cit. P. 719

equivalents as a category of exclusion, but naturally understood it within their own framework of true versus false religion, that is to say, the opposition of Christian belief against pagan idolatry. Up through the 12th century, which saw the emergence of new concepts of *magia naturalis*, magic in Christian discourse became therefore equivalent to trafficking with demons<sup>1</sup>, who, as was well understood, were the very same entities that had manifested themselves as “gods” to the pagans.

Hence it is quite clear that the Christian discourse of magic came to occupy a major part of the “space” in the collective imagination that had been created by the original monotheism-paganism distinction. In that process, however, the imaginary “other” acquired a new aura. From the perspective of anti-pagan counter-religion, the Greek and Roman concept of magic as illegitimate or forbidden practice became something much more dramatic, by being “demonized” as the domain of the Enemy of Mankind. As explained by Valerie Flint.

The characterization of “magic” as the work solely of wicked demons, and of “sorcerers” and “magicians” as their servants, stemmed from two convergent developments. In the first place, the concept of the “daimon” changed... In the second, “*magia*”, or “magic”, became the *chief* term whereby the most powerful of the emerging religious systems described, and condemned, the supernatural exercises of their enemies. In brief, as organized and institutionalized religious practice was asked to play an ever more prominent place in the daily life of humans, as an exclusive form of monotheism commanded much of this practice, and as Christianity, in particular, assumed . . . a quasi-imperial role, the older, looser, views of the dealings of human beings with the “*daimones*” could no longer be tolerated. The “daimon” was translated, then, into the evil demon of Judaic and Christian literature... Thus, those humans who looked to obtain supernatural help in the older ways and through an older or different “daimon”, came to be viewed by many as terminally deluded, and their exercises seen as magic as its worst. Sorcerers and magicians were then “demonized” by being declared subject only to the demonic forces of evil, and were described as offering reinforcement to the most wicked of these forces’ designs. The process of demonisation was greatly assisted by the extraordinary range of activities which had meanwhile been captured under the name of magic<sup>2</sup>.

In the course of such redefinitions of pagan religion as (demonic) magic, the original emphasis on religious error clearly shifted towards an emphasis on *danger*. While one may seek to refute the errors of pagans, gnostics, or heretics generally, in an effort to win them over to the truth, such an approach is useless in the case of demons: the important thing is, rather, to protect individuals and society against the enemy. And because—as rightly

<sup>1</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, ‘Magic in the Middle Ages’. Cambridge University Press, 2000 P. 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Flint ‘The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions’, in: Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Vol. 2 Ancient Greece and Rome Edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999 P. 279.

pointed out by Flint—an enormous variety of activities had now come to be covered by the same term “magic”, they could all be perceived as manifestations of one and the same threat. Again, we see how simplification is essential to a polemical agenda. The assumption of demonic agency became in fact the only universally agreed-upon characteristic of “magic”, which now functioned as a polemical waste-basket category lumping together such widely different things as divination (itself a category including various techniques, e.g. geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, astrology, observation of flight and sounds of birds, or of the entrails of animals, and so on)<sup>1</sup>, evocation of angels, demons or the dead, curse tablets and image magic, amulets and talismans, the activities of witches, enchantment by magical use of words, ligatures, and so on.

Nowadays, all these “exceptive arts” or varieties of “superstition”<sup>2</sup> are routinely associated – by specialized academics no less than by the general audience—with “magic” (or with the more recent term “the occult”); and throughout the history of Christianity, theologians have sought to convince their fellow Christians that these activities were unlawful, dangerous, immoral, deluded, and wrong. of course, the mere fact that they needed to do so proves that many Christians *did* practice them. There is no particular reason to assume that, in doing so, they intended to choose the devil’s part; more likely they simply expected to gain something useful from these arts and techniques, and did not see why they should be so incompatible with Christian faith. Again, I would emphasize that from a historical point of view, all such practices, no matter how far removed they may be from standard concepts of normative Christianity, must be recognized as integral parts of the tapestry of Christianity as a living culture<sup>3</sup>. Within that culture, “magic” has always been a hotly contested space, but the efforts of leading theologians and church leaders to exclude it as the “other” of Christianity should be seen as part of a polemical discourse internal to Christianity itself, rather than being taken at face value as though they were a historically reliable description of factual realities. In the practice of church history and largely of history in general, however, the standard phenomenon of a confusion between polemical concepts and historical realities has reigned supreme. Just as in the case of “gnosticism”, the terms and categories of the polemicists have (consciously or unconsciously) been taken over by academics and have been allowed to strongly influence the way we have perceived and construed the history of Christianity and of Western culture as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> See *Thérèse Charmasson*, ‘Divinatory Arts’ in: *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*, et al. *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> See the catalogues of practices associated with this term in *Dieter Harmening*, ‘Superstitio’. Op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> The only alternative is the arrogant position, implicit in traditional approaches, according to which only an elite of professional theologians ever really understood what Christianity meant: a position that (arrogance apart) can logically be maintained only if one holds to an essentialist instead of historical understanding of Christianity. See again my ‘Dreams of Theology’ (op. cit.).

## 6. THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF PAGANISM: PROTESTANTISM VERSUS ROMAN CATHOLICISM

That “paganism” and “magic” had actually become integral parts of Christianity was keenly perceived by the leaders of the Reformation, who accordingly sought to exclude Roman Catholicism from the domain of legitimate religion. Hence history repeated itself in the 16th century: the Reformation—and Calvinism most in particular—defined its very identity by polemically excluding Roman Catholicism as the “other” of true Christianity, in a way that is structurally similar to the cases we have just explored. In this process, the emphasis shifts back again from “danger” towards “error”<sup>1</sup>.

The relation between “paganism” and “magic” in this Protestant discourse is extremely complex, with the concept of “idolatry” as arguably a major point of connection; but this is hardly the place to go into that problematics in any detail. Suffice it to say that the truth-error distinction basic to traditional anti-pagan polemics is given a vehement new sting in the new Protestant variety, by means of being framed in terms of a distinction between *belief* and *practice*. This was something new. In a Roman Catholic context the true doctrine was not only embodied in the Church, but also ritually enacted in its central ceremonies; therefore by religious practice, the faithful participated in the truth. Not so from a Protestant perspective. Salvation comes from faith alone, that is to say, not from ritual participation, good works, or any other kind of practice. Together with Roman Catholicism, this principle has the effect of very cleanly and effectively excluding both “paganism” and “magic” from the domain of legitimate Christianity.

The same simple Protestant principle has exerted an enormous influence over how the nature of “religion” has come to be perceived since the 16th century, in academic contexts and generally—with far-reaching but usually overlooked implications for the study of Western esotericism. The modern study of religion has only slowly managed to break free from the crypto-Protestant idea that religion is based upon—and hence defined by—“belief” (i.e. upon the adherence to certain propositions held to be true), and many scholars continue to think in these terms even today. Applied to the history of Christianity, this has the effect of calling attention away from its symbolic, mythical and ritual aspects<sup>2</sup>, in favour of an artificial concentration on Christian doctrine as supposedly representing the core of what Christianity

<sup>1</sup> And note that the strategy of ridicule was a major one already in this context. One good example of this is the Calvinist polemicist Philips van Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde (1540–1598), whose biting satire *De Biëncorff der H. Roomsche Kercke* (The Beehive of the Roman Catholic Church; 1569) went through many editions. See also the “invectives” discussed in *Claude Postel, ‘Traité des invectives au temps de la Réforme’*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> While highlighting the triad “symbol, myth and ritual” in what follows, I will assume that they include the role of the visual as such. The religious use of images may be included under ritual practice, regardless of whether images are seen as mere “symbols” or, more concretely, as direct representations or embodiments of what they represent.

is all about for the believer. In terms of the Grand Polemical Narrative such a reduction makes perfect sense, but historically it is extremely misleading, for in many respects an approach based upon the Protestant principle is simply incapable of describing who Christians have actually been, what they have believed, and how they have behaved. Any dimension of lived Christianity that does not fit the pattern is simply not registered. Once again, confusion between polemical concepts and historical realities caused the latter to be perceived from a simplifying ideological angle, and the resulting picture was taken for granted by later generations as factual description.

With respect to Western esotericism, the contribution of Protestantism to the Grand Polemical Narrative has had a double effect. First, it strongly amplified the already existing practice of excluding “paganism”, “gnosticism” and “magic”—domains which, however, as every student of Western esotericism knows, had just been witnessing an important revival engineered by Catholics in the half century preceding the Reformation<sup>1</sup>—from the domain of Christianity. And second, it promoted an approach to religion in general that emphasizes only doctrine and verbal/scriptural expression. As a result, if the excluded “other” came in view at all, not only was it automatically put in a negative light, but even more seriously, its symbolic, mythical and ritual aspects were bound to be systematically ignored, played down or “translated” into something that could be verbalized and understood in doctrinal terms. Apart from the fact that symbolic, mythical and ritual dimensions are integral parts of *any* kind of religion (including even the most extreme manifestations of Protestantism itself<sup>2</sup>), for our present concerns it is essential to see that the types of religiosity which had been excluded as “other” in Western culture had always been characterized precisely by a strong emphasis on those very dimensions: paganism is largely practice supported by myth (and flourishing in the veneration of images), gnosticism is nothing without its rich mythology<sup>3</sup>, magic is eminently something done and not just something believed in, and the role of images and symbols is pervasive in all these domains.

In his study of eros and magic in the Renaissance, Ioan P. Couliano has analyzed the “censorship of the imaginary” as a historical process with profound effects, that developed in the wake of the Reformation<sup>4</sup>; and one

<sup>1</sup> I am not aware of any major studies that explore systematically and in detail to what extent the explicit defense of “paganism” and “magic” in the wake of the rediscovery of hermeticism—by Catholics such as Ficino, Lazzarelli, Pico della Mirandola and so on, and often combined with defenses of that other traditional enemy, Judaism—played a role in Protestant polemics against Roman Catholicism. On the face of it, one would expect that the phenomenon of a hermetic/neoplatonic Christianity defended by Catholics would make it an ideal target for Protestants, as demonstrating how deeply the Roman Catholic church had sunk.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. the example of Calvinism briefly discussed in my ‘Dreams of Theology’. Op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> See the discussions of “mythological gnosis” in: *Roelof van den Broek* ‘Gnosticism I: Gnostic Religion’ in: *Wouter J. Hanegraaff* et al. Dictionary. Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Ioan P. Couliano*, ‘Eros and Magic in the Renaissance’. The University of Chicago press, 1987. P. 193.

merely needs to think of the iconoclasm of Protestantism and its pervasive rhetoric against Roman Catholic “idolatry”, to realize that the attack on images cannot be separated (except conceptually and analytically) from the censorship of religious “practice” and ritual<sup>1</sup>. By seeking to exclude Roman Catholicism from legitimate Christianity and include it in the pagan/magical domain of the “other”, the Protestant discourse cemented its own identity as the anti-imaginal, anti-mythical and anti-ritualistic counter religion *par excellence*; and this, in turn, could not but amplify long-standing associations of “truth” with the clarity of words, and “error” with the ambiguity of images<sup>2</sup>.

But the ascetic ideal of a religion based only on words was hard, perhaps impossible, to maintain in practice. It is significant that some of the most important innovative currents in the history of “Western esotericism” since the 16th century emerged precisely from Protestant foundations: notably

<sup>1</sup> See in this regard *Peter J. Bräunlein*, ‘Bildakte. Religionswissenschaft im Dialog mit einer neuen Bildwissenschaft’ in: Luchesi, B.; von Stuckrad K. (eds). *Religion im kulturellen Diskurs: Festschrift für Hans G. Kippenberg zu seinem 65 Geburtstag*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004. On iconoclasm, see e.g. *Alain Besançon*, ‘The Forbidden Image’. The University of Chicago press, 2000; *Phyllis Mack Crew*, ‘Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544–1569’. Cambridge University Press, 2008; *Solange Deyon & Alain Lottin A.* ‘Les casseurs de l’été 1566 L’iconoclisme dans le Nord’. Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2013; *Joseph Leo Koerner* ‘The Reformation of the Image’. The University of Chicago press, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See Claire Fanger’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation *Signs of Power and the Power of Signs* (chapter “Inventing the Grand Dichotomy: St Augustine, Signs and Superstition”) for a brilliant discussion of Augustine’s ideas about miraculous versus demonic signs, with reference to his *De doctrina Christiana*. Augustine’s discussion is based upon the conventional nature of signs, whose only meaningful use is ‘the transfer of a *motus animi*, a concept, from one mind to another’. Demons, however, are not interested in clarity but in entrapment of human beings; and therefore demonic signs are necessarily ambiguous and violate the rational transfer of conceptual meanings: ‘the transfer of meaning...must some how be *incomplete* in demonic language: the intended meaning never reaches the human recipient whole, for if it did, it would not “lead” anywhere. The communication is always broken off before it is fully understood, and hence the hearer is made curious, tempted to further communication (aiming to “complete” the transfer of thought), thus proceeding farther and farther into the trap’. The demons play on human curiosity: ‘The kind of appetite that leads to entrapment by demonic signifiers is *curiositas*, the perverse and insatiable...desire to know things for their own sake. One might even say that the “appetite” designated by the term *curiositas* is an appetite for signs themselves, rather than for meaning as it is embodied in signs used appropriately’. Such misuse of signs is a perversion of divine worship itself, and hence directly related to idolatry: ‘the diviner, the curious or superstitious person, looks to the sign as thing rather than to the thing the sign stands for, just as idolaters look to the statue of a god, to creature rather than Creator’. Augustine points out that the rejection of idols should be extended to ‘all imaginary signs, which lead to worship of idols, or worship of creation and its parts in place of God’ (*De doctrina* II, 23.36). Idolatry, then, becomes a subcategory of all practices involving “imaginary signs”, i.e. ‘signs of imaginary things, conducive to (or the product of) fantastic imaginings, rather than reason or good sense’.

the Rosicrucian Manifestoes and the Christian Theosophical current linked to the work of Jacob Boehme both sprouted from Lutheran foundations and demonstrate that myth, symbolism and the religious imagination could flourish in a Protestant context. But it is no less true that precisely these currents, together with their Hermetic/Neoplatonic and Paracelsian origins, came to be branded as *Schwärmerei* (“enthusiasm”) and heresy by mostly Protestant polemicists, and finally ended up enriching the space of the pagan-gnostic-magical “other” with new concepts, myths and images.

Ehregott Daniel Colberg’s polemic against *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches* [sic] *Christenthum* (1690–1691) plays an important role here, as arguably the first book to present what we now refer to as Western esotericism as a specific domain in its own right. Colberg saw the connections that historians of Western esotericism still emphasize today: a specific type of “Platonic-Hermetic Christianity” had come into existence since the 15th century, and had further developed into currents such as Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism and Boehmian theosophy. Colberg sought to warn his readers against this danger, but only a few years later Gottfried Arnold’s famous *Impartial History of Churches and Heresies* took the side of the heretics in what amounted to a counter-polemics against orthodoxy<sup>1</sup>. And in 1703 he published Abraham von Franckenberg’s *Theophrastia Valentiniana* (orig. 1629, but not printed before): the first known apology of gnosticism<sup>2</sup>. Although the terminology used to refer to the “other” has always remained quite fluid and hence confusing, “hermetic” eventually emerged as a particularly convenient term since it could be connected to so many aspects of the field: the hermetic writings themselves, the traditional “hermetic art” of alchemy, and hence all types of *Naturphilosophie* somehow associated with Paracelsianism. In sum, as I concluded elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Colberg’s and Arnold’s importance in this regard seems to have been first noted by *Antoine Faivre A. & Karen-Claire Voss*, ‘Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions’ in: *International Review of the History of Religions*. Vol. 42, Nº 1: Amsterdam: Brill, 1995, and cf. the longer discussion in: *Antoine Faivre*, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*. State University of New York Press, 2000. P. 11. More recently it was discussed at length in *Monika Neugebauer-Wölk*, M. *Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800 Prolegomena zu einer Bestimmung ihrer Differenz*. in: *Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 3, 2003. S. 127–165. See also *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*, ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’. Op. cit. P. 490. Neugebauer-Wölk’s very interesting discussion and criticism of the approach outlined in my ‘Dreams of Theology’, and its implications for how we look at the relation between Western esotericism and Christianity, require a much more detailed response than would be possible here. As for Protestant anti-esoteric (or more specifically, anti-theosophical) discourse more generally, see in particular *Antoine Faivre*, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, Op. cit. 16–19. Faivre, seems to have been the first to call attention to the importance of Protestant polemics in the history of Christian theosophy and of Western esotericism more generally.

<sup>2</sup> See *Carlos Gilly*, ‘Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis von Paracelsus bis auf die Schüler Jacob Böhm’, in: *Broek R., Cis Heertum C. (Hrsg.). Poemandres to Jacob Böhme. Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*. Amsterdam: Pelikaan 2000 P. 416–422.



In a manner very similar to what happened in Late Antiquity, with the reification of “Gnosticism” as a distinct heretical system opposed to Christianity, the concept of a distinct system or tradition of “Hermeticism” (comprising... the entire mixture of hermetic literature, neoplatonic speculation, kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, and magic outlined above) seems to have emerged in the 17th century and to have been taken up especially in Protestant contexts. It is mainly against this background that the proponents of the Enlightenment came to present it as the epitome of unreason and superstition<sup>1</sup>.

This new concept of “hermeticism”—in fact an umbrella term that comprises the entire “referential corpus” central to what modern scholars understand by modern “Western esotericism”—therefore emerged as a Protestant polemical concept. It is essentially a late 17th/18th-century development of the Grand Polemical Narrative whose earlier stages I have been tracing. The space originally occupied by “paganism” in the monotheistic imagination, and which later came to include “gnosticism” and “magic” in the Christian imagination, had now been further embellished by the revived and Christianized paganisms of Neoplatonism and Hermetism, various forms of Christian kabbalah, Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, and Christian Theosophy. The arts or disciplines of astrology, alchemy and *magia naturalis* had been integral parts of this compound at least since the neoplatonic revival of the later 15th century (although the sources, of course, went back through the Islamic and Christian middle ages to the Hellenistic culture of Late Antiquity); but due to their status as traditional sciences they would be highlighted for special emphasis in the final stage of the Grand Polemical Narrative, that occurred in the 18th century.

## 7. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OCCULT: THE ENLIGHTENMENT AGAINST THE IRRATIONAL

The so-called Scientific Revolution developed in a culture rife with religious, social and political conflict, and hence dominated by a complex variety of polemical discourses. It is usually impossible in this context to make any sharp separation between strictly scientific or philosophical polemics and purely religious ones, and hence we encounter the basic oppositions discussed above in the debates of science and natural philosophy no less than in those pertaining to theology. For the very same reason, however, the 16th and 17th centuries are *not* characterized by anything resembling the clear-cut opposition of “science against superstition” or “reason against unreason” so familiar from traditional historiography in the wake of the Enlightenment. It was simply not typical for scientists to oppose “science” against “religion” and reject the latter; instead, scientists usually saw themselves as taking the side of truth, which naturally included true religion, against whatever they saw as error. One clear illustration is the case of the witchcraft

<sup>1</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Introduction’, in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. Dictionary. Op. cit.



debate. In his groundbreaking monograph of 1997, Stuart Clark explains why and how the ‘reassuring story of the victory of science over magic, of reason over ignorance, and, in the sphere of demonology itself, of scepticism over belief’<sup>1</sup> has been thoroughly undermined by what we now know about the “scientific revolution”: ...men who were undoubtedly leading exponents of the new styles of natural philosophy, who championed the Royal Society, and were, some of them, fellows of it, went out of their way to insist on the reality of witchcraft and the importance of demonic activity in the natural world. On the other hand, neither of the leading critics of witchcraft beliefs who went into print in this period— John Webster and John Wagstaffe—were “new scientists” . . . Arguably the most powerful of all sceptical treatments of witchcraft was still Reginald Scot’s— reissued in 1651, 1654, and 1665 but originally published in 1584, and steeped in theological, rather than natural scientific orthodoxies<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, the traditional type of religious polemics that saw magic as based upon demonic activity remained in full force; and progressive scientists tended to continue believing in demons rather than rejecting them as figments of the superstitious imagination (as they were supposed to have done according to later historians). Likewise, in lieu of many other examples, it may suffice here to mention the famous cases (which can easily be expanded) of the practicing astrologer Kepler, or the alchemical activities of Newton and Boyle—all of them devout Christians—, to make the by now uncontroversial point that the so-called “occult sciences” were integral parts of the history of the scientific revolution. Obviously this does not mean that subjects like magic, alchemy or astrology were never targets of attack from scientific perspectives that we now recognize as “progressive” (see e.g. the well-known case of Robert Fludd, attacked by Mersenne, Gassendi and Kepler). The point is, rather, that defenders and opponents could be found on both sides of the divide (or rather, the grey area or no man’s land) that divided the new science from traditional approaches in natural philosophy. Even leaving aside other considerations<sup>3</sup>, this in itself is sufficient to demonstrate that a rejection of the “occult sciences” cannot reasonably be construed as representative of the scientific revolution as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Clark, ‘Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe’. Oxford University Press, 1999 P. 296

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here of the role played by the concept of “*qualitates occultae*”, on which see *Keith Hutchinson* ‘What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?’ in: *Isis*. University of Chicago Press. Vol. 73, No. 2, 1982 P. 233–253; *Ron Millen*, ‘The Manifestation of Occult Qualities in the scientific revolution’ in: *Osler M.J., Farber P.L., eds. In: Religion Science and Worldview: Essays in Honor of R.S. Wtstfall*. Cambridge, 1985 P. 185–216; *Wouter J. Hanegraaff*. ‘Occult / Occultism’ in: *Hanegraaff W.J. et al. Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Op. cit. ‘What Happened to Occult Qualities’, *Millen*, ‘The Manifestion of Occult Qualities’, and *Hanegraaff*, ‘Occult / Occultism’.

Of course that revolution eventually led to the emergence of what we now recognize as “genuine science”, and against that background 18th-century Enlightenment discourse—or rather, the simplified versions of that discourse which eventually, during the 19th century, came to be perceived as such<sup>1</sup>—did polemically oppose reason against irrationality and science against superstition or “the occult”. In doing so, it could fall back on the entire existing reservoir of excluded “others” and their associated stereotypes, inherited by Enlightenment ideologues and their intellectual heirs from monotheistic and Christian polemical discourse, but now rejected for new and different reasons. From a perspective that emphasized the progress of reason over the superstitions of the past, the original “pagan” other was seen as representing a “primitive”<sup>257</sup> stage of human consciousness dominated by idolatrous image-worship. Referred to as “fetishism” since Charles de Brosse (1760), idolatry was routinely associated with “magic”, and both were seen as based upon “wrong thinking”. “Fetishism” was intellectually inferior because it relied on a failure to distinguish between a material image and the concept symbolized by it; and “magic” (frequently used as a synonym for “occult philosophy” or “occult science”) relied on the equally confused belief that occult “correspondences” merely imagined in the human mind reflected real connections in the material world<sup>5</sup>. The former type of approach clearly reflects traditional Christian perceptions of paganism and magic as “wrong religion”, whereas the latter reflects perceptions of *magia naturalis* and all other “occult” disciplines as “wrong science”; and in both cases, the implicit “intellectualist” bias which takes it for granted that religious behaviour is rooted in intellectual processes is clearly a legacy of the Protestant principle discussed earlier. It goes without saying, furthermore, that the traditional association of all these domains with demonic activity strongly amplified their perception as primitive and backward, based upon the fears and delusions that had dominated human consciousness for so long and that were now finally being driven away – or so it was hoped – by the light of reason.

<sup>1</sup> It has become very clear in recent decades that the idealized picture of “Enlightenment discourse” as codified in historiography since the 19th century does not match – once again, for the same story repeats itself over and over again—its actual complexity. See in this regard e.g. *Christopher McIntosh*, ‘The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment’. State University of New York Press; Reprint edition, 2012 *Monika Neugebauer-Wölk*, *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption - Integration - Konfrontation*. Berlin, Max Niemeyer Verlag; Auflage: 1, 2009; and various contributions in: *Antike Weisheit und Kulturelle Praxis: Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Trepp A.-Ch. & Lehmann H. (hg). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Auflage: 1, 2002

<sup>2</sup> The negative connotations of that word were not yet obvious in the 18th century; see e.g. Court deGébelin’s 9-volume *Le monde primitif* (1773–1782).

<sup>3</sup> For these approaches, see discussion in *Wouter J. Hanegraaff* ‘The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic: The Occult Philosophy in Tylor and Frazer’ in: *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, ed. Molendijk A.L., Pels P. Leiden: Brill, 1998 P. 253–275.

In sum: the space in the collective imagination occupied by the “other” of monotheism and official Christianity, which had grown and developed through the various stages outlined above, had now finally been transformed into the space containing *Das Andere der Vernunft*<sup>1</sup>. As such, it has exerted an incalculable influence over the academic study of religion and of culture in general during the 19th and through most of the 20th century. The Enlightenment defined its own identity by means of a polemical discourse that presented itself as entirely rational, while excluding all forms of “superstition” as wholly irrational and hence misguided<sup>2</sup>. And this superstition included much more than the dogmas of the church: the entire “hermetic” compound that had come to be perceived as a quasi-autonomous “current” or “movement” by Protestant polemicists around the end of the 17th century was readily available for assuming the role of the “other” of reason. An attitude of ridicule was usually most effective as a polemical strategy, but as the Enlightenment discourse developed through the 19th and especially the 20th centuries, it has often emphasized the aspects of immorality and especially of “danger” as well. This is particularly clear in the case of the various kinds of modernist discourse that perceive phenomena such as fascism and National Socialism as a return of the “gnostic” enemy and as the fatal result of a *Zerstörung der Vernunft*<sup>3</sup> vaguely but persistently associated with “the occult” in general<sup>4</sup>.

As an epilogue to the above, it should be noted that the reification mainly by Protestant and Enlightenment authors of “Hermeticism” as a coherent counterculture of superstition and unreason, followed by its exclusion from acceptable discourse, forced its sympathizers to adopt similar strategies. From the 18th century on and throughout the 19th, as a by-product of secularization and the disenchantment of the world, one sees them engaged in attempts at construing their own identity by means of the “invention of tradition”: essentially adopting the Protestant and Enlightenment category of the rejected other, they sought to defend it as based upon a superior worldview with ancient roots, and opposed to religious dogmatism and

<sup>1</sup> See Gernot Böhme & Hartmut Böhme ‘Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants (suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft)’. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag; Auflage, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> A question that cannot be developed in more detail here is in how far Enlightenment perceptions of “religion” as such were in fact determined by it being associated primarily with Roman Catholicism rather than Protestantism, and of the former with paganism and magic (viz. worship of images, emphasis on ritual practice rather than doctrine).

<sup>3</sup> *Philosophen Georg Lukács*, ‘Die Zerstörung der Vernunft’. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to gnosticism, a very clear example is the political philosopher Eric Voegelin (see section on him in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction’. Op. cit. 29–36). For occultism in general, see in particular Louis Pauwels et Jacques Bergier *Le Matin des Magiciens*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960; and cf. the very useful appendix “The Modern Mythology of Nazi Occultism” to Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, ‘The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazilideology’. New York: NYU Press; Reprint edition, 1993.

narrow-minded rationalism. This process is part of a new kind of polemical discourse, in which self-styled “esotericists”, “occultists”, “magicians”, and eventually “pagans” as well, self-consciously define themselves in opposition to religious and scientific orthodoxies. The rhetorics and strategies of exclusion at work here would merit a separate analysis, but fall beyond the limits I have set myself in the present article<sup>1</sup>.

## IMPLICATIONS

I have argued that the perception of “Western Esotericism” as a domain of research in its own right is the historical outcome of a polemical discourse that ultimately goes all the way back to the origins of monotheism, and in fact consists of long series of successive simplifications. It is by the end of the 17th century in a Protestant context that this field was first conceptualized in a manner roughly equivalent to modern scholarly understandings, and its perception as a domain different not only from mainstream religion but also from normative science and philosophy is rooted in Enlightenment discourse. This account clearly confirms the nature of “Western Esotericism” as a theoretical construct instead of a natural term, and is incompatible with common religionist ideas according to which there exists something “essentially” esoteric. Nothing “is” esoteric unless it is construed as such by somebody for some reason.

I believe it would be too simple to attribute the traditional resistance of academics against the study of Western esotericism merely to the fact that they reject its perspectives from their own “Enlightenment” worldview, or even to the feeling that by taking such a field seriously one gives it some legitimacy. Both certainly play a role, but I would suggest that on a deeper level, the fact that—until recently—the study of Western esotericism was almost completely excluded from academic research finds its explanation in the very nature of polemics as such. The process of simplification that is basic to any polemical discourse requires that access to detailed factual information be restricted as much as possible. We know this from the role played by secrecy, dissimulation and propaganda in actual warfare<sup>2</sup> (whence the truism that “the first casualty in any war is truth”), and likewise, with respect to Western esotericism detailed factual information is simply not in the interest of the dominant party. I hasten to add that I do not mean this in any conspirational

<sup>1</sup> For short discussions at the example of “magic”, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Magic V’ in:

Hanegraaff W.J. et al. *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Op. cit. and Wouter J. Hanegraaff ‘How magic survived the disenchantment of the world’ in *Journal Religion*. Vol. 33, 2003.

Very interesting in this regard is the tension between “Abwehr” (rejection) and “Verlangen” (desire) analyzed by von Stuckrad at the example of (neo)shamanism; see esp. von Stuckrad, *Schamanismus und Esoterik*, 273–279.

<sup>2</sup> For instructive examples, see again Hugh Urban ‘The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration’. Op. cit.

sense<sup>1</sup>; what I have in mind is the simple fact that in order for any polemical rhetoric to be effective, things should be kept simple and too much information about the “other” will only create confusion. In that regard, the academic study of Western esotericism is clearly the natural enemy of the Grand Polemical Narrative—not because it chooses the “enemy’s side”, but because as an academic discipline it is committed to the expansion of knowledge from a perspective of ideological neutrality. Both of these principles—the pursuit of knowledge and a neutral approach—work against rhetorical simplicity and in favour of complexity. The deep irony is that precisely the eminently academic enterprise of expanding our knowledge of Western religion and culture by means of critical and unbiased research, if applied consistently, is bound to eventually expose reigning polemical narratives as mere simplifying constructs, and hence threaten the safety and stability of conventional academic identities that are built on them. Resistance against such deconstruction is psychologically understandable, but is nevertheless in direct conflict with *the* methodological principle basic to the academic enterprise as it developed in the wake of the Enlightenment (and which, in my opinion, must be preserved at all costs): the “practice of criticism”, whose only commitment is to truth and which therefore cannot afford to impose restrictions on itself out of respect for any tradition or authority<sup>2</sup>.

From the above it should be clear that, in my opinion, the importance of the study of Western esotericism goes far beyond a mere “academic interest” in some historical currents and ideas that happen to have been neglected by earlier generations. On the contrary, this domain of research should be recognized as centrally important to historians of religion and culture because it is only by virtue of excluding its basic components—as imagined in the polemical imagination—from the realm of the acceptable that Western culture as such has been able to define its very identity. If I am correct in arguing that the most essential components of that identity are at bottom polemical concepts, it follows that we cannot understand them in isolation, as if they exist in and for themselves. Instead, we need to understand the dynamics of the underlying discourse that created them; and this, in turn, requires us to try and step *outside* the latter and analyze it from a neutral point of view.

What does this entail? The very attempt (or even just the idea) of making such a step is bound to have disturbing and disorienting effects, because it commits us to a radical empiricism with profoundly relativistic implications. If we perform the “thought experiment” of trying to imagine what Western

<sup>1</sup> See the flourishing genre of occult fiction and quasi-fiction based upon the concept that the establishment is “hiding the truth” in order to preserve its power; the most famous recent example is, of course, Dan Brown’s mega-bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, based upon the mystifications of *Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1982, and related literature.

<sup>2</sup> In this respect I adopt the approach of *Peter Gay*, ‘The Enlightenment: An Interpretation’: London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970. Ch. 3: ‘The Climate of Criticism’.

history might look like if perceived from outside its own foundational discourse, we find that we have lost all traditional criteria by means of which we routinely privilege certain aspects of Western culture or religion as relatively “important”, “central”, “serious”, or “profound”, while marginalizing others as less important, eccentric, unserious, superficial and so on. My contention is that we instinctively tend to adhere to the Grand Polemical Narrative not only because we are so used to it (so that we seldom even perceive its presence) but also because we feel we would be lost without it: the narrative protects us from perceiving the full complexity of our own culture. Simplicity is psychologically reassuring, while complexity is hard to deal with; and the disappearance of traditional lines of demarcations will leave us in a state of disorientation. All this is entirely correct: if we can manage to step outside the Grand Polemical Narrative, nothing will look the same, the ground will seem to vanish under our feet, and the general impression will be that of utter chaos. The only solution in any such situation is not to panic but to simply start looking carefully at what is there, and see what patterns emerge<sup>1</sup>.

It would of course be stupid to even suggest that, in pursuing such an approach, we should forget all the accomplishments of past research and start “from scratch”. To take the most obvious example: the Grand Polemical Narrative is itself a major pattern, whose very presence is bound to emerge as extremely relevant to understanding the dynamics of Western culture. The difference is that it is now reduced to its proper status as an object for scholarly investigation, rather than being allowed to function as the latter’s foundation and starting point. This in itself makes it possible for other patterns, different from and unrelated to those that follow from the Grand Polemical Narrative, to come into view as well. In the context of a radical new historiography as suggested here, “Western esotericism” will figure quite simply

<sup>1</sup> I am aware that the approach advocated here cannot fail to evoke associations with the basic process of psychotherapy. Since it seems to me that such parallels indeed make sense, I might as well make them explicit. As human individuals [cf. as a culture] we define our adult identity by rejecting parts of ourselves and repressing them into the realm of the subconscious [cf. the realm of the excluded “other”]. This “shadow” becomes the reservoir of who, what and how we do not want to be; but it is in fact a significant part of who, what and how we actually are. Rather than facing and confronting the parts of ourselves [cf. of our culture] that we do not want to own, we tend to project them outside ourselves [cf. “pagans”, “heretics”, “witches” and so on]. Any successful therapeutic process, in contrast, involves a confrontation with the contents of our subconscious and an effort to integrate them as parts of our own identity. Since such a process requires a breaking down of the barriers we have created to protect our identity and keep it stable, we naturally tend to resist it (out of a fear of chaos, disorientation, and madness). But if we manage to overcome such resistance, we can gain a more complex and multi-leveled understanding of ourselves and are able to redefine our identity accordingly [cf. the radical new and far more complex picture of “Western culture” that must result if its contents are no longer subdivided along the lines of the Grand Polemical Narrative]. I freely admit that, in my opinion, such a “psychotherapy” of academic research would be healthy and desirable.

as what it is: an imaginary entity produced and reified by the foundational polemical discourse of Western culture. The gradual emergence and development of that entity in the collective imagination, and the various historical manifestations that have been subsumed under it, can then be studied in detail, ideally without distortion by quasi-essentialist assumptions and hence without artificial boundaries separating “the esoteric” from the “non-esoteric”. It is true that, given the existing political, social and psychological realities, such an approach may well remain a utopian ideal, at least in its fully developed form; but the study of “Western esotericism” and of Western religion and culture generally will greatly profit if we at least start traveling in its general direction.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

## RELIGION AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION: ESOTERIC TRADITION AS POETIC INVENTION<sup>1</sup>

The soul never thinks without an image.  
(Aristotle, *De Anima* III.7. 431 a 16)

As recently argued by Lucia Traut and Annette Wilke, the concept of imagination has been strangely neglected in the modern study of religion and should urgently be restored to the status of a crucial ‘key term’ in our discipline<sup>2</sup>. They rightly point out that although scholars of religion are using the term quite frequently, even in the very titles of monographs<sup>3</sup>, it tends to be treated rather vaguely and without much theoretical reflection<sup>4</sup>. At present, there

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> *Traut Lucia; Wilke Annette*, ‘Einleitung’ in: *Religion – Imagination – Ästhetik: Vorstellungs- und Sinneswelten in Religion und Kultur*, ed. Lucia Traut, Annette Wilke: Universität Leipzig, 2015. P. 19–60).

<sup>3</sup> Probably the best-known case is Jonathan Z. Smith’s *Imagining Religion* (*Jonathan Z. Smith*, ‘Imagining Religion’: From Babylon to Jonestown. Chicago, 1982. Stausberg, Michael (ed.). *Contemporary Theories of Religion: A Critical Companion*. London, 2009). Other examples mentioned by Traut and Wilke are Ronald Inden’s *Imagining India*, the notion of ‘imagined homelands’ in diaspora studies, and Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (*Traut Lucia; Wilke Annette*. Op. cit. P. 17–73). A quick search on Amazon for ‘imagination’ / ‘imagining’ and ‘religion’ is sufficient to demonstrate how often the terminology is being used in the titles of scholarly books on religion.

<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, exceptions. See e.g. *Herdt Gilbert*; *Stephe Michele*, ‘The Religious Imagination in New Guinea’. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1989; *Shulman David*, ‘More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India’. Cambridge: MA, 2012; *Pezzoli-Olgiati Daria* (ed.) *Religion in Cultural Imaginary: Explorations in Visual and Material Practices*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015; *Wolfson Elliot R.*, ‘Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism’. Princeton, 1994; *Id.* *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream: Oneriopoiesis and the Prism of Imagination*. New York: Zone Books, The MIT Press, 2011; *Id.* *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania*. New York: Zone Books, The MIT Press, 2014 (cf. note 7).



is no general theoretical debate going on about the imagination, its nature, its function, or its relevance to the historical, social, discursive, or cognitive dimensions of religion. There is no entry on 'imagination' in standard reference works such as Mark C. Taylor's *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998) or Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon's *Guide to the Study of Religion* (2000); it is not a topic of discussion in Peter Antes, Armin Geertz and Randi Warne's *New Approaches to the Study of Religion* (2005); nor does it play a role of any significance in Michael Stausberg's more recent overview *Contemporary Theories of Religion* (2009), and it is absent from the list of entries for Stausberg and Steven Engler's *Oxford Handbook for the Study of Religion* (2016). Clearly, modern scholars of religion still see the imagination pretty much as a non-issue.

### 1. THE IMAGINATION BETWEEN CARETAKERS AND CRITICS

I will be arguing in this article that the imagination should be promoted to the status of a key topic in the study of religion. To illustrate its importance, let us first take a quick look at the basic theoretical and methodological opposition between 'religionist' scholars and their critics. By religionists I mean scholars of religion in the tradition of Mircea Eliade and other intellectuals historically affiliated to the *Eranos* circle<sup>1</sup>; by their critics I mean modern scholars associated with organizations such as the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR), or journals such as *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*. Their basic approaches are ultimately incompatible, and both are highly influential in the study of religion as well as popular understandings of religions, especially in the United States. As is well known, religionists (the chief academic 'caretakers' of religion according to the well-known terminology of McCutcheon 2011) tend to think in terms of mythical archetypes, universal symbols, or a *mundus imaginalis*, and their entire conceptual apparatus relies on their highly positive understanding of the imagination as a faculty of knowledge that enables us to apprehend profound spiritual realities beyond the reach of mere rationality or normal sense experience. In short, they assume that the religious imagination is noetic, as it somehow puts us in touch with ultimate or deeper levels of reality. In sharp contrast, modern scholars in the 'critical' tradition typically argue, or assume implicitly, that gods, angels, demons, or any other spiritual entities are obviously not real but exist only in the human imagination. For them, the task of the scholar consists in piercing through the veil of imaginative fantasies and illusions to get at the more fundamental social, psychological, discursive, or political realities that actually explain religion. In short, they believe that the religious imagination is not noetic but deceptive: it prevents us from perceiving reality.

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture'. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

While scholars in the critical tradition clearly disagree with religionists about how the imagination should be assessed and valued in the context of religion, one would therefore expect them at least to agree about its importance. After all, if the imagination does such a good job at confusing religious believers about the true nature of reality and making them believe in things that do not exist, then should we not try to analyze that phenomenon in depth? As already noted, however, that expectation is not borne out in practice. This is a remarkable fact, for it suggests that although ‘critical’ scholars see themselves as standing in a rationalist and secularist tradition, they might not be aware of the central role that the imagination played in the philosophical project of the Enlightenment, from Thomas Hobbes and David Hume to Immanuel Kant. As formulated by Mary Warnock in her classic analysis of this debate, Kant had to draw the conclusion that

Without imagination, we could never apply concepts to sense experience. Whereas a wholly sensory life would be without any regularity or organization, a purely intellectual life would be without any real content. And this amounts to saying that with either the senses or the intellect we could not experience the world as we do. The two elements are not automatically joined to each other in their functions. They need a further element to join them. The joining element is the imagination ... (Warnock 1976, 30)<sup>1</sup>.

The intellectual foundations for this conclusion can be found already in Hobbes and Hume. It was therefore the Enlightenment (and not Romanticism, as is often assumed<sup>2</sup>) that discovered the imagination as a faculty of the mind that is crucial to our very capacity of apprehending reality and bringing order to the chaos of sense impressions<sup>3</sup>. To the best of my knowledge, these conclusions have never been refuted<sup>4</sup>. Rather, what happened is that they were expanded, reinterpreted, and taken into entirely new directions by Romantic thinkers such as Schelling, Wordsworth and especially Coleridge, who famously distinguished between the ‘primary imagination’ through which all of us perceive the world around us and the ‘secondary imagination’ that is central to artistic creativity and genius<sup>5</sup>. As a result of this

<sup>1</sup> Warnock Mary. ‘Imagination’. Berkeley, 1976. P. 30. This is not to deny that Kant saw the role of the imagination in human cognition as a deeply troubling fact. On his ambivalent attempts to minimize and obscure its importance between the first and second edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, and the significant differences between how he discussed the imagination in his theoretical and his empirical writings, see *Böhme Hartmut*; *Böhme Gernot*, ‘Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants’. Frankfurt A.M., 1983. P. 231–250; *Kneller Jane*, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Ch. 1 & 5; and cf. *Wolfson Elliot R.*, 2014 Op. cit. 1–2, n. 3 with further literature.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Engell James*. ‘The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism’. Cambridge, MA, 1981. P. 3–10.

<sup>3</sup> *Engell James*. Op. cit, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. *Clark Andy*. ‘Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science’. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36. Cambridge University Press, 2013. 197–199.

<sup>5</sup> *Warnock Mary*. ‘Imagination’. Op. cit, 1976. P. 66–130; *Warnock Mary*, *Imagination and Time*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994. P. 22–44.

development, we have come to assume, quite incorrectly, that imagination stands in contrast with rationality just as Romanticism stands in contrast with the Enlightenment. I would argue, rather, that if religionists take inspiration from Romantic speculation about the secondary imagination and its quasi-divine creative powers<sup>1</sup>, scholars in the critical tradition should get more familiar at least with the Enlightenment argument concerning the primary imagination and its central role in human cognition.

What we can learn from Hume and Kant is that the imagination is the primary reality of our mental lives as thinking animals. It is only by means of our imaginative faculty that we are able to entertain 'concepts' and 'ideas' at all. Precisely how the imagination accomplishes such miracles was a mystery to Kant, and he despaired about ever resolving it: he called it 'an art concealed in the depth of the human soul whose real modes of activity Nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze'<sup>2</sup>. This might be a defeatist position, at least from contemporary perspectives, for it would seem that cognitive scientists are presently rediscovering the fundamentals that were first uncovered by Hobbes, Hume, and Kant. In their groundbreaking work on 'conceptual blending,' Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner observe that cognitive studies have long been led astray by the insistence of twentieth century analytical philosophers that figurative thought should be excluded from 'core meaning.' This made them blind to the fact that, in fact, 'imaginative operations of meaning construction... work at light- ning speed, below the horizon of consciousness'<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps partly for chauvinistic reasons, Coleridge's obscure musings on the imagination have received much attention particularly from British scholars. I would agree with Mary Warnock that although the Romantic theory of imagination is certainly of great cultural and historical importance, from a more technical and philosophical point of view it is far inferior to the British empiricist and Kantian tradition. As Warnock notes, with a fine point of irony, 'Instead of arguments, we are presented with repeated statements, obscure, dark and perhaps profound. The reason for this change, this tremendous deterioration in the rational climate, is that the sharp distinction which Kant had drawn between what could and could not be known, between legitimate thought, and impossible, empty metaphysical speculation, had been done away with' (*Warnock Mary*, 'Imagination'. Op. cit. 1976. P. 63–64). For a fascinating discussion of how Coleridge's understanding of the imagination seeks to overcome methodological agnosticism in order to create the foundation for a new kind of 'Romantic Religion,' exemplified for instance in the sophisticated esoteric philosophy of Owen Barfield, see: *Reilly Robert J.* *Romantic Religion: A Study of Owen Barfield*, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books 2006). Incidentally, Barfield's crucial influence on J.R.R. Tolkien, whose famous theory of faerie (*Tolkien John Ronald Reuel*. 'On Faery-Stories' in: *The Tolkien Reader*. New York. 1966. P. 33–99) is based upon the same foundations, makes this lineage highly relevant to Markus Altena Davidsen's research on fiction-based religion in the "Spiritual Tolkien Milieu" (*Davidsen Markus A.* 'The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-Based Religion. Diss. Leiden University', 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Kant Immanuel*. 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft' (2. Auflage 1787) in: *Kants Werke*. Bd. III. Berlin, 1968. P. 180–181. *Warnock Mary*. 'Imagination'. Op. cit, 1976. P. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Fauconnier Gilles; Turner Mark*. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York, 2002. P. 15.

Their conclusion is radical, and I would like to highlight it for special emphasis:

The next step in the study of mind is the scientific study of the nature and mechanisms of the imagination<sup>1</sup>.

If Fauconnier and Turner are correct, then it is clearly time for us as scholars of religion to get serious about establishing the imagination as a new key term in our discipline as well<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION AS AN OBJECT OF RESEARCH

The imagination is obviously a very large topic, with many potential applications in the study of religion and other cultural domains<sup>3</sup>. In this article I will be exploring just one possible avenue: that of the historical imagination as an object of research (and not, therefore, as a factor in historical research, important and interesting though that topic certainly is)<sup>4</sup>. My concern will be simply with how religious actors imagine history – a question that, as will be seen, is inseparable from the question of how they find meaning in it. Building upon the argumentative tradition of Hume and Kant, Mary Warnock has explained why it is that ‘without imagination we could have no idea of past, present and future’<sup>5</sup>: that is to say, no idea of continuity in time. We give meaning to this continuity by turning the succession of events into a story: a narrative with a plot. However, this very operation is an extremely selective simplification that inevitably does violence to the infinite complexity of historical events. Furthermore, whereas any story has a beginning, middle, and end, history is different in that we all find ourselves in the middle of it and do not know its end<sup>6</sup>. My concern in this contribution is therefore not

<sup>1</sup> *Fauconnier Gilles; Turner Mark*. *The Way We Think...* Op. cit. P. 8.

<sup>2</sup> For a pioneering application of conceptual blending to the Nag Hammadi corpus, see *Lundhaug Hugo*, ‘Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology’ in: *the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul*. Leiden, 2010; and cf. *Davidson Markus A.*, ‘The Religious Affordance of Fiction: A Semiotic Approach’, in: *Religion* 46.4, 2016) (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> *Brann Eva T.* ‘The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance’, in: *Utopian Studies*. Vol. 7, No. 2. 1996. P. 222–224.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘historical imagination’ has been on the agenda of historical method and philosophy of history at least since Hayden White’s classic *Metahistory* (*White Hayden*, ‘Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th-Century Europe’. Orig, 1973, Baltimore, 2014), and arguably already since R.G. Collingwood’s work after World War II. The relation between fictionality and historicity has been an object of vigorous debate in specialized journals and popular media; and even though these heated discussions may ‘have given off more smoke than light’ (as remarked by A. Rigney. See: *Rigney Ann*, ‘Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism’. NY: Ithaca, 2001. P. 5), at least the importance of the question is generally understood by historians.

<sup>5</sup> *Warnock Mary*. ‘Imagination and Time’. Op. cit, 1994. P. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*. P. 108.

with history as such, but with religious actors who turn history into a story, or impose a story upon history.

These stories are products of the historical imagination and, more specifically, of historical memory. Memory is generally considered a sub-class of the imagination, as it allows us to picture what is no longer the case or what we are no longer experiencing. Just as our individual sense of identity depends upon how we remember our life (if we lose our memory, we literally no longer know who we are), likewise our sense of collective identity depends upon how we remember our common history. However, our memory is not a photographic plate. Like all other forms of imagination, it is an active faculty that continually recreates the past in the very process of preserving it. Just as we perceive the world 'out there' only through the medium of our imagination, we perceive history 'back then' only through the medium of our individual and collective memory. In both situations, the medium causes us to see things that exhibit highly variable degrees of accurate correspondence to the realities 'out there' or 'back then'.

This leads me to Jan Assmann's concept of *Gedächtnisgeschichte*, or *mne-mohistory*<sup>1</sup>. To explain my understanding of it – which is somewhat different from Assmann's own<sup>2</sup> – let me begin with a concrete example. The sixteenth-century humanist Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535/36) was remembered for many generations as a black magician in league with the devil, and among other things, this caused him to become a model for the figure of Faust in Goethe's famous tragedy. In fact, however, specialists know that Agrippa was not only a philosophical skeptic but also a very pious Christian fideist who saw unquestioning faith in Jesus Christ as the only reliable foundation for true knowledge and salvation<sup>3</sup> (van der Poel 1997). At first sight, we might be tempted to think of these two conflicting pictures as 'the Agrippa of the imagination' versus 'the Agrippa of history,' but this would be correct only in a very rough and imprecise sense. It is more accurate to say that while any picture of Agrippa exists only in our historical imagination, Agrippa the black magician displays a relatively high degree of non-factuality, whereas Agrippa the skeptic and Christian fideist displays a relatively high degree of factuality. Factuality and non-factuality may then be seen as theoretical polarities between which a narrative can be located:

<sup>1</sup> Assmann Jan. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. Munich: C.H. Beck; Auflage, 1992; *Id.* *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA, 1997. P. 6-22; *Id.* *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien*. Munich: C.H. Beck; Auflage, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Western Esotericism', in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*. Ed. Olav Hammer, Kocku von Stuckrad. Leiden, 2007. P. 112 *Id.* *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. P. 375–378.

<sup>3</sup> Poel, Marc van der. 'Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and His Declamations'. Leiden, 1997.

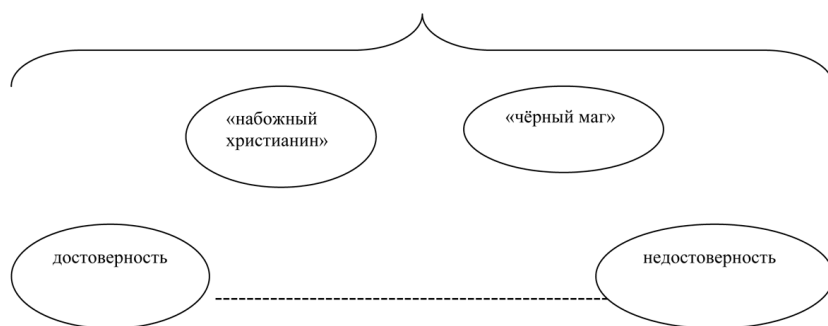


Fig. 1

The worrying fact from a historian's perspective is that the Agrippa that tends to be remembered is the relatively non-factual one, for the simple reason that he makes a good story – one that displays a relatively high degree of poeticity<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, the relatively historical Agrippa tends to be forgotten because his story displays a relatively low degree of poeticity. His memory is typically pre-served only by specialized historians writing for a limited academic audience.

This example was chosen to illustrate the concept of mnemohistory, which may be defined as 'the history of how we remember the past,' as opposed to the history of 'what actually happened in the past.' The relevance of this distinction lies in the fact that it is ultimately grounded in the inherent paradoxality of the imagination – a deeply puzzling feature that goes to the heart of what the imagination is all about and may be the chief reason why philosophers tend to find it so problematic<sup>2</sup>. The imagination never shows us the world 'out there' or 'back then' otherwise than by creating it for us in our mind, which is just another way of saying that it only shows us things by deceiving us about them, or reveals them only by concealing them from our gaze. Now if we focus on one horn of this dilemma and emphasize the deceptive side of the historical imagination, this will inspire us to pierce through the veil of historical fantasies in order to discover (in the famous words of Leopold von Ranke) *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, how things really were. This is the post-Enlightenment

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Markus Altena Davidsen for convincing me of the need to break up my original notion of 'fictionality' into two component parts. As Davidsen pointed out to me, fictionality can mean either non-factuality or poeticity (i.e. those patterns that are needed for a 'good story'), and these should be distinguished because 'factuality draws the historical imagination towards absolute referentiality/accuracy, but poeticity does not draw it towards absolute non-referentiality/non-factuality' (Davidsen, personal communication, November 27, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> For particularly profound and complex analyses of the religious imagination and its inherent paradoxality, see the oeuvre of: Wolfson Elliott, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Op. cit. 1994 P. 204–214 et passim; Id. *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream: Oneriopoiesis and the Prism of Imagination*. Op. cit. 2011. P. 109–142 et passim; Id. *Giving Beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania*. Op. cit. 2014. P. 1–13 et passim.

project of classic historical criticism, or critical historiography, which concentrates on investigating the primary sources in meticulous detail and is bound to conclude (if we stick to our example) that Agrippa was not a black magician at all, but a philosophical skeptic and fideist Christian. Here we are dealing with the classic function of historiography as an instrument of Entmythologisierung.

I cannot emphasize enough that, in my opinion, such critical historiography is indispensable as the foundation for any serious historical research project, in the field of religion as well as anywhere else. Without it, we are building our houses on sand. But essential as it may be, it is structurally incomplete: it must be complemented by the practice of mnemohistory or, more precisely, mnemohistoriography<sup>1</sup>. Here are we dealing with the other horn of the dilemma. It is true that the imagination (like memory) is ultimately deceptive; however, it is ultimately revelatory as well, for it is only through these deceptions that we are able to apprehend reality at all! The imagination discloses the world to us in the form of creative inventions that must be studied for their own sake; and this is true for the world of realities 'out there' as well as of realities 'back then.' Perhaps most important of all, it is naive to assume that the creative products of the historical imagination simply stand over against the objective facts of history – on the contrary, they find themselves among those facts and can be studied as such. To return to our example: the multiple distortions, misunderstandings, and creative inventions about Agrippa (in short, everything – whether false or correct – that pertains to how Agrippa has been perceived) are fully part of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. One might even argue that, as far as Agrippa's historical impact is concerned, these fantasies are ultimately more relevant and important than his 'real' identity known only to a few specialists. In sum, mnemohistory focuses on Agrippa as imagined and remembered. Accordingly, a mnemohistoriographical analysis of Agrippa will describe in meticulous detail how the chain of imaginative reconstructions has developed through time. Whereas Jan Assmann seems to think of mnemohistory as an independent pursuit, I would insist that history and mnemohistory must always be practiced in dialectical interaction.

### 3. EXAMPLE 1: THE STORY OF ANCIENT WISDOM

In the rest of this article, I will focus on the role of the historical imagination in my own field of specialization, Western esotericism. My concern is with the *longue durée* of a series of historical currents, ideas, and practices from late antiquity to the present that share at least one thing in common: the simple fact that they were discredited and marginalized in scholarly research since the period of the Enlightenment and therefore ended up

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture'.  
Op. cit, 2012 P. 375–376.



in a vaguely defined no-man's land beyond the established academic disciplines. In other words, as I have tried to explain elsewhere<sup>1</sup>, the materials that we now categorize under the rubric of 'Western esotericism' can be characterized as the historical casualties of Enlightenment discourse: they represent everything (e.g. 'magic,' 'occult philosophy,' 'superstition,' 'the irrational,' or even simply 'stupidity') that the intellectual elites and the emerging academy perceived as incompatible with their own agendas of modern science and rationality and against which they therefore defined their own identity. This means that the field can be defined as the Enlightenment's polemical Other, because it stands for the sum total of discredited or rejected knowledge that Enlightenment thinkers felt they needed to discard in the interest of modern science, reason, and progress.

That agenda was expressed with particular clarity by the nowadays forgotten Enlightenment pioneer in the history of philosophy Christoph August Heumann. In his *Acta Philosophorum* (the very first professional journal devoted to history of philosophy), he wrote in 1715 that all these fake or pseudo philosophies should be dumped 'into the sea of oblivion' (*das Meer der Vergangenheit*) to be forgotten forever. Following an argumentative logic of destruction reminiscent of the recent assault by 'Islamic State' on Palmyra and other monuments of 'pagan' antiquity<sup>2</sup>, he argued that no documentary source of these 'superstitious idiocies' should be preserved in libraries and archives. Their very memory had to be erased from collective consciousness<sup>3</sup>. This comparison with the human and cultural tragedy that is currently unfolding in the Middle East is not just random but based upon a true parallel: these Enlightenment polemics were built directly upon the struggle of monotheist religions, Christianity in particular, and Protestantism even more in particular, with the late Hellenistic complex of a broadly Platonizing religion and philosophy that may conveniently be referred to here as ancient paganism and which was understood as deeply infected by idolatry<sup>4</sup>. For Protestant thinkers in particular, quite similarly to how 'Islamic State' looks at pagan remains, these traditions came from the devil and should be destroyed.

More specifically, and crucial to my argument here, the Enlightenment polemic was a secularist reformulation of the early modern Protestant attack on an extremely influential historical narrative that can be defined as Platonic

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy...' Op. cit, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'On the Death of Khaled Asaad', 2015 Creative Reading.  
URL: [www.wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.com](http://www.wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.com).

<sup>3</sup> Heumann Christoph August. Von denen Kennzeichen der falschen und unächten Philosophie, in: *Acta Philosophorum* 2. 1715 P. 179-236. See. Hanegraaff Wouter J., 'Esotericism and the Academy'... Op. cit, 2012. P. 132-133.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Idolatry', in: Rever: Revista de Estudos da Religião 5.4. 2005.  
URL: [http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv4\\_2005/Id](http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv4_2005/Id). 'The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Western Esotericism', in: *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*. Ed. Olav Hammer, Kocku von Stuckrad. Op. cit, 2007.

Orientalism<sup>1</sup>. We are dealing here with an extremely powerful historical narrative that has been operative in Western consciousness since the Patristic period and was formulated in explicit programmatic terms during the Italian Renaissance. Here it will serve as my first example of the poeticizing historical imagination and the construction of cultural memory. In what follows, I will deliberately try to present it not as an argument about historical events, but as a story (before reading on, please read this footnote)<sup>2</sup>.

Once upon a time, in very ancient days long before the birth of Christianity, the Light of true spiritual wisdom began to shine in the East. Some say it all started in Egypt, with Hermes Trismegistus; others say it began with Zoroaster in Persia; yet others say that it originated with Moses among the Hebrews. But wherever its ultimate beginning may have been, its true source was God himself, who caused the Light of wisdom to be born in the darkness of human ignorance. The Light now began to spread, carried forward through the ages by a long succession of divinely inspired teachers, until it finally reached Plato and his school in Athens. Now Plato was much more than just a rational philosopher: he was a divinely inspired teacher of wisdom. His dialogues did not present any new and original message either: they merely reformulated the ancient and universal religion of spiritual Truth and Light. Henceforth the true wisdom was carried forward by a succession of Platonic teachers and philosophers, and this tradition finally culminated in the religion of Jesus Christ. When Christianity began to conquer the world, this should have been the glorious fulfilment of the ancient divine revelation. However, something went terribly wrong. The Christian message was perverted and misunderstood. As the Church was triumphant over its opponents, Christians were progressively blinded by power and the pursuit of worldly pleasures. And so, because of their impurity, they slowly lost touch with the ancient core of all true religion. They no longer understood that the gospel was meant to be

<sup>1</sup> Walbridge John, 'The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism'. Albany, NY, 2001; Hanegraaff Wouter J., 'Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture'. Op. cit, 2012. P. 12–17. Of course, this terminology cannot fail to evoke associations in any reader's mind (or more precisely, in his/her imagination!) with Edward Said and postcolonial theory, but for our present purposes it will be useful to bracket those associations. In my opinion, Said's Orientalism should be interpreted as a limited nineteenth century subset of a much larger historical phenomenon in which Platonic Orientalism plays a very major role; but that argument would lead us far beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>2</sup> At this point we are confronted with the inherent limitations of a standard academic format. The present article is based upon a keynote lecture delivered at the Congress of the International Association for the History of Religion, Erfurt (Germany), 25 August 2015. Having asked my audience to 'sit back and enjoy the story,' I deliberately abandoned the 'neutral' tone of voice that is appropriate for an academic lecture and did my best to shift to the more dramatizing style of a storyteller (trying to take some inspiration, here and there, from Galadriel's voice at the beginning of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*). I accompanied the story with an elaborate series of Powerpoint slides, consisting only of images to the storyline. Readers of the present article are kindly invited to try and read the story in a similar manner.

the culmination and fulfilment of pagan wisdom. Instead, they began to see all pagans as their mortal enemies – practitioners of idolatry and worshipers of demons, dangerous agents of darkness who must be annihilated in God's name. The Platonic philosophers themselves, and their ancient Oriental predecessors (those who had been the first carriers of the Light) were now perceived as teachers of the dark arts instead. And so it was that the ancient wisdom declined and its true nature was forgotten. There came a time when the leaders of the Church themselves had descended to the level of common criminals, and the very institution of the Church had become an embarrassment to all true Christians. It was at this darkest moment of history, when all seemed lost, that God himself intervened, and after the long darkness of Winter, a new Spring arrived. By the mysterious workings of Divine Providence, the manuscripts of Plato and the ancient teachers of Oriental Wisdom were rediscovered and restored to the light of day. They traveled all the way to Italy, the heartland of the Church, and were translated into Latin and the vernacular languages. Just when they were most needed, due to the miracle of printing, all the sources of ancient wisdom could now be read and studied by the multitudes, more widely than could ever have been imagined at any previous period of time. And so it is that at this darkest moment of decline and forgetfulness, God reminded humanity of the true sources of Wisdom, Truth, and Light. Surely this is the beginning of a new Reformation that will purge the Church of its errors and usher in a New Age of the Spirit. Behold the Golden Times are returning!

This is the essential story that Italian humanists such as Marsilio Ficino and his many followers were telling themselves and their readers by the end of the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup>. It is crucial to my argument to be clear about the high drama and emotional appeal of which a historical narrative such as this is capable – especially if it is told not with a stance of academic distance and irony, but with the moral force and commitment of a narrator who shows his sympathy with the 'Lightbearers' and their journey through history. In discussing such narratives as scholars, we sometimes risk forgetting that we are not just dealing with a theory, a theological doctrine, or an intellectual argument about history – in short, with something that neatly fits our own preferred order of academic discourse. The narrative may contain, or refer to, all those elements; but at the most basic level we are dealing with a story that is meant to speak directly to the imagination and engage the emotions. I want to insist that this is not a trivial observation. The core narrative of Ancient Wisdom had a very strong impact on the historical imagination of mainstream intellectuals from the fifteenth to at least the eighteenth century, and after its decline in mainstream academic discourse, it has continued to do so in esoteric milieus up to the present. Its remarkable power to influence discourse can certainly not be explained just by the rational arguments or historical evidence that its defenders have tried to muster in support. First and foremost, that power resides in the fact that it is a good story that appeals to the imagination and engages the emotions. Its poeticity is crucial to understanding its appeal.

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy'... Op. cit, 2012. P. 5–53.

So what is it that makes this a good story? Or formulated in more technical language, what are the chief ‘affordances’<sup>1</sup> that make it possible, even likely, for such a historical narrative about Ancient Wisdom to be accepted by readers as plausible and persuasive? We should distinguish here between religious and historical plausibility. With reference to the example at hand, if readers find it religiously plausible this means that they are willing to assume that the spiritual Light is real and valuable, whereas if they find it historically plausible this means that they are willing to assume that events happened basically the way the story tells us they happened. While there is a logical hierarchy between the two (the Light could exist without the story but the story could not exist without the Light), it seems to me that the story’s religious plausibility does not depend on its historical plausibility (one does not assume there is a spiritual Light because things happened the way they happened), nor that its historical plausibility depends on its religious plausibility (one does not assume things to have happened the way they happened because there is a spiritual Light). Rather, it would seem that religious and historical plausibility here both depend on the power of the story as such: one is willing to assume that there is a Light, and that this is how it has been carried forward through history, simply because the story has such an appeal. So why does it? This is a question that must ultimately be answered in terms of basic human psychology; and in order to answer it, we will need an empirical psychology of the imagination, the emotions, and their mutual interaction.

As far as I can see, the story of Ancient Wisdom has two chief affordances in view of its religious and historical plausibility, and these should be at the center of such a psychological analysis:

(1) It is marked by a clear ethical dualism, formulated not just in the somewhat abstract and always debatable terminology of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ but visualized directly as a battle of Light against Darkness. If the story succeeds in engaging its listeners, they will identify with the Lightbearers who have been working so hard to keep the true knowledge alive, while feeling negative emotions (sadness, defiance, anger) about the forces of darkness and ignorance.

(2) Successive historical events are framed as a journey or adventure through history, in which the protagonists suffer all kinds of setbacks but also experience unexpected moments of salvation. If the story appeals to us, then we are glad to watch the sages carrying on the Light and handing it over to their successors from generation to generation; we are shocked, disappointed, and worried when the mission is betrayed by those who should have known better; we are appalled at the blindness of those who oppose the Light; we feel we want to come to the rescue of the Lightbearers who are so unjustly accused; we feel greatly relieved at the unexpected arrival of help from above; and we are inspired by hope that the forces of darkness and ignorance will not have the final word but the Light will prevail.

<sup>1</sup> *Davidson Markus A.* ‘The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-Based Religion’. Diss. Op. cit, 2014. P. 96–104.

#### 4. EXAMPLE 2: THE STORY OF PAGAN ERROR

Having made these suggestions, let us now move on to a second example of the poeticizing historical imagination and the construction of cultural memory. Against the Renaissance narrative of Pagan Wisdom we find an equally influential counter-narrative of Pagan Error. It originated among Roman Catholic critics of Platonism such as Giambattista Pico della Mirandola and polemicists against witchcraft such as Johann Weyer, gathered momentum with Counter-Reformation intellectuals such as Giovanni Battista Crispo, and became central to the frontal Protestant assault on Platonic Orientalism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>. The basic storyline goes as follows (and again, it is helpful to try and imagine it as dramatically as possible):

Far from being teachers of wisdom, the pagan sages of the ancient Orient (Zoroaster, Hermes, Pythagoras, Plato and his followers) were teachers of darkness. They were in league with evil demons, the false gods of the heathens, who taught them the arts of magic and expected to be worshiped in hideous rites of idolatry. Far from being a preacher of Egyptian wisdom, Moses was elected to liberate the Jewish people from the darkness of Egyptian paganism. The true religion of the One God began with him, and finally culminated in Christianity. However [just as in the Ancient Wisdom narrative], something went terribly wrong at that point. In their efforts to explain the gospel in doctrinal terms, the Fathers of the Church began making use of the so-called philosophy of Plato. Seduced by the eloquence of the Platonic authors, who could speak so beautifully about God as the One source of Being from whom everything had flown forth, they did not realize that they were allowing the Christian message to get infected by the virus of pagan error: a religion of emanation that rejected the *creatio ex nihilo* and undermined the need for faith in Jesus Christ by suggesting that everyone could find the truth in himself. This is how the Christian message came to be poisoned by pagan errors that caused the Church of Christ to be slowly transformed into the Church of Antichrist. However, at the time of deepest darkness, when the church was ruled by criminals and even the original pagan texts were freely disseminated like never before, God sent Martin Luther to remind Christians of the true message and purify the Church of its pagan errors. In their battle against the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers are really fighting against the demonic forces of darkness that had succeeded in extinguishing the light of the gospel and had replaced it by the false doctrines of Platonic and ancient Oriental paganism. Only when Christianity will be fully purged from the darkness of pagan idolatry will the light of the Gospel be triumphant.

Clearly, this Protestant story is a perfect mirror image of the earlier one. The teachers of light have become teachers of darkness; the so-called pagan wisdom is exposed as pagan error; Platonic philosophy is not the cure for Christianity but the cause of its decline; the rediscovery of ancient Oriental

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy'... Op. cit, 2012. P. 77–152.

and Platonic manuscripts in the Italian Renaissance is not a divine intervention but an ultimate attempt by the devil to pervert the minds of Christians; and the Reformation of the Church does not imply a rediscovery of ancient pagan wisdom but, on the contrary, requires its final destruction.

Again, it is a very good story. As far as I can tell, its most important affordances are still the same: a sharp ethical dualism of darkness and light, and the notion of a journey or adventure through history that has many setbacks but should culminate in a happy end. The difference between the two stories clearly lies in their radically opposed valuations of ancient Hellenistic paganism in general and Platonic Orientalism more in particular, but also in the basic emotions to which they make an appeal (a point to which I will return below). The Ancient Wisdom narrative and the Protestant counter-narrative can be seen as model stories that allow many variations. In contemporary New Age culture, for instance, it is easy to see how the Renaissance model of Platonic Orientalism has morphed into a wide variety of popular esoteric and New Age narratives about the ancient tradition of spiritual wisdom carried on through the ages by lightbearers or lightworkers, ascended masters or mahatmas, who are patiently trying to awaken human beings to their inner divinity. In the world of Evangelicals and Christian fundamentalists, on the other hand, we encounter endless variations on the Protestant counter-narrative about the battle against the very real demonic forces of the occult.

I have been arguing that stories such as these – emotion-laden inventions of the historical imagination – may ultimately be more fundamental to how religion functions than verbal discourse. Critics might want to argue that it is possible to understand imaginative formations as falling within the domain of discourse, but I suggest that it is rather the other way around: human discourse falls within the wider context of the historical imagination. Linguistic signs, verbal communication, and so on, are embedded in pre-verbal thought that operates through images. We see things before we start talking about them. We are not telling stories about abstract words or concepts but about how we perceive reality in our minds. This reality may correspond either to the world that presently surrounds us (the world ‘out there’) or to the remembered world of the past (the world ‘back then’), but in either case we perceive it only through the imagination.

##### 5. EXAMPLES 3 AND 4: THE STORIES OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE EDUCATION OF HUMANITY

To expand the scope of analysis, I will proceed with two more examples of the poeticizing historical imagination and the construction of cultural memory. My third example is the classic ‘grand narrative’ of rationality and scientific progress that underpins the projects of Enlightenment and Modernity. Interestingly, it turns out to be a mixture of the two previous narratives. The storyline is familiar, and goes as follows:

Once upon a time, in ancient Greece, the light of Reason began to shine. Rather than believing blindly in imaginative fables about the gods or accepting the dictates of priestly elites, philosophers began to think for themselves and draw their own conclusions from direct observation of the physical world. They began to build a rational worldview in harmony with the experience of the senses. In doing so, they were trying to liberate their fellow humans from the reactionary forces of mystical obscurantism, magical superstition, and religious prejudice, insisting on free inquiry and the quest for rational understanding. Due to their efforts, the Light of Reason began to spread. But then a new religious power emerged to oppose them: that of Christianity and its doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ alone, supported by irrational trinitarian doctrines and assisted by a powerful priestly hierarchy that sought to suppress the freedom of the human spirit. The result was a new Dark Age of ignorance and superstition that lasted many centuries. Only with the Renaissance revival of classical learning did Reason begin to make its comeback, assisted by the Reformation and its success in breaking the hegemony of the Church. As scientists began to discover the true laws of nature, thereby demonstrating the absurdity of religious prejudice, Reason finally triumphed over superstition, and human freedom over despotism. Thus the foundations were created for a better society of Enlightenment and Progress. Against the reactionary forces of religious prejudice and magical superstition, Reason must and will prevail. Through rational education, the human mind can be cured of ignorance and persuaded of the truth. In the end, it is only stupidity and blindness to reason and facts that obstructs the forward march of Science and Reason.

Just as in the Ancient Wisdom narrative, the light is born in Antiquity but suffers a serious decline due to the rise of Christianity, only to be rekindled through the revival of secular (pagan) learning in the Renaissance. But of course we are dealing here with the light of reason, not the mystical light of spiritual wisdom. Likewise, the spreading of the light is hindered and opposed not by a force of demonic evil but by human despotism and ignorance, not to mention sheer stupidity. Again, it is a very good story that relies for its effect on the same affordances that were noted earlier: a clear dualism of light and darkness, and an eventful story or adventure through history towards a hopeful happy end.

Interestingly, this is different with my fourth and final example of the poeticizing historical imagination and the construction of cultural memory. We have seen that the Platonic Orientalist narrative of 'pagan wisdom' stands against the Protestant counter-narrative of 'pagan demonism.' Similarly, against the Enlightenment narrative of 'rational paganism' stands a Romantic counter-narrative that relies on what might be called an 'esoteric paganism'<sup>1</sup>. The basic storyline is as follows:

The history of human consciousness began in the innocence of childhood. Humanity was still living in a dreamlike state, intimately at one with Nature, under the benevolent guidance of an enlightened priesthood of visionaries and healers.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy'... Op. cit, 2012. P. 270–277.



The voice of divinity spoke to the human mind directly, through a poetic Ur-language of images, symbols, signatures and correspondences. Secret doctrines were transmitted to the spiritual elites through mystery initiations and mythical narratives. This original Oriental wisdom reached its culmination in Egypt, but it was through the people of Israel that human consciousness began to progress and grow through adolescence to maturity, culminating in the appearance of the absolute and universal religion of Christianity. Thanks to the Platonic tradition, the ancient wisdom of the Orient flowed harmoniously into the heart of Christian doctrine. The Middle Ages, the time of the great cathedrals and the Holy Roman Empire, were the great period of Christian splendor and harmonious unity. But spiritual evolution and progress requires strife and effort to move forward, and so the human mind had to encounter new challenges to grow further. The unity of Christendom was shattered by the advent of the Reformation, leading to an age of individualism and rational inquiry. The natural sciences tried to pierce the veil of Isis so as to discover the very mysteries of divinity itself, up to a point where human consciousness got so much divorced and alienated from the sources of true wisdom and divinity that philosophers and theologians even began to doubt the very existence of God. However, the evolution of human consciousness unfolds through history under the mysterious guidance of divine Providence, which will always take care to lead its children back on the right track even if they lose their way for a while. As the human mind reaches full maturity, the individual Self will be at one with the Self of the universe, and human beings will choose in freedom to live in harmony with the spiritual laws of divine wisdom.

Although this narrative adopts some crucial aspects of the Ancient Wisdom narrative of Platonic Orientalism, its structure is clearly very different from the ones we have seen before. The guiding idea is evolutionary: it is concerned with the steady progress of human consciousness as a whole, understood (in the terms of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing) as an ‘education of the human race’<sup>1</sup> under the guidance of a benevolent divine force that patiently leads it towards full maturity. Contrary to all three previous narratives, this one is not based upon a dualistic opposition of light against darkness, for the final outcome of the process is never in doubt. The trials and tragedies of human history are ultimately just tests and challenges: they do not seriously endanger the larger process but, on the contrary, are necessary in order for it to move forward. Obviously, we recognize this narrative as ‘Hegelian’; but it is more accurate to say that Hegel’s philosophy of history is a primary example of a far more widespread Romantic narrative.

## 6. THE EMOTIONS

If I have been calling attention to the role of the emotions throughout this article, it is because the theme of the imagination requires such an emphasis. The fact that feelings, affections, or passions are more easily evoked by

<sup>1</sup> *Lessing Gotthold Ephraim*, ‘Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts’. Berlin, 1780.



imaginative representations than by strictly rational argument is a commonplace in philosophical analysis in this domain. For instance, David Hume already remarked that ‘lively passions commonly attend a lively imagination’<sup>1</sup> and observed, in a discussion of political discourse, that ‘men are mightily governed by the imagination, and proportion their affections more to the light under which any object appears to them, than to its real and intrinsic value’<sup>2</sup>. This phenomenon is so well known from daily experience that I do not think it is in need of any further proof. of course, these observations can easily be applied to the topic of the historical imagination as well: there is no doubt (cf. the example of Agrippa, above) that beyond the restricted circles of specialized historians, the ‘real and intrinsic value’ of historical data tends to take a back seat compared to how they are ‘made to appear’ through narrative framing. Whenever any of my four historical stories succeeds in convincing an audience, clearly this is not because it provides factual information that is perceived by them to be correct, but because the story engages the emotions.

The historical imagination can play on a very wide and complex emotional register, and of course each recipient or participant will respond differently. Nevertheless, it may be useful to ask ourselves what are the dominant emotions on which each of the four narratives relies for its effect. My preliminary suggestions would be as follows.

1. The story of Ancient Wisdom clearly relies on positive symbols of identification. First and foremost, these are meant to inspire love for the divine Light of Truth, combined with feelings of gratitude for those who have been carrying it forward through the ages. The chief negative counterpart to these positive emotions might be described as a kind of painful, melancholy sadness about the ignorance of so many human beings, their tragic failure to see the light.

2. The Protestant counter-narrative does not think in such terms of ignorance, but assumes that the enemy knows exactly what it is doing: the latter is inspired by radical evil and has the worst intentions. Accordingly, the narrative symbolism is meant, first and foremost, to inspire emotions such as fear and revulsion. To give just one example: among the most potent of such symbols encountered in the literature is the horrific image of Platonism as a ‘poisoned egg’ from which a filthy breed of vermin comes crawling out<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hume David*. ‘A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects’. London, 1739 Bk III. 3.6).

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. Bk III.2.7. Cf. *Warnock Mary*. ‘Imagination’. Op. cit, 1976. P. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Colberg Ehregott Daniel*, 1690–91, *Das Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum, Begreifend Die Historische Erzählung vom Ursprung und vielerley Secten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie, unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreuzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäufer, Bourignisten, Labadisten, und Quietisten*. 2 vols. Frankfurt, 1690. P. 91, 75; *Bücher Friedrich Christian* *Plato Mysticus in Pietista redivivus; Das ist: Pietistische Übereinstimmung mit der Heydnischen Philosophie Platonis und seiner Nachfolger*. Dantzig, 1699. P. 9; *Brucker Jacob*. 1731–36. *Kurze Fragen aus der Philosophischen Historie, von Anfang der Welt biß auf die Geburt Christi, mit Ausführlichen Anmerckungen erläutert*. 7 vols. Ulm, 1731–1736). III. P. 520–521; *Hanegraaff Wouter J*. ‘Esotericism and the Academy’... Op. cit, 2012. P. 111.115. 143–144.151.

or the related image of a demonic 'seed pod' from which an end- less swarm of heresies comes to infect the world<sup>1</sup>. The chief positive emotions that allow its adherents to confront the horror might be described here as righteous anger and courageous defiance.

3. The Enlightenment narrative has a very different emotional tone: on principle, it distrusts mere emotion and seeks to restrain it by reason. I suggest that the feelings inspired by this narrative are essentially those of pride. In their most positive manifestation we are dealing here with the quiet and confident, happy pride inspired by true achievement; but since a sense of intellectual superiority is always implied, it has the potential of turning into arrogance. Its negative counterpart therefore consists in feelings of profound irritation and contempt for the irrational, and the stupidity of those who refuse to listen to reason and recognize facts.

4. Finally, there is the Romantic narrative, describing an 'education of the human race' from the innocent bliss of childhood to the full maturity of true knowledge. If the Enlightenment story inspires pride in human achievement, its Romantic counterpart is marked, rather, by profound feelings of awe towards the grand and sublime mysteries of Being, Creation, Evolution, Consciousness, Freedom, and the Self. This narrative is grounded in dialectics rather than dual- ism, and therefore leaves no room for truly negative emotions. However, when its adherents lose their sense of awe, and with it their belief in this whole grand de- sign of existence, one typically sees them sink into states of depression and despair. Existential nihilism is the child of Romanticism betrayed.

Of course this is just a rough sketch, without any great pretensions. The larger point at issue is that the historical imagination produces stories about the past that derive much of their persuasive power from their ability to engage the emotions. In the cases discussed here, these emotions are rooted in deep existential commitments to basic values that lie on either side of the most basic fault lines of Western culture: as we have seen, the first two narratives are all about the conflict between Hellenistic paganism and Scriptural Monotheism, whereas the third and fourth narratives are all about the conflict between Enlightenment values and traditional religion.

## 7. ANTI-ECLECTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

I have been arguing that the products of the historical imagination are polarized between the theoretical extremes of factuality (wie es eigentlich gewesen) and poeticity (the good story). The four narratives that I have been discussing clearly tend towards the poetic side of the spectrum. The important point to make here is that their power as stories is grounded in highly selective procedures of data selection. Enormously complicated developments

<sup>1</sup> *Mora George* et al. *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De Praestigiis daemonum*. Tempe, 1998. P. 106); *Hanegraaff Wouter J.*, *Esotericism and the Academy...* Op. cit, 2012. P. 86–111.

and messy realities are simplified for maximum emotional effect. Grey areas of moral ambiguity are reduced to a stark opposition of light versus darkness. Even the education of the human race can only lead towards ever more light and ever less ignorance: true regression, defeat, or failure is out of the question. These are all instances of historical eclecticism: a highly selective approach to historical data, guided by a storyline that privileges emotional satisfaction and dramatic effect over full empirical accuracy, rational evaluation of all the available evidence, or historiographical precision.

In my previous work I have sought to demonstrate that Enlightenment historiography in such domains as history of philosophy, religion, and science was grounded in a deliberate, explicit, self-conscious choice for eclecticist method<sup>1</sup>. The job of historians did not consist in presenting their readers with all the available evidence and leaving it up to them to make up their minds: this would only confuse them. On the contrary, historians were expected to apply their own rational judgment to historical materials so as to sort the 'wheat' from the 'chaff.' Enlightenment historians were convinced that, in applying such selective procedures, they were serving the truth. In fact, however, they were doing the opposite: by promoting eclecticism as a core methodical principle, they lent legitimacy to a type of historiography that sacrifices historicity/factuality on the altar of poeticity. The result is a clear, satisfying, easily understood storyline premised on the idea of a heroic battle of science against superstition, religion against magic, philosophy against the irrational. From a historical point of view, however, this type of Enlightenment mnemo-history is in no way superior to any of the other narratives that I have been discussing: just like the 'Ancient Wisdom,' 'Protestant' and 'Romantic' narratives, the 'Enlightenment' narrative is a poetic invention with a seductive story-line that speaks to the imagination and can have a very strong emotional appeal. This is what makes it so effective in deluding us about the degree to which it is actually grounded in rational argument and factual evidence.

Therefore what we need in the study of religion is an anti-eclectic historiography<sup>2</sup>. Such a historiography cannot be concerned with issuing judgments about the 'truth' or 'seriousness' of human cultural products, taking positions in favor of certain traditions at the expense of suppressing others. Instead, it has to be grounded in a radical empiricism that welcomes all the available data as equally worthy of attention. Such a perspective has been very much 'in the air' in the academy since the 1990s at least. It obviously reflects deconstructionist critiques of how the 'grand narratives' of modernity have been guiding our perception of history and the world around us; but interestingly enough, it has also been highlighted from a perspective informed by cognitive studies in a naturalist and evolutionist framework. In her 2010 Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion, Ann Taves pointed out that throughout the twentieth century, the study of religion, as well as neighboring disciplines such as psychology, have been operating

<sup>1</sup> Hanegraaff Wouter J. 'Esotericism and the Academy'... Op. cit, 2012. P. 129–130. 140, 149–152.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 152, 377–378.

with artificially limited and restrictive concepts of 'religion' that were based on the tacit exclusion and systematic neglect of anything associated with magic, the esoteric, the occult, the paranormal or the metaphysical<sup>1</sup>.

How did we come to adopt such artificial distinctions and allow them to dominate our conceptual understanding of 'religion'? I believe that the answer is simple, and rooted in elementary human psychology: poeticity tends to trump factuality in the historical imagination. We are wired to like a good story about what happened in the past and how we ended up where we are today, and our deep emotional need for a clear storyline that satisfies our personal preferences tends to overwhelm our attention to rational arguments and empirical or historical evidence. We pay attention to what interests us, while neglecting what does not, and although the resulting perspective is obviously limited and selective, we are more than willing to accept it as 'true.'

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This might sound like a rather negative conclusion. The polarity of poeticity and factuality in the historical imagination could easily lead us to believe that while stories are exciting they just happen to be false, whereas history might be more true but just happens to be boring! I suspect that it is for such reasons that so many students of religion end up being disappointed and disenchanted once the implications of historical research and critical analysis begin to dawn on them: too often, they move from the undergraduate 'classroom of sympathy' to the graduate 'classroom of doubt' and never manage to recover the enthusiasm with which they started<sup>2</sup>. However, it seems to me that there is light at the horizon, for once the grand narratives have been deconstructed as poetic inventions and we recognize the paradox at the heart of the historical imagination (the fact that, as noted above, it only shows us reality by creating it for us), this makes it possible to tell a true historical story, that is to say: one that is historically accurate and exciting at the same time. The true 'hero' of such a story would be the historical imagination itself. As historians, we can trace and describe the many adventures that this hero has gone through, in his quest of grasping realities that always keep eluding him while believing in narratives that always keep deluding him. The story of that quest, I insist, is not a delusion. It is the true story of how human beings have really and actually been trying to gain knowledge, and how we keep persist- ing in the attempt. This story can never be told completely, and we are still stuck in the middle of it, but I believe it can be told accurately. It is well worth trying to tell it – for it is, of course, the story of ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> *Taves Ann*. 'Presidential Address: Religion in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University', in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79.2. 2011. P. 298–303.

<sup>2</sup> *Kripal Jeffrey J*. 'The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion'. Chicago, 2007. P. 22; *Hanegraaff Wouter J*. 'Leaving the Garden (in Search of Religion): Jeffrey J. Kripal's Vision of a Gnostic Study of Religion', in: *Religion* 38, 2008. P. 259–276.

Monica Centanni

**SERIO LUDERE. ABY WARBURG'S BILDERATLAS:  
A ROLE-PLAYING GAME TO STUDY CLASSICAL TRADITION<sup>1</sup>**

The theme of my contribution is an exposition of the researches on Warburg's Atlas made by the "Seminario Mnemosyne" at the Centro studi classica Università Iuav di Venezia<sup>2</sup>. In particular I would like to present the hermeneutic readings of the Atlas panels/plates, and the operation of the Bilderatlas as a device to study and display the intertwined connections among formal and thematic topics, and between images and texts.

**I. ORIGINS, FORTUNE, AND MISFORTUNE OF ABY WARBURG'S  
MNEMOSYNE ATLAS**

πάθει μάθος  
"through pain, from pathos,  
you learn"  
*Aeschylus, Agamemnon, l. 177*

As Aby Warburg left the Kreuzlingen Sanatory – where he was hospitalised intermittently for more than five years, followed by the psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger – in 1925, his assistant Fritz Saxl displayed a group of black panels in the Ellipse Reading Room in this Institute in Hamburg<sup>3</sup>,

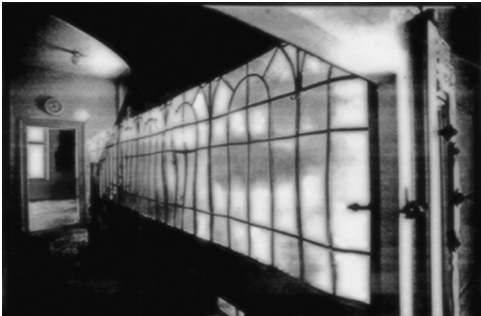
These panels presented many photographs, gathered according to the topics of Warburg's researches.

The actual project for the Bilderatlas was conceived between 1927 and 1928, as a result of researches conducted by Warburg and his scholars. His activities,

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> See, in "La Rivista di Engramma", the readings of Mnemosyne Atlas by Seminario Mnemosyne, since 2000 [http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id\\_articolo=103#saggio%20corali](http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=103#saggio%20corali). In general, on the methods of the Venetian Seminar, s. Centanni 2004.

<sup>3</sup> On the design of the building, especially the Elliptical Hall and on Warburg's intervention in the design, s. Calandra 2014.



Kreuzlingen  
(Thurgau, Switzerland)  
Sanatorium  
Bellevue, directed by  
Ludwig Binswanger  
(photographs 1920 ca.)



on his return from the hospitalisation in Kreuzlingen, resumed and used a large part of the research materials that he had only kept for his own personal use until then.

The first panels with photographic montages were conceived as small exhibitions, held at the Hamburg-based Institute and elsewhere. The scientific staff of the KBW, under the direction of its founder, created large panels on which it was possible, by assembling photographs, to reconstruct the research and investigation course. There was also the attempt of proposing a new style for scientific communication, without indulging in didactic simplifications of complex interpretative routes, reaching maximum expressiveness and efficiency.

From 1925 it is as if the private laboratory – the work of the researcher, a new version of the Renaissance *studiolo* – had opened its doors: not only

Hamburg, Heilwigstraße 116,  
Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg:  
the Ellipse Reading Room with some “thematic panels”





to its students, employees, colleagues, and scholars but also to the public. The panel displays then reveal the mechanisms of the research: by exposing them, they are also clarified and explained, triggering a virtuous circle between research and communication.

It was with the panels for the KBW exhibit that Warburg had the idea of creating a unique piece of work in the form of an atlas: a work that would collect the fruits of the research that he had conducted throughout the course of his life and that had inspired his students and collaborators.

Indeed, the Atlas was born as a result of stratified researches over the years: researches with their own history and their more or less formalised outcomes (articles, lectures, and lessons left in the form of notes). The Atlas project was in fact created in parallel with the creation of the Library and Institute.

The Atlas has been presented as a figurative and reasoned explication of the mechanisms of the Classical tradition and the dynamics of cultural transmission from one era to another. The theme of iconographic tendencies and of morphological and thematic image tradition – a theme that was never openly exposed by Warburg in his written works – is finally explicit in the Atlas. Mnemosyne is therefore proposed as an original and final outcome of Warburg's methodology and, at the same time, as an initial repertoire for its future applications.

Warburg died in 1929, leaving his *opus* unfinished and incomplete. The difficulties in the reconstruction of the original design of the piece (after the promoter's passing) were met by difficulties given by the historical circumstances that in 1934, after the rise of National Socialism in Germany, brought the KBW to move from Hamburg to London, where it became the Warburg Institute only after the Second World War<sup>1</sup>.

The Bilderatlas project, that was meant to be published by Teubner publishing, was interrupted by the transfer of all the Institute's

Hamburg,  
Heilwigstraße 116,  
Kulturwissenschaftliche  
Bibliothek Warburg  
The Ellipse Reading  
Room

<sup>1</sup> On the afterlife of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, s. Fleckner, Mack 2015.



material – books, machines, photographs – from Germany to London. These factors came to qualify the critical value and meaning of Mnemosyne, bringing the Atlas to be considered as a sort of ‘ghost’ project.

Warburg’s followers – Gertrud Bing, Edgard Wind, and Fritz Saxl especially – with all the logistic issues they were forced to face, lost the tracks of the ambitious Atlas project. The materials and documents related to it resurfaced only at the beginning of the 1970s.

It was only recently, after 60 years in the dust, that Warburg’s last version of the Atlas was reconstructed in its panels, and put on display in various exhibits – the first one in Wien in 1994; another one in Venice in 2004, presented by the Seminar group that I promoted<sup>1</sup>. The collection of the Atlas panels has since been published (based on photographic documentation of the 1929 original ones) in many different editions that have been coming out since 1998 in Germany, Italy, France. The Atlas has become Warburg’s most studied work, however only in the past ten years.

## II. WHAT THE BILDERATLAS MNEMOSYNE IS

In the last two years of his life, Aby Warburg conceived a complete Atlas of Images (the Bilderatlas) that could be “an instrument of mental orientation” in the history of human civilisation, starting from the ancient roots of Classical tradition.

From 1927, Warburg and his collaborators dedicated all their energies to structure many panels that became:

- the tool-box of their researches;
- the work space in which they collaborated in;
- the most significant display format for their exposition (lectures and more or less improvised exhibitions) of their researches.

Between ‘27 and ‘29, the Atlas was both a study tool and a device for the display and sharing of studies and researches on Classical tradition brought forth by the Warburg Institute.

The issue that Warburg and his followers meant to address was that of structuring a system of exposition and representation of the Renaissance – Italian, at first, then European – as a force field, in which the formally composed and chaste medieval repertoire was forcefully irrupted by “life in movement” – those styles of Antiquity that are taken from the archaeological finds of the 1400s (sarcophagi, reliefs, coins). This is what we find in Warburg’s notes for the “Introduction” to Mnemosyne, when he writes that the Atlas would be an instrument of intellectual orientation with an anti-chaotic function (how the artwork clarifies and outlines its object).

“[There is a] duality between an anti-chaotic function, which can be termed thus because the artwork selects and clarifies the contours of the

<sup>1</sup> On the early history of Mnemosyne, and the first steps of its fortune, s. Seminario Mnemosyne 2004.



object, and the demand that the beholder should gaze in cultic devotion at the idol that has been created, creating the human intellectual predicaments that should form the proper object of a scientific study of culture that takes as its subject the illustrated psychological history of the interval between impulse and rational action”<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, the collection of images presented in the Atlas have the function of “de-demonising impressions”, reclaiming their original meanings: “The process of de-demonising the inherited mass of impressions, created in fear, that encompasses the entire range of emotional gesture, from helpless melancholy to murderous cannibalism, also lends the mark of uncanny experience to the dynamics of human movement in the stages that lie in between these extremes of orgiastic seizure – states such as fighting, walking, running, dancing, grasping that the educated individual of the Renaissance, brought up in the medieval discipline of the Church, regarded as forbidden territory, where only the godless were permitted to run, freely indulging their passions”<sup>2</sup>.

Warburg underlines the peculiar role of the image in the process of absorbing pre-coined expressive values, through the representation of life in motion: “Through its images the Mnemosyne Atlas intends to illustrate this process, which one could define as the attempt to absorb pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion. On the basis of its images it [the Mnemosyne] is intended to be first of all an inventory of pre-coined classical forms that impacted upon the stylistic development of the representation of life in motion in the age of the Renaissance”<sup>3</sup>.

As early as 1905, the author was helped in such efforts by Osthoff’s writing on the nature of the superlative in the Indo-Germanic language: in brief, he demonstrated that a change in the root of the word could occur in the comparison of adjectives and conjugation of verbs. Not only does the conception of the energetic identity of the intended attribute or action not suffer (even though the formal identity of the basic lexical expression has fallen away) but the arrival of an alien root and the addition of supplementary forms achieve an intensification of the original meaning.

A similar process can be ascertained, *mutatis mutandis*, in the area of the language of gesture in art when, for example, the dancing Salome from the Bible appears as a Greek maenad, or when a female servant carrying a fruit basket in Ghirlandaio rushes by in a quite conscious imitation of the Victory of a Roman triumphal arch.

In this frame, Warburg introduces the concept of “Engram”, as an ancestral track impressed and preserved in collective memory, which is translated in a repertoire of gestures (the *Pathosformeln*): “It is in the area of mass

<sup>1</sup> Rampley 2017, A3; the *Einleitung zu Mnemosyne* by Aby Warburg, German text and Italian translation is now available in “La Rivista di Engramma”: s. Ghelardi 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Rampley 2017, A3.

<sup>3</sup> Rampley 2017, A5-B1.

orgiastic seizure that one should seek the mould that shapes the expressive forms of extreme inner possession on the memory with such intensity – inasmuch as it can be expressed through gesture – that these engrams of affective experience survive in the form of a heritage preserved in the memory. They serve as models that shape the outline drawn by the artist's hand, once the extreme values of the language of gesture appear in the daylight through the formative medium of the artist's hand"<sup>1</sup>.

In this conceptual context, there is no place for any aesthetic vision: "Hedonistic aesthetes win the cheap approval of the art-loving public when they explain such formal changes in terms of pleasure in the extended decorative line. Let anyone who wishes content themselves with the flora of the most beautiful and aromatic plants; this will never, however, develop into a physiology of the circulating, rising sap of plants, for this only reveals itself to whoever examines the subterranean roots of life"<sup>2</sup>.

The main issue and chronological hub of the Atlas is Italian Renaissance culture, especially because the revival of Classic imagery, at the time, was experienced as a flag of individual freedom, against the (entirely medieval) subjection to Fate: "The Italian Renaissance sought now to absorb this inherited mass of engrams in a peculiar, twofold manner. On the one hand it offered welcome encouragement for the newly liberated spirit of worldliness, and gave courage to the individual, struggling to maintain his personal freedom in the face of destiny, to speak the unspeakable. However, to the extent that this encouragement proceeded as a mnemonic function, – in other words, it had already been reformed once before by art using pre-existing forms – the act of restitution remained positioned between impulsive self-release and a conscious and controlled use of forms; in other words, between Dionysus and Apollo, and provided the artistic genius with the psychic space for coining expressions out of his most personal formal language"<sup>3</sup>.

It is precisely in the Renaissance that there is the struggle involving the artist and his works; between the imitation of the ancient models and the emergence of the individual genius: "The compulsion to engage with the world of pre-established expressive forms – regardless of whether their origin is in the past or the present – signifies the decisive critical moment for any artist intending to assert his own character. It was recognition of the fact that until now this process had been overlooked, despite its unusually wide-ranging importance for the stylistic formation of the Renaissance in Europe, that led to Mnemosyne, the images of which are intended, most immediately, to present nothing but a traceable inventory of pre-coined expressions, which demanded that the individual artist either ignore or absorb this mass of inherited impressions surging forward in this dual manner"<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Rampley 2017, B4.

<sup>2</sup> Rampley 2017, B5.

<sup>3</sup> Rampley 2017, C4.

<sup>4</sup> Rampley 2017, D1.

In other words, as Warburg affirms by quoting – but also going beyond – Nietzsche, we have to find the best symbol of the character of Antiquity in “the double-headed herm of Apollo–Dionysus”. This is the right way “to take seriously the role of *sophrosyne* and ecstasy as a single, organic functional polarity that marks the limit values of the human will to expression”.

### III. MNEMOSYNE ATLAS MISUNDERSTOOD

In the late 1960s, a biographical book on Warburg’s thought and life was commissioned to Ernst Gombrich. *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* would then be published in 1970 in London<sup>1</sup>. Until then, Warburg’s name and his work were more or less unknown. In reality, while Gombrich was commissioned, first in the 1930s and again after World War II, to work on publishing the entire corpus of Warburg’s works, Gertrud Bing, Warburg’s closest assistant in the last years of his life, had assumed the job of writing the biography of the Master. According to Gombrich’s declarations, when Bing died in 1964, she destroyed all the book’s materials that had been left unfinished. However, a lot of archive materials collected in previous years by Gertrud Bing (and the other collaborator of Warburg, Fritz Saxl) is gathered in Gombrich’s volume.

Gombrich’s book represents a turning point for Warburg’s worldwide fortune and, at the same time, an incredible misinterpretation of his method and the importance and innovative nature of his research. In essence, Gombrich read all of Warburg’s intellectual biography, and especially the last years of his life after the Kreuzlingen Sanatorium, as a story strongly marked by the scholar’s psychiatric illness. Gombrich’s worst chapter in Warburg’s activity precisely concerns Mnemosyne Atlas, not considered as a superb project but as a symptom and a manifestation of Warburg’s mental disorders, necessarily destined to fail. In a recent essay, the story of Gombrich’s collaboration with the Warburg Institute in London, from the 1930s to the publication of the volume – which will be published (not by chance) only after the death of Gertrud Bing – has been reconstructed<sup>2</sup>. Openly against Bing and the fidelity in Warburg ideas, and against the tenacity (both by Bing and Saxl) on the urgency of publishing the Atlas, Gombrich has exhibited all of his reservations since the early stages of his collaboration. Against the perseverance of Warburg’s closest collaborators in completing the most important project of his life, Gombrich did not even spare his pounding irony. Thus, in a letter sent to his friend Ernest Kris in 1942, Gombrich wrote on Gertrud Bing: “[She] is a really nice and clever person as long as she does not quote Warburg’s Atlas”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> On the troubled story of Warburg’s biography written by Gombrich, and on the materials that it includes see, recently, Wedepohl 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Wedepohl 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Wedepohl 2015, p. 131.

In general, Gombrich presents Warburg as a kind of disordered genius, deeply conditioned by intellectual currents of his time and lacking in a genuine original method. According to Gombrich, Warburg, troubled by his psychological disorders, at the last stage of his career would have converted to playing with figures because, after his illness, he was incapacitated to do much else and was no longer able to write anything.

The book – which stitches together biographical narrative, published and unpublished writings, diaries, fragmentary notes, and private letters – paints an extraordinary, fascinating, and tormented portrait of the German scholar. It is to Gombrich, therefore, despite the intentions of the author, that we owe the undoubted merit of having promoted and restored the charismatic personality of Aby Warburg.

Gertrud Bing decries the phenomenon: “Warburg’s posthumous fame is based more on hearsay than on the knowledge of his writings, and even today he shares the fate of those authors who [...] are praised with more zeal than with which they are read”.

Despite Gombrich’s intentions, by virtue of his successful biographical essay (translated into all major European languages), paradoxically, not only did the interest in Warburg’s personality increase but, most importantly, Warburgian studies reprised. Edgar Wind, one of the best interpreters of Warburg’s teachings, also slated Gombrich’s biography; in a review that came out shortly after Gombrich’s publication, he highlighted all the shortcomings of the publication.<sup>1</sup>

Parallel, and as a counterpoint, to this contemptuous and denigratory reading, is the fanatic approach of Warburg memory keepers who treat the Atlas as an object of religious devotion. Two symmetrical positions – both unprofitable.

The second way to apply the Bilderatlas is by using it as a “machine for knowledge”: following the methods, understanding its operation as a machine for the study of the transmission of themes, symbols, and images of Classical tradition.

Giorgio Pasquali, one of the greatest 20th century Italian classical philologists, wrote that the illness was unleashed by fear.

“I saw him calmer and happier when he returned to Italy in 1927 than when I left him in 1915, frightened at the thought of the inevitable war between Germany and Italy, which would, he feared, create an abyss between the two countries he loved”<sup>2</sup>.

Pasquali’s farsightedness when observing the life and works of Warburg made him view his death as an “autumnal euthanasia”: the sudden death of a life which was nonetheless “in a certain sense finished”. The conclusion to which Pasquali refers to is Mnemosyne. Unlike the superficial specialists and readers to come in the fifty years that followed, he considered it a “complete” work.

<sup>1</sup> Centanni, Pasini 2000; Wedepohl 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pasquali [1930] 2014.

“He leaves a figurative atlas ready for publication, which takes its name from memory, *Mnemosyne*, aiming to show how different countries and different generations - the Eastern Mediterranean in the Middle Ages and the European Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Italian and German, and finally the generation and the circle of Rembrandt - had successively conceived and transformed the ‘pathetic’ Dionysian legacy of Antiquity. He wanted to continue to live in that atlas for posterity”<sup>1</sup>.

Warburg’s legacy as teacher and scholar is recapitulated in words that have surprising relevance in the conclusion of Pasquali’s paper.

“Young scholars will work according to his intentions, according to his spirit, even if they do not accept with conviction concepts that are closely linked with his own powerful personality, and instead use the atlas as a touchstone for their own thoughts. Art historians and cultural scientists have a duty to make the work of Warburg fruitful, letting it operate on them, thereby transforming it”<sup>2</sup>.

These are exemplary words, because they refer to the fundamental problem of knowledge: progressing at a slow pace, via successive changes of route without preliminary postulates, but with the distinct purpose of interpreting and comparing different hypotheses which, by interaction and reciprocal transformation, create sparks of knowledge.

In Warburg’s Atlas, the coordinates of Western civilisation are defined dynamically and within very wide ranges: the chronological period that he assesses runs from the ancient Sumerian civilisation to the contemporary age; the spatial coordinates outline a geography that is historically and politically fragmented but that also however presents a cultural continuum, with boundaries that coincide with a broader Mediterranean basin that reaches all the way north to Hamburg, and well beyond the east of Baghdad<sup>3</sup>.

The Atlas speaks of cultures and places that have profound logical and analogical relationships, such as the ones that the Warburg panels bind in images that are apparently different and distant. This way they come to reveal the system of co-presences and hybridisation, rejecting the outline of the “dynamograms” behind Mediterranean and European culture.

The Atlas will be an extensible system of hangers on which  
I hope to hang all the clothes, small and large, that are  
produced by the loom of Time.

*Aby Warburg*

The weavings of life and memory - the nervous knots, the information sorting centres, the alternate rhythms of persistence and oblivion, the complex

<sup>1</sup> Pasquali [1930] 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Pasquali [1930] 2014.

<sup>3</sup> On the Atlas’ coordinates (Plate A, and the group A, B, C), s. Seminario Mnemosyne [2001, 2015] 2015; Seminario Mnemosyne [2004, 2015] 2016.

articulations of the transmission of thoughts - are reproduced in Mnemosyne in the form of joints and syntactic connections, ramifications, citations, and internal references, repetitions of forms and subjects.

It is in this sense that the Atlas is a piece that should be studied, but that is also a great Method Treaty: a figurative Treaty that reached us without the captions and explanations that the author had seen as necessary. Mnemosyne therefore invites us to travel through its streets, following the figures pinned on the panels as signposts.

#### IV. WHAT HAS SEMINARIO MNEMOSYNE DONE WITH THE BILDERATLAS?

##### IVa. The state of the materials

The first problem for the Seminario Mnemosyne was represented by the actual state of the materials and equipment: an absent (and not re-constructible) archetype; unpublished and fragmentary texts (in the Archives of the Warburg Institute in London); mixed and poor quality photographic reproductions of the original panels taken by Gertrud Bing, Edgard Wind, and Fritz Saxl (before the departure for exile in London); and a critical bibliography that in year 2000 (when Seminario Mnemosyne started to work on the Atlas) was still very small and superficial.

To this, one must add the absolute multiplicity of documents of which the panels are constituted of - regarding time period, cultural circumstances, styles, workmanship, support. In Mnemosyne, in fact, you can already find from the first panels (put together with equal semantic dignity) archaeological finds, maps of the stars, Arabic manuscripts, topical photographs, works of art, newspaper clippings, etc.

The year 2000 publication for the Akademie Verlag of a critical edition of the 1929 version of the Atlas<sup>1</sup> (proposed later in 2002, in Italian translation and in a new version by the publisher Arago) now allows you to work on a solid textual basis that is philologically much more rigorous. The rekindled interest around Mnemosyne also brought a critical awakening and, therefore, a richer and updated bibliography.

The printed editions of Mnemosyne published in the last decade are good but are not exactly "suitable" for a thorough study of the work. The choice of an A4 format - the biggest allowed by market protocols in order to keep prices down and make it accessible to scholars, and not only to collectors and amateurs - is useful to give an overall idea of the direction of the project, but greatly penalises the crucial details of the images and pictures.

It is particularly problematic when the artwork that is displayed is not famous or of large-format. In many cases, Warburg "quotes" a detail from a miniature or an illuminated page, or from woodcuts of 16<sup>th</sup> century printed editions, or of "minor" works that are therefore more difficult to find in better

<sup>1</sup> Warke, Brink 2000; Ghelardi 2002.

reproductions. In these cases, if you don't have access to the original materials, and can only base your study on published editions of the Atlas, reading the images of the panels and understanding Warburg's choices can be almost impossible.

In short, anyone who has tried to grapple in the study of the Atlas has found himself to deal with the primary problem of the readability of the panels that are available in reproductions of reproductions that are by now quite old and difficult to read.

#### IVb. The choice of which panels to analyse

The choice of the panels to be analysed and published in Engramma was dictated by the interests of scholars and students, and by the different researches in progress among the Seminario Mnemosyne scholars. The first project was the reading of Panel 5<sup>1</sup>. Panel 5 belongs to a group of panels (4–8) that assembles archaeological subjects and was selected because of the familiarity with the discipline – Classical tradition – and therefore with the images that appear in the panel (for example, a series of pagan sarcophagi), but also for the central role of a key concept of Warburgian thought: the *Pathosformel*.

Another investigation path that we followed was the selection of panels that had explicit relationships with Warburg's published essays. The analysis of these panels (e.g. Panel 39, in connection with the 1893 dissertation on Botticelli's mythological paintings<sup>2</sup>; or Panel 46, in relation to the masters of the early Italian Renaissance and the figure of the Nymph<sup>3</sup>) benefit from the direct entries by Warburg on the issues, and provide in-depth material on the essays and inspire original research ideas.

The new knowledge of the Atlas materials, but also of its entire structure, led to the study of the opening panels of Mnemosyne: Panels A, B, and C, are approached as an autonomous nucleus in the body of work, as does Warburg himself by identifying only these three panels with letters instead of numbers like the rest. The three opening panels were read as a hermeneutic access to Mnemosyne<sup>4</sup>. The study of Panels A B C – in connection with that of Panel 79<sup>5</sup> which concludes (but doesn't close) the Atlas – has opened a door on the issue of Orientation, of the Man-World relationship, of the role of Representation for life and existence, and many contemporary issues. For Seminario Mnemosyne, this was a great step forward, an evolution and a first actual access to the materials, even because of the new possible methodological uses of the Atlas.

<sup>1</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2000a. On Mnemosyne Atlas Plate 5, s. also Seminario Mnemosyne 2003, and Bordignon 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne [2000] 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

<sup>4</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne [2001, 2015] 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2001b.



In this sense, it was possible to trace Atlas themes through the succession of panel analyses that more eloquently lent themselves to this game of relationships.

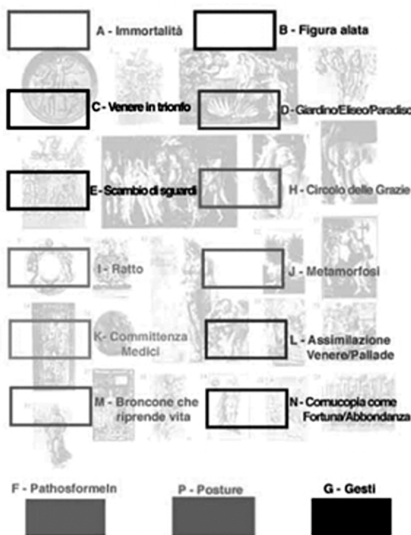
#### IVc. A reading method

Accessibility and readability of the materials of the Atlas were the first filter in the selection criteria of the panels to be analysed. The shortage of support materials and the general visual eloquence of the Atlas suggested an approach through the panels of the Atlas, which was – and is – both an essay and a visual product.

The first stage of the analysis of a Bilderatlas panel proceeds from the reconstruction of the panel or plate in a readable format: retrieving good photocopy reproductions of the individual works, cropping them and reassembling them on a large cardboard, according to the order, pattern, and proportions presented by the first critical edition of the Atlas.

An example of this process is the work done on Panel 46 (the Nymph)<sup>1</sup> and 47 (The Angel and the Head-Huntress)<sup>2</sup>: the reason behind the insertion of a series of pages from a Florentine manuscript in a median strip of the montage initially appeared mysterious and was only clarified by means of a survey carried out directly on the original manuscript, preserved in the national Library of Florence. The miniatures that appear on the pages selected by Warburg present the themes of Judith and Tobias and the Angel, themes that are guidelines for both Panel 46 and Panel 47.

Examples of graphic  
reading of Plate 39,  
by Seminario  
Mnemosyne 2000



<sup>1</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

<sup>2</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne [2002, 2014] 2014.



For the first readings of the panels we made use of simple graphics software. It came to suggest possible patterns of access and understanding of the panel, highlighting individual sections of them and evident thematic and formal combinations of the montage.

The analysis continued with the comment and further evaluation of the identified thematic and formal areas. The readings tried to overcome the lack of original critical materials and specific studies, relying directly on the images and on the history of the individual works of art. The texts published in Engramma are the outcome and a choral writing effort<sup>1</sup>.

What has manifested itself in this working process is the gradual complication of the methodology. The reading proceeds by identifying an *incipit* and an *explicit* in iconic sequences, an entry and exit from the panel, which guide the drafting of the text (like the link between Winged-Genius and Fortune recognisable as thematic figures in the reading of Panel 39<sup>2</sup>). Several corrections were necessary when faced with montages that demonstrated the possibilities of other combination strategies, such as the centrality and the attractive force of a particular image, or group of images. This is the case of the identity of Dionysus/Hades (as according to Heraclitus) and the figures in *sparagmos* caused by the god, in the central images of Panel 5<sup>3</sup>.



Example of thematic reading of Mnemosyne Atlas, Plate 5, by Seminario Mnemosyne 2000  
At the centre of the montage, Orpheus' *sparagmos*.

<sup>1</sup> On the birth of Seminario Mnemosyne and the choral method for studying the Atlas, s. Centanni 2004, and Centanni 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne [2000, 2014] 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2000a.

Further important information was given by the identification of precise compositional expedients in the general montage, such as the repetition of a detail from an artwork that is already present in the same panel in full reproduction. This is the case of the detail of the faces of Chloris and Zephyrus taken from Botticelli's *Primavera* in Panel 39<sup>1</sup>; but the same strategy (complicated by the original/copy issue) is found in Panel 46, dedicated to the image of the Nymph<sup>2</sup>. Again. In Panel 45 there are three images of the miracle of San Zaccaria, always from the Church of Santa Maria Novella<sup>3</sup>: the left vertical section of the panel shows the details under construction, but the same finished composition (shown in a much larger image in the middle of the panel) reveals the specific intent to draw attention to the architectural frame of the scene and its pictorial rendering.

These considerations made it necessary to maintain flexibility in the gradual readings that are necessarily a continuous processing. At the same time, the recognition of images or subject repetitions in distant panels has made it possible to identify specific structural relationships between groups of panels that refer to each other, even if not immediately close. The absence of the original archaeological piece in Panel 41a, dedicated to Laocoön, immediately recalls Panel 6, in the centre of which stands the same Vatican marble discovered in 1506<sup>4</sup>.

From the analysis of Panels 39, 46, and 74, for example (starting from the original concept of *Pathosformel*), come the derivations of "posture" to be considered as a pure iconographic convention that has been semanticised as "eloquent" or "effective gestures" (as occurs in the readings of Panel 39, as well as in Panel 74).

Positive results of this journey in the Atlas research are the attempts of appropriation and direct application of Warburg's method: this is the meaning of the proposition of original panel mounting experiments made by the Seminario Mnemosyne.

If left unattended, what can produce negative outcomes is the progressive complication (in length and in digressive inserts) of the accompanying texts of the panels, which may end up betraying the first and essential hermeneutical function of these readings: over-interpretation.

#### IVd. The general proposed scheme for the Atlas

Acting as guide to the project was the idea of presenting the Atlas like a big music score: orchestrated by its author according to a general design, it is complex in its articulations but simple and clear in its structure. The 63 panels that make up the final version of the work (the so-called

<sup>1</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne [2000, 2014] 2014.

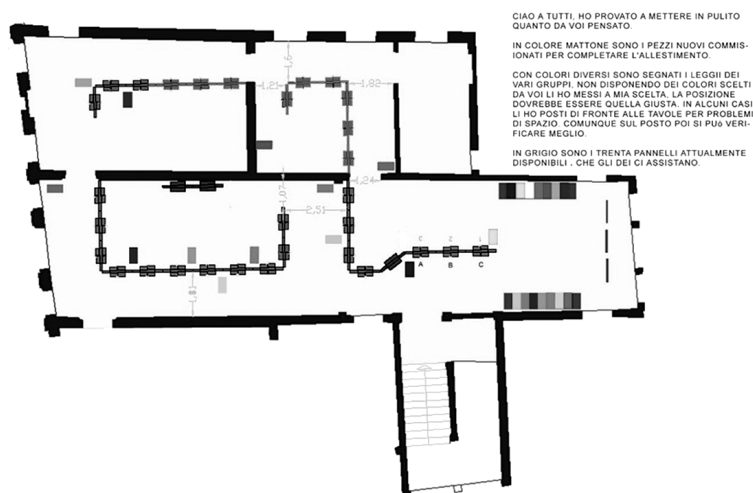
<sup>2</sup> Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

<sup>3</sup> S. Mnemosyne Atlas 2012-, Panel 45.

<sup>4</sup> On Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 41a, s. Centanni 2003.

“Daedalus version”) have been divided in 14 routes or “Pathways”: I–XII, plus 2, alpha and omega, in the opening and close<sup>1</sup>.

The effort of entering deeper inside the Atlas-maze propelled the study in the midst of Warburg’s thought, up to the adoption and reinvention of terms shaped according to his language. It is the case of the invention of the term *Statusformel* (always in the reading of Panel 39), which defines a morphologically and semantically characterised posture but which, unlike the already Warburgian *Pathosformel*, is not loaded with pathetic values.



Design by Fernanda De Maio, for the exhibition of Mnemosyne Atlas in Venice, Fondazione Levi 2004.

The suggested internal articulation, and the titles of each Pathway and their interpretation, is the result of the research of “Centro studi classicA”, as well as of individual scholars who are part of the group. We feel justified in proceeding with this division for several reasons – diversity, lacunae, and gaps in the progressive numbering of the panels – that implicitly announce that the works have an internal articulation.

More specifically:

- the first three panels (Panels A, B, and C) are identified with letters rather than numbers: a clear mark of an opening section, a thematic introduction to the work, and one we have designated as the “Alpha Pathway”;
- between Panels 8 and 20, and between Panel 64 and Panel 70, there is a gap in the numbering: in the two instances we have placed a *caesura* (between Pathways II and III, and between Pathways X and XI).

While establishing boundaries between the pathways, we also considered the relative uniformity that can be found between some groups of panels:

- Panels 1–8 show all the archaeological materials and have been subdivided into two contiguous pathways: Pathway I, Sumerian and Assyrian archaeological items (Panels 1, 2, 3); Pathway II, Hellenistic and Imperial Rome, mostly known during the Renaissance (Panels 4, 5, 6, 7, 8);

<sup>1</sup> Mnemosyne Atlas 2012, see section “Pathways”

– The group of panels numbered between 20 and 27, which we have defined as Pathway III, consists of materials that are mostly of an astrological nature originating from the Middle-East (Panels 20 and 21); and then a series of almost ‘monographic’ plates on Italian sites that borrow from eastern astrological subjects for the extensive iconographic cycles in Palazzo della Ragione in Padova (Panel 23), the Malatesta Monument in Rimini (Panel 25), and Schifanoia in Ferrara (Panel 27);

– Panels 28/29 to 36 portray a repertory of different vehicles of tradition (masterpieces by Piero della Francesca, and valued Burgundian tapestries, together with objects in daily use and popular illustrations), signalling that the avenues of circulation of themes and subjects moves from an East-West axis to a North-South one by placing an indistinct *caesura* with the preceding series, we have defined this group as Pathway IV;

– Panels 37-49, chronologically and geographically very consistent, illustrate the irruption of ancient models into Renaissance art of Northern Italy: we have decided to split them between Pathway V (Pollaiuolo and Botticelli: Panels 37, 38, 39); and Pathway VI (emergence of emotional formulas of grief and mourning: Panels 40, 41, 41a, 42); and Pathway VII (Ghirlandaio and Mantegna, Nymph, Fortune, grisaille: Panels 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49);

– Between Panels 50/51 and 64, the materials are not consistent from either stylistic or geographical points of view, but are united by the theme of forms of survival and of “trades with heaven” of the ancient gods during the Reformation: through these panels we have identified Pathway VIII (ascent to heaven and falling back to earth: Panels 50/51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56), Pathway IX (Dürer and cosmology: Panels 57, 58, 59), and Pathway X (16th century monarchies and the gods in the service of power: Pathway XII);

– The Atlas closes with the “Omega Pathway”, which throws light on the symbols of the bodies of power, and the pact between religious power and temporal power, using documents of a contemporary event (Panel 78: the Lateran Pact of 1929 between the Italian State and the Church of Rome), and stressing the symbolic sublimation of sacrifice (Panel 79).

Pathways through  
Bilderatlas,  
by Seminario  
Mnemosyne

## Pathways

- α. coordinates of memory
- I. astrology and mythology
- II. archaeological models
- III. migrations of the ancient gods
- IV. vehicles of tradition
- V. irruption of antiquity
- VI. Dionysiac formulae of emotions
- VII. Nike and Fortuna
- VIII. from the Muses to Manet
- IX. Dürer: the gods go North
- X. the age of Neptune
- XI. ‘art officiel’ and the baroque
- XII. re-emergence of antiquity
- ω. the classical tradition today

Obviously, there are many links between contiguous paths. This happens, for example, between Panel 27 and Panel 28/29, where the theme of vehicles of Classical tradition in Mantegna continues; and between Panel 77 and Panel 78, linked in an experiment to prove the persistence of engrams during the contemporary era.

There are also distant connections between remote panels. For example, some images of Panels 4–8 – presenting the ancient models (“antike Vorprägungen”, as Warburg defined them) – reappear in Panels 37–49, which represent the Renaissance apographs in “anti-quarian style”.

As can be gathered running through this review, some pathways are more clearly defined, and others appear to be blurred.

Defining the series of Pathways Alpha/I-XII/Omega is useful to track an organigram of the internal structure of the Atlas, and providing an X-ray of its principal framework. However, a reading of these articulations also serves to highlight the play of internal twists and turns that connect one panel to another, and each group of panels to other groups, criss-crossing different pathways. On the other hand, the experience gained during these years of research – while studying individual panels and the general structure of the Atlas – had already highlighted parallels and internal links between one panel and another, sometimes confirmed by the author's own comments.

The most significant example is perhaps the case of Laocoön that appears as an ancient example in Panel 6 and reappears cited in copies and variants as the guiding theme of Panel 41a (but is also presented in a drawing by Mantegna in Panel 37). In this sense, Panels 37–49 (which we have grouped together in Pathways V, VI, VII) can be considered an expansion of the core defined as Pathway II, which groups together the ancient monuments to which Renaissance artists had access to.

An example of a distant link between panels is the ecstatic-pathetic posture of the Maenad (already present as an 'original' exemplar in Panel 6), which is re-employed in a neo-Attic relief and cited as a model for a Magdalene under the Cross in Panel 25.<sup>1</sup> The same Renaissance piece reappears later in Panel 42, where the posture is inserted within a panel that displays various figures of Mourners over the Dead Christ drawn from ancient models.

We believe that the system of divisions and interweavings that are here outlined is a valid point of departure for the reconstruction of the scenario planned by Warburg for the *Bilderatlas*. It is useful as a working instrument to suggest a framework in the reading of the "score" and internal orchestration of the Atlas.

#### IV.e Evolution of the reading method

Thanks to a critical review of the reading process of the Atlas, we found a new formula to expose the process of analysis of Mnemosyne panels in Engramma: the goal is to restore the dry directness of the first reading, without sacrificing the possibility of discussions on specific topics.

The new structure of the Atlas Mnemosyne, published in Engramma from 2012, includes:

- The partition of the panels in groups, via 14 pathways;
- a brief description of each panel;
- Aby Warburg's notes for the individual panels (preserved at the Warburg Institute in London<sup>2</sup>, so far unpublished and published for the first time in the German edition of the Atlas, Warnke, Brick 2000);

<sup>1</sup> On Plate 25, s. Seminario Mnemosyne 2001

<sup>2</sup> WIA III 104.1.


“La Rivista  
di Engramma”,  
section Mnemosyne  
Atlas

Mnemosyne Atlas



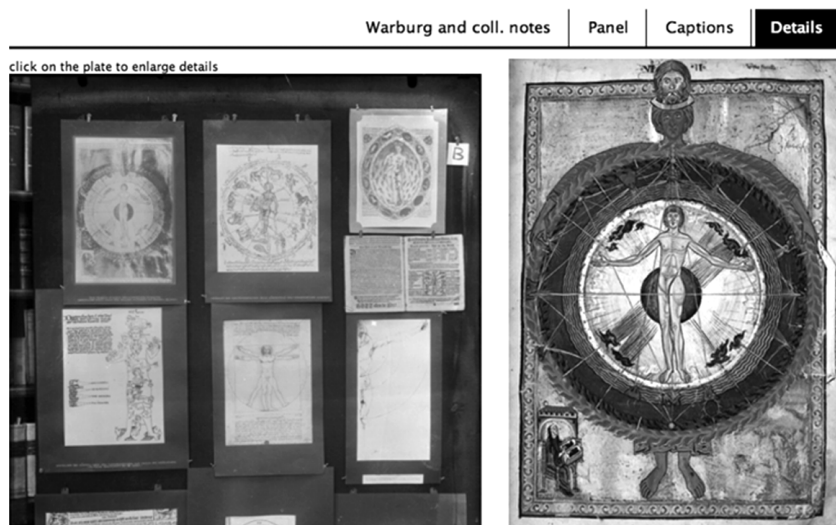
Mnemosyne Atlas 39

Love 'all'antica' in Medicean Florence  
Botticelli's mythological allegories as exempla of the introduction of the 'ideal 'all'antica' style 'in early Renaissance art. Intensified life is expressed in representations portrayed 'all'antica': the theme of Love and metamorphosis. The female figure in motion: conflation of Venus (an evolution 'all'antica' of Baldini's calendar), Pallas (in Botticelli and in the minor arts) and the Nymph (Chloris, Daphne, *Abundantia-Fortuna*).

Warburg and coll. notes	Panel	Captions	Details
		<p>Botticelli. Idealstil. Baldini 1. und 2. Amor antikisch. Pallas als Turnierfahne. Venusbilder. Apoll und Dafne = Verwandelung. Horn d. Achelous.</p> <p>Content analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Metamorphoses of the Virtues of Love in Medicean Florence. A reading of Plate 39 of the Mnemosyne Atlas Mnemosyne Seminar group of Classica Engramma no. 116, June 2014</li><li>◆ The Botticelliana serie and the 'ventilata veste'. Guide to reading Plate 39 translated by Elizabeth Thomson Engramma no. 4, December 2000</li><li>◆ Research material on Mnemosyne – Panel 39 edited by Seminario di Tradizione classica Engramma no. 4, December 2000 [OLD LAYOUT]</li></ul>	

Example  
of the “cover-page”  
of Mnemosyne Atlas,  
Plate 39





- Display of each panel with details and image captions;
- In-depth essays on the panel or individual thematic/formal issues offered by the panel.

This structure makes it possible for an articulation and an enrichment of the materials regarding each individual panel and allows the investigation of panels not analysed until now and getting back to already published readings in *Engramma*, in order to review the products in the light of recent methodological acquisitions.

Researching  
and publishing high-  
resolution images  
of the Mnemosyne  
Atlas panels: detail  
of Panel/Plate B

## V. SERIO LUDERE

Giordano Bruno, a thinker who was fundamental to Warburg during the latter part of his life, wrote:

“Things, signs, images, spectres, ghosts present themselves to us [..] Not for nothing did Socrates define oblivion as the loss of perception; however, if for the same reason he had also defined the seed of what can be remembered as “chance and not conceived by memory”, he would certainly have inquired more deeply. If indeed phantasy availing itself of sensitive images does not knock with sufficient energy, the cognitive faculty will fail to open the doors, and if the cognitive faculty which is the custodian fails to open the doors, the mother of the Muses, scorning such images, will refuse them”<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Giordano Bruno *Sigillus sigillorum ad omnes animi dispositiones comparandas*, 11, 19–20:

“Obiiciuntur nobis res, signa, imagines, spectra vel phantasmata. [...] Haud igitur temere oblivionem insensationem quandam appellavit Socrates; qui si eadem ratione et memorabilis iactum semen a memoria non conceptum insensationem similiter quandam appellasset, rem sane profundiorum explicasset. Ni igitur vivacius phantasia sensibilibus pulsaverit speciebus, cogitatio non aperiet, ostiaria quoque cogitatione non aperiente, easdem indignans Musarum mater non recipiet”.

It is common in the academic world to close yourself in the isolation of your field or theme, closing your mind, neutralising enthusiasm, spirit, and passion. However, as we well know, it is only by listening and learning that you can eventually teach something.

Together we can play the most serious game of all: shape our individual passions so that they can be useful to everyone. Knowing that we play together but also remembering that we have the commitment and duty to play our own game – ours and nobody else's.

The quality that "Engramma" is most proud of is the presence (in its drafting and editing team) of students, graduate students, young and very young scholars. Together with the more adult and experienced scholars, they share full editorial responsibility, both in a scientific and technical sense: from the programming of the journal issues and numbers, to the first essay evaluation and reviewer choice; to the relation with authors, and to the most specific aspects of the editorial job – layout, drafting, and work on images.

In the many choices and responsibilities, each team-member of Seminario Mnemosyne comes to learn to defend even his own line of research, finding ways and forms in which, according to the unwritten rules of the *serio ludere*, his scholarly passion can become part of everybody's game.

As in the composition of the panels of the Atlas Mnemosyne, the style that "Engramma" tries to practice is that of a non-solitary research. It is a varied and complicated forge in which everyone is called to find his place, and find time and care for the objects of his passion as a scholar. And for the objects of his desk-mate.

An example of our work is an analysis of the advertisements for Maison Valentino, published in Engramma no. 118, along with a presentation of the reading method on Mnemosyne Atlas, published in the following issue. Certainly, they are not the most important we have published in the recent years, but they are particularly interesting and relevant because they have been proposed by very young members of the Seminario Mnemosyne. I like to present them like a 'movie trailer' of our method and our research, taking the cue from Mnemosyne Atlas<sup>1</sup>.

This is the "girl in grey" – a Valentino ad campaign that directly takes from the "ventilate veste" (dress in the breeze) of the Nymph figure, with clear Classical references to the maenads, to the figure of angels and Renaissance nymphs. Aby Warburg highlighted the connection among the Classical inspiration for the dresses of Florentine girls in the Renaissance age, and the suggestions by Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo, who teach artists to represent figures in movement, just like the ancient models.

This is what Alberti wrote in *De pictura*: "They take delight in finding amongst their hair, their mane, in the midst of branches, fronds and dresses, some movement [...] And so, in that grace, the bodies that are so rustled by

<sup>1</sup> Fasiolo 2014; Fressola, Giacomini 2014.





the wind will partly reveal the nude, and partly have the clothes sweetly thrust in the air”<sup>1</sup>.

And this is what Leonardo wrote in his *Treatise on Picture*: “You [painter] shall reveal a nymph’s or angel’s actual size of the breasts, when they wear light and thin dresses, moving about in the wind”<sup>2</sup>.

From the figure of the modern “nymph in grey” we can shift to the reading of Mnemosyne Atlas Panel 47. Its main theme is the grace of the Nymph/Angel that can transform itself in a Maenad and in a “head-huntress”, for a good reason (as Judit, the biblical heroine), or a bad one (as the cruel Salome against John the Baptist)<sup>3</sup>.

Studying the overall architecture of the Atlas, as well as the individual boards and tracing figurative and thematic routes, the study does not only focus on the operation of the Atlas-machine, but also on its possible application to the interpretation of themes, postures, and myths of contemporary culture.

Frame from Progetto  
Mnemosyne

<sup>1</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura*, II, 45: “Dilettano nei capelli, nei crini, ne’ rami, frondi et veste vedere qualche movimento [...]: volgansi in uno giro quasi volendo anodarsi ed ondeggiando in aria simile alle fiamme, parte quasi come serpe si tessano fra li altri, parte crescano qua et parte in là [...]. a medesimo ancora le pieghe facciano; et nascono le pieghe come al troncho dell’albero i suoi rami. [...] Ma siano, quanto spesso ricordo i movimenti moderati et dolci, più tosto quali porgano gratia ad chi miri, che meraviglia di fatica alcuna”.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, IV, 527: “Solo farai scoprire la quasi vera grossezza delle membra à una ninfa, o’ uno angello, li quali si figurino vestiti di sotili vestimenti, sospinti o’ inpressi dal soffiare de venti; a questi tali et simili si potrà benissimo far scoprire la forma delle membra loro”.

<sup>3</sup> On Plate 47, s. Seminario Mnemosyne [2002, 2014] 2014.

In this sense, the Atlas is a work that ought to be studied but that is also a great treaty on methodology: content and form – Warburg teaches – are held together.

In this way, every Bilderatlas panel and our own panels, produced by ourselves, are like storyboards. Or, better, the panels – both Warburg's and the new ones – are like a workbench with all its tools, designed as a play-board that is afterwards raised and set vertically.

It is not only the outcome of the (evident) research work. It also, and most importantly, presents the process, always open to new additions, elaborations, and variations, shown in each panel.

This is the game of knowledge, not simply a solitary romantic quest. In the free competition of the *serio ludere* everyone knows they must play hard to show others – and the world – that their research is necessary. And that therefore it can become 'publishable' and important for everyone.

In this school, you win with your team but only by having each team-member win his individual enterprise: it is for this reason that it is best to win in many.

Finally, in conclusion, I address the motto – or, in Renaissance terms, 'impresa' – process. At the end of his comment to Plato's *Republic*, Marsilio Ficino wrote:

"È proprio dei sapienti iocari et studiosissime ludere".

"It is up to the wise to play and joke, and by hard-studying, to revel himself with joy".

Or, more philosophically, in the verses we read the f. 159v of the *De Ludo Globi* of Nicolò da Cusa:

"Luditur hic ludus; sed non sic pueriliter at / Lusit ut orbe novo sancta sophia deo". "Let's play at this game, and not in puerile manner, / but as the sacred wisdom plays with the new globe-ball for God".

These words inspired the title of my paper. And I address these words as a good auspice to our work.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bordignon 2012

Giulia Bordignon, "L'unità organica della *sophrosyne* e dell'estasi". *Una proposta di lettura della Tavola 5 del Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 100, September / October 2012.

Calandra 2014

Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, *Aby Warburg architetto. Nota sui progetti per la Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg ad Amburgo*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 116, May 2014.

Centanni 2003

Monica Centanni, *L'originale assente: il gruppo del Laocoonte in Tavola 41a dell'Atlante Mnemosyne (Appendix: Un esempio di cattiva lettura di Ernst Gombrich)*, "la Rivista di Engramma" no. 25, May/June 2003

Centanni 2004

Monica Centanni, *Studiare Mnemosyne, progettando una mostra sull'Atlante: dal diario di Venezia, 2004*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 35, August/September 2004.

Centanni 2012

Monica Centanni, *Engramma, da 0 a 100*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 100, September/October 2012.

Centanni, Pasini 2000

Monica Centanni, Giovanna Pasini, *a Portrait of Aby Warburg. a true 'Intellectual Biography' by Giorgio Pasquali (1930), Gertrud Bing (1958), and Edgard Wind (1970)*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 1, September 2000.

De Maio 2004

Fernanda De Maio, *Multum in parvo. Dal diario dell'allestimento della Mostra Mnemosyne, Venezia 2004*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 35, August/September 2004.

Fasiolo 2014

Bianca Fasiolo, *O Valentino vestito di nuovo - anzi...d'antico. Lettura iconografica della campagna Fall/Winter 2013 della Maison Valentino*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 118, July/August 2014.

Fleckner, Mack 2015

Uwe Fleckner, Peter Mack (eds), *The Afterlife of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg. The Emigration and the Early Years of the Warburg Institute in London*, Berlin/Boston 2015.

Fressola, Giacomini 2014

Anna Fressola, Alberto Giacomini, *Progetto Mnemosyne. Video di presentazione*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 119, September 2014.

Ghelardi 2002

Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne. L'Atlante delle immagini*, a c. di M. Ghelardi, Torino 2002.

Ghelardi 2016

Maurizio Ghelardi, ed. By, Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne. Einleitung. Introduzione al Bilderatlas (1929)*. Nuova edizione critica e traduzione, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 138, September/October 2016 <[http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id\\_articolo=2991](http://www.engramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=2991)>

Mnemosyne Venezia 2004

AA. VV., a cura di M. Centanni, special issue of "Engramma" dedicated to the exhibition in Venice, Fondazione Levi, 2004, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 35, August/September 2004.

Mnemosyne Atlas 2012-

Aby Warburg & co., *Mnemosyne Atlas*, electronic version by Seminario Mnemosyne, "La Rivista di Engramma", section Mnemosyne Atlas.

Pasquali [1930] 2014

Giorgio Pasquali, *Ricordo di Aby Warburg*, "Pegaso" II, 4, 1930, 484-495; [first electronic edition "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 25, May/June 2003] first English edition, translated by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 114, March 2014.

Rampley 2017

Matthew Rampley, ed. by, *Mnemosyne Atlas. Introduction (1929)*, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 142, February 2017.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2000a

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Monica Centanni and Katia Mazzucco, *Madre della vita, madre della morte. Figure e Pathosformeln. Saggio interpretativo di Mnemosyne Atlas, Tavola 5*, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 1, September 2000.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Monica Centanni and Katia Mazzucco, *Epiphany of the "nympha gradiva". Readings of Mnemosyne Atlas, Plate 46*, English version by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 3, November 2000.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2001a

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Monica Centanni and Katia Mazzucco, *Coincidentia oppositorum: the Malatesta Temple. Readings of Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 25*, English version by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 8, May 2001.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2001b

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Monica Centanni and Katia Mazzucco, *"Hoc est corpus" Guide to reading Plate 79*, English version by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 11, October 2001.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2003

Seminario Mnemosyne, *Progetto Mnemosyne: prototipo per una mostra sull'Atlante di Aby Warburg*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 26, July/August 2003.

Seminario Mnemosyne 2004

Seminario Mnemosyne, coordinated by Monica Centanni et al., *Cronologia di Mnemosyne (1929-2002)*, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 35, August/September 2004.

Seminario Mnemosyne [2000, 2014] 2014

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Giulia Bordignon, Monica Centanni, Alessandra Pedersoli, *Metamorphoses of the Virtues of Love in Medicean Florence. a reading of Plate 39 of the Mnemosyne Atlas* [Italian edition, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 114, March 2014; first version, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 4, December 2000]; "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 116, June 2014.

Seminario Mnemosyne [2002, 2014] 2014

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Maria Bergamo, Giulia Bordignon, Monica Centanni, *The Angel and the Head-huntress. a Reading of Plate 47 of the Mnemosyne Atlas* [Italian edition, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 116, May 2014; first version, "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 20, October 2002]; "La Rivista di Engramma" no. 119, September 2014.

Seminario Mnemosyne [2001, 2015] 2015

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Monica Centanni, Silvia De Laude, Daniela Sacco, Silvia Urbini, *Through the Maze: Plates a B and C. The opening themes of Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas* [Italian version: "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 125, March 2015; first version: "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 12, November 2001], English edition by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 125, March 2015.

Seminario Mnemosyne [2004, 2015] 2016

Seminario Mnemosyne, co-ordinated by Giulia Bordignon, Monica Centanni, Silvia De Laude, Daniela Sacco, *Orientation: cosmology, geography, genealogy. a reading of Plate a of Mnemosyne Bilderatlas* [Italian version: "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 125, March 2015; first version: "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 32, April 2004], English edition by Elizabeth Thomson, "La Rivista di Engramma", no. 135, April/May 2015.

Warnke, Brink 2000

Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, hgs. von M. Warnke und C. Brink, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2000.

Wedepohl 2015

Claudia Wedepohl, *Critical Detachment. Ernst Gombrich as Interpreter of Aby Warburg*, in Fleckner, Mack 2015, pp. 131-164.

Wind 1970

Edgard Wind, Review of E.H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*, "The Times Literary Supplement" 25 June 1971, 735-736.

Daniela Sacco

***ITER PER LABYRINTHUM:*  
PLATES A B AND C OF BILDERATLAS MNEMOSYNE<sup>1</sup>**

THE OPENING THEMES OF ABY WARBURG'S ATLAS

What I am presenting today is the result of research work conducted by the Seminar group at the Centro studi classica IUAV University in Venice about the first plates of the *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas*<sup>2</sup>.

The first three plates of Warburg's Atlas are headed by the letters A, B and C unlike the plates that follow, which are identified by numbers, 1–79. Their position and identification by letter reveal that the plates are a related group, and are distinct from the other panels. Panels A, B and C – which were probably assembled after the rest of the work had been completed – prove to be an introduction to the themes contained in the Atlas as a whole, a sort of threshold leading to the labyrinth which is *Mnemosyne*, with all the coordinates for making the entire work accessible.

Plates A, B and C present three different approaches to the schematization of the thematic threads running throughout the Atlas and, therefore, through the traces of the repertoire of the western tradition which the Atlas represents.

Plate A illustrates schematically three mapping principles: astro-cosmographical, topographical, and genealogical. Plate B, by subject, presents the development of the relationship between the micro and the macrocosm via anthropocentrism and the figure of *homo cosmicus* in an itinerary that leads from the astrological anthropopathy of the Middle Ages to the anthropoiesis of the Renaissance, and finally to the re-emergence of magical anthropopathy in the modern age. Plate C represents by theme the journey of man through the cosmos together with his understanding of the science of astronomy. At the same time, it also presents the trajectory leading to the acquisition of technical knowledge as the means for achieving victory and learning, which combines the power to create and to destroy.

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> A different version of this article was published in "Engramma", 125, March 2015.



Mnemosyne Atlas,  
Plate A, B & C.  
London, Warburg  
Institute Archive

The composition of plates A, B and C according to layout, subject and theme provides three schemes that encapsulate in seemingly simplified fashion the complex evolution of western civilization: the three opening plates appear to present a method of tracing clear itineraries through the forest of symbols, themes, myths and figures whose wanderings represent the corpus of the classical tradition.

The theme that innervates the Atlas, outlined in the A, B and C group of plates, is “the distance between the self and the external world”, as Warburg himself explains in his *Introduction* to the *Bilderatlas* in 1929<sup>1</sup>. It considers the relationship between man and the cosmos and, as a consequence, the relationship between freedom and necessity; a relationship which at times, during the Middle Ages but during the post Renaissance period too, becomes an oppressive fetter, and mutates decisively between the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, and is then reflected into the time in which Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* is conceived – the historically significant period in which the equilibrium between man and the cosmos is disrupted and then redefined following the outbreak of the First World War.

An internal comparison alone between the three opening plates reveals the weavings and junctures that unravel through images throughout all the plates that make up the Atlas. In this sense, plates A, B and C as the introduction to *Mnemosyne*, point by illustration to the cultural, geographical and historical context of the entire Atlas: the oscillation between the opposite poles of rationality and mathematics, and magic and religion, and the evolutionary lines that lead from astrological superstition to the technological conquest of the heavens, from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe.

<sup>1</sup> A. Warburg, *Mnemosyne Einleitung* (1929), in M. Warnke (Hrsg.), *Aby Warburg. Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2000, pp. 3–6; En. tr. by M. Rampley, “The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past,” in *Art In Translation* 1.2, July 2009, pp. 273–283; now also in “Engramma”, 142, February 2017.



## PLATE A

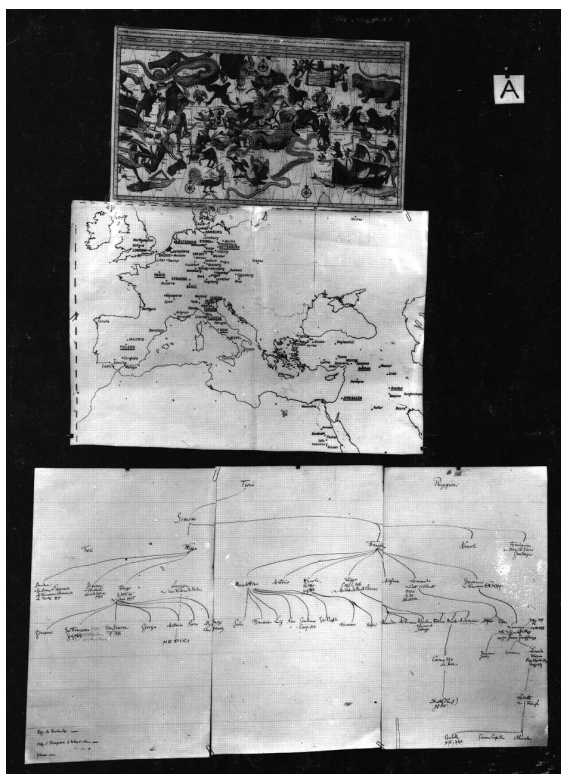
The grid-like scheme of plate A shows astrology as a star, a cosmography that reflects on topography and genealogy and different ways of controlling the heavens, space and human evolution, giving them form and sense. The first plate that opens *Mnemosyne* offers an initial general overview of the historical, geographical, and gnoseological co-ordinates of the Atlas.

The plate, which is probably the most enigmatic of the three, suggests a methodological relationship between the different applications of the same cartographical logic: the recognition of constellations in the heavens by joining up luminous dots of stars in the shape of man and animals; drawing maps and routes on earth; drawing family trees that represent relationships between members of one family, chosen as an example.

Just three figures suffice to displays, according to Warburg's notes for the plate, the "different systems of relations with which man is connected": cosmic, with the sky represented via its constellations; earthly, where the signs of western culture around the Mediterranean Basin are disseminated; genealogical, with the ramifications of the family tree of one of the most powerful families of the Italian Renaissance, schematized as a paradigm within a microcosm.

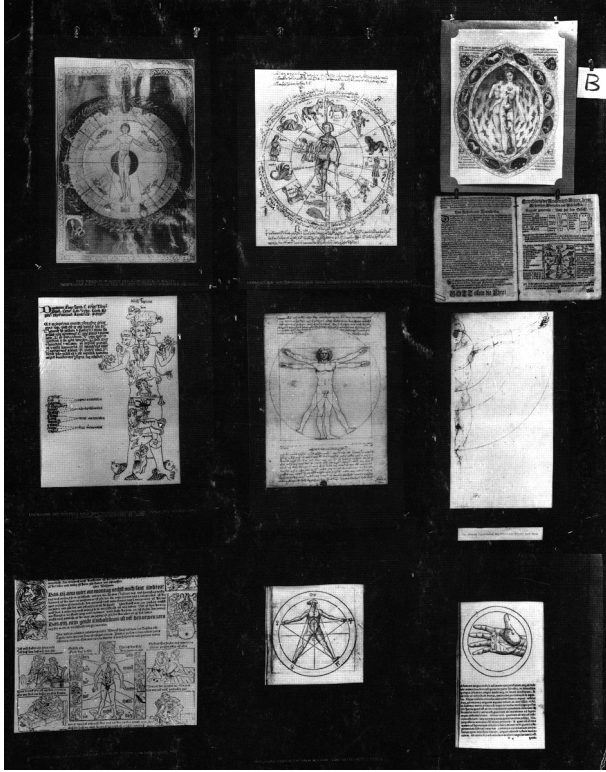
The plate shows from top to bottom, an image of the sky populated by mythological characters; a map that, in order to illustrate transmigrations between North and South, and East and West, starts at Cyzicus and Alexandria, and ends in Hamburg, where Warburg was born; the bottom of the page shows the ancestry of the Medici-Tornabuoni family, during the Renaissance.

The itinerary for reading the plate starts from the top, and travels downwards taking the reader from a general horizon progressively through to a human dimension embodied in the individuals belonging to a specific historical and social context: from the heavens to earth, from earth to mankind; from cosmology to geography, from geography to genealogy, in a process of gradually focalizing specifically on the relationship between subject and object, man and world.



Mnemosyne Atlas,  
Plate A, London,  
Warburg Institute  
Archive

## PLATE B



Mnemosyne Atlas,  
Plate B, London,  
Warburg Institute  
Archive

In plate B, the eye is drawn to one of the central themes of the preceding plate: the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, and the shifts in this system of relations.

Plate B includes astrology in the relationship between the micro and macrocosm, which, from its pagan conception in late antiquity, reappears in the Middle Ages, transfigured into the figurative language of Christianity, to re-emerge during the Renaissance and recover in part its ancient meaning (the first image on the panel is an illustration of a vision by Hildegard of Bingen).

The ten images pinned to plate B demonstrate and highlight a feature common to them all: the centrality of the human body which is placed at the centre of most of the images. The items displayed on the plate are placed in a discontinuous chronological order: mediaeval illustrations and

drawings of two Renaissance masters, treatises on traditions of magic and the occult, and the survival of iatro-astrology into the C18th. In the sequence, the oscillations between different stages of interdependence between microcosm-macrocosm and an unstable equilibrium between the heavens and the earth are made clear.

The brief note left by Warburg and his collaborators as a comment on the plate explains that it deals with: "Different degrees of the cosmic system's influence on Man. Harmonic correspondences. Later, conversion of harmony to abstract geometry, rather than one that is cosmically determined (da Vinci)."

Warburg himself, then, tells us in his note, what the main theme of the montage is, and its compositional meaning: astral influences that bind man's body to "harmonic correspondences". It is significant that he stresses the moment when, during the Renaissance revolution, Man understands the harmony that binds his body to the cosmos as being a series of norms which give rise to geometric abstractions rather than a burden of "cosmically determined" influences.

Together with the note on plate B, the significance of the montage can also be deciphered by the text of the conference that Warburg held on 25 April 1925,



which has recently been published in Italian together with accompanying iconographic materials, some of which coincide with the images on the plate. The opening lines of this invaluable text read: “The rediscovery of classical antiquity was not a phenomenon generated in workshops, but a process of conflict between a new vitality and the survival of what preceded it”<sup>1</sup>. The antiquity that asserted itself, demonically transformed by astrology into religious matter, gave Warburg scope for clearly understanding the rebirth of antiquity as the result of modern Man’s attempt to free himself of practices in Hellenistic magic.

In the montage, the two Renaissance works by Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer respectively – two examples of “modern Man’s attempt to free himself” – are surrounded by various images taken from manuscripts and later printed works ascribable to the tradition of daemonic astrology in which the body of *homo zodiacalis* appears, fully or in part, to be surrounded, marked and constellated by astrological and planetary signs.

In the plate, it is possible to identify three thematic itineraries: the first is cosmological, the second anthropometrical and the last is magico-apotropaic. From the beginning, plate B represents astrology as astropathy, articulated into the derived practices of astrodiagnostics and astrotherapy, and finally becoming the esoteric magic of astrophilia. At the centre of the montage are placed the Renaissance figures of *hominis dignitas* by Leonardo da Vinci and Dürer, the only ones that are free of astral *religio* and who, conversely, impose upon the cosmos their own proportions and limits. With the emergence of the two Renaissance images, man is no longer conceived as the passive victim of a conflict between demonic forces fighting for control of his body. He actively takes part in the battle to re-establish the balance between subjection and cosmic forces.

However, the conquest of equilibrium is never final. The positioning of the two images from *De occulta philosophia* by Agrippa von Nettesheim at the end of the plate illustrates the drift towards astropathy and its magico-esoteric cures.

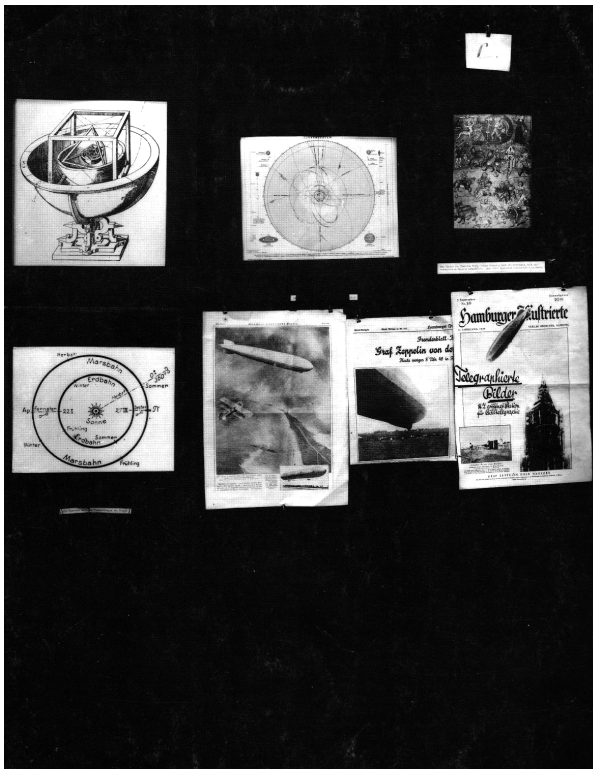
The subject of plate B, therefore, is the incessant oscillation between classical rationality, which Warburg called “Athens”, and “Alexandria”, the name he uses for the spatial and temporal dimension of Hellenistic irrationality. In his essay *Ancient and pagan divination in the time of Luther*, Warburg writes: We live in the age of Faust when modern scientists, oscillating between magical practices and cosmological mathematics, endeavour to gain for their space for thought that separates them from their object in order to contemplate it dispassionately. Athens must always be conquered afresh from Alexandria<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A. Warburg, *L'effetto della “Sphaera Barbarica” sui tentativi di orientamento cosmici dell'Occidente* (Conferenza del 25 aprile 1925), in A. Warburg, *Per monstra ad sphaeram*, a cura di D. Stimilli e C. Wedepohl, Milano 2014, pp. 43–105.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. A. Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten*, “Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften”, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1920, 26, Heidelberg 1920 (GS I, 487–558; Renewal 597–697)

With his montage of plate B, Warburg invites us to acknowledge the oscillation, even within the same historical and cultural era, during the Renaissance between the recovery of the space for thought (*Denkraum*) and its loss, and “the founding act of human civilization”<sup>1</sup>, which for Warburg coincides with the creation of distance between the self and the external world.

## PLATE C



Mnemosyne Atlas,  
Plate C, London,  
Warburg Institute  
Archive

Plate C is dedicated mainly to the power of Mars, and its theme is the discovery of astronomical mathematics and the simultaneous survival of the magical and demonic aspects of the influence of the planets. The plate has an apparently linear and progressive layout: from the earliest conquests of modern science (the representation of planetary orbits, their trajectories and measurements based on Kepler) to its latest achievements (the transmission of images via telegraphy). The focus is on the power of the various means of representation and reproduction (machinery of technology) and on the resulting enhanced ability to transmit figurative ideas (“pictorial slogans” – *Schlafbilder* – is an expression of Warburg’s and refers to the circulation of images).

The layout of the six images occupies just a part of the upper region of the plate (it should be remembered, however, that the 1929 version

of the Atlas was a dummy run), and follows a dialectical rather than a linear sequence.

The montage opens with engravings representing orbits of the planets, and, in particular, the elliptical orbit of the planet of war giving the lie to the composure of the cosmos represented with its concentric spheres. The engravings compared with images taken from contemporary tabloids representing the Zeppelin airship accomplishing the feat of circumnavigating the world, recount the story of man’s attempt to measure the heavens, conquer them and rule routes through them. At the same time, the inclusion of a miniature taken from a German manuscript of the second half

<sup>1</sup> A. Warburg, *Mnemosyne Einleitung* (1929), cit.

of the Quattrocento representing Mars and his bellicose sons, (“the wayward sons of Mars” in the caption), is a reminder that, despite technological and scientific achievements, it is always necessary to reckon with the irrational and destructive influence of Mars.

Plate C opens with two illustrations taken from the works of Kepler: even if he had still based his *Mysterium Cosmographicum* on what had until then been accepted as undisputed laws controlling the solar system – uniformity, regularity and the circularity of the movement of the celestial bodies subordinated to a divine principle – in his *Astronomia nova* of 1609, he used empirical data from astronomical observation to confirm that the theory was untenable. Kepler then decided to study the movement of Mars, with the courage to overcome a primitive fear applied to mathematics, and introduced a new solution to calculate the movements of its orbit: the ellipse. Thus, the antagonist of the representation of the cosmos as spherical, perfect and orderly is Mars, and the discovery of the planet’s elliptical trajectory revolutionises the Platonic notion of the harmony of the spheres. The formal constant in plate C is the ellipse, from the shape of the planet’s orbit to the contour of the airship. The heroes of this story, who with their scientific knowledge and their courage succeed in taming the heavens, are Kepler, and, featuring in the closing images of the plate, Count von Zeppelin, and the aviator-entrepreneur Hugo Eckener.

By including an image of the airship Warburg, tells the story of a wonderful invention whilst recalling its prismatic nature: technology can serve destruction. Indeed the airship was used as a bomber during the First World War, while at the same time it can be an instrument of knowledge and communication between people. Indeed we know that in 1929 Eckener circumnavigated the world.

The theme of war is strongly present in plate C, also for this reason the three panels have been part of the exhibition *Mars’ sons. A B C of the war in atlases* by Aby Warburg, Ernst Jünger and Bertolt Brecht, organized by the Centro studi classicA at Iuav University of Venice, in which the works of the three different authors were compared with respect to the theme of representation of the world during the War.

The three atlases or primiers of these authors: Warburg’s *Bilderatlas* (1929), Jünger’s *Veränderte Welt* (1933), and Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel* (1933–1947), are conceived as answer to the revolution of space, time, and perception triggered by the First World War, they constitute an historical-critical and spiritual ‘orientation tool’, in the new era that begins with the twentieth century. In the face of formidable violence of war, as an alternative to aphasia, to the folding in silent pain, they give words to image to rename the world after its destruction.

The main theme proposed in the first three plates of the *Bilderatlas* is the need for *Orientierung*: orientation. *Orientierung* is almost a technical term in Warburg’s lexicon and implies the attempt to discover designs in the heavens and on earth that enable man to plot routes in the search for interior as well as exterior order, giving shape and limitations to

the frightening world, and to the anxiety caused by the demons that inhabit not only the heavens above but also those that dwell inside us, disturbing the psyche.

Plates A, B and C indicate that finding one's bearings is essential in order to understand the purpose of a journey which is always about migration and return. Warburg borrows from Kant's 1786 essay *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*<sup>1</sup> the notion that finding one's bearings is "to determine when leaving a certain part of the world (one of the four which make up the horizon), where the other parts are, especially the orient". To orient oneself is, therefore, having to decide where the orient is, and reflecting on the continuous to and fro between the East and the West, from one shore to the other of the Mediterranean, displayed at the centre of Plate A as a liquid area through which the classical tradition flows.

In panels A B and C, the theme of orientation is intimately linked to the theme of astrology and its scientific evolution with the astronomy of Kepler. Astrology plays with the relationship that binds man to the cosmos, together with the unceasing effort by man to extricate himself from the need for that bond. The relationship between freedom and necessity with regard to destiny is expressed in the motto, coined by Warburg, "*Per monstra ad sphaeram*" and chosen as an *ex libris* when his beloved friend Franz Boll – the author of *Sphaera*, an essential text for Warburg's analysis of Schifanoia – died. It is a play on words that echoes a famous line by Seneca "*Per aspera sic itur ad astra*" (*Hercules Furens* II, 437), from which in antiquity the proverb "*Per aspera ad astra*" had already been taken.

As regards the Latin source, the change Warburg made by coining a new motto is particularly significant: the adversities one has to survive in order to reach the stars are not just the impervious and difficult routes of the journey; they are also horrible monsters – *monstra*, whose demonic power man has been called to overcome. "*Per monstra ad sphaeram*": the three plates grouped together speak of man's disquiet at being subjugated to the *monstrum*, and of the prospect of ambiguous freedom from that bond that will come with the scientific contemplation of the stars.

For those who enter into the Atlas, the group of Plates A, B and C orientate into the forest of the Atlas whilst simultaneously confirming that the compositional process and the interactive nature of each plate, and *Mnemosyne* as a whole, is greatly complex.

Plates A, B and C advise in advance that the entire Atlas is a journey, a jungle of excursions that cannot be simplified, on pain of tearing apart the discontinuous threads of memory. Through images we are told that the radiating boundaries and the map of the journey are not rigidly fixed and defined. Around the Mediterranean, the routes are drawn by the continuous convergence and separation of journeys between East and West, which at times merge, becoming one path, and are then attracted into other orbits.

<sup>1</sup> I. Kant, *Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?* (1786), *Berlinische Monatschrift Mill*, pp. 304–30; ed. and En. tr. by A.W. Wood, G. di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–18.

In the western tradition – from Classical Greece to Hellenism, from Hellenism to Christianity, via the Middle Ages, up to the Renaissance and modernity – nothing is definite and the ways phenomena appear and disappear are always dynamic and reversible: signs and forms survive only if they withstand the experience of the journey, whether through space or time, and the permeable boundary between East and West that alone sanctions transmigration – physical, conceptual and symbolic. The survival, whether apparent or submerged, is evidence that tradition is not preserved and guarded, nor confined to museums; even when motifs survive merely in the shape of an engram, if they are strong enough, they can defend themselves.

#### ABBREVIATIONS AND EDITIONS

##### GS I

A.M. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. by G. Bing, with the collaboration of F. Rougemont, Teubner, Leipzig-Berlin 1932; new edition by H. Bredekamp, M. Diers, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1998.

##### Renewal

A.M. Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, ed. by K.W. Forster, En. tr. by D. Britt, K.W. Forster, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles 1999.

Pavel Nosachev

## LINKS OF A GOLDEN CHAIN: IMAGES OF THE HERMETIC TRADITION IN ETIC APPROACHES<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that the name of this paper references the well-known research concept proposed by the British cultural historian Frances Yates. For Yates, the hermetic tradition was “a beautiful and consistent line of development”<sup>2</sup> of the cult of the cosmos, which accompanied the theoretical and practical system of magic concentrated in the works of the hermetic corpus. She traced this line from its beginning in late Antiquity through the entire Middle Ages to the Renaissance, when “the return to the occult was the stimulus for original science”,<sup>3</sup> forming the basis of natural sciences of the New Age. This picture was a construct produced by Yates to explain the role and place of Western esotericism in the culture of the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> To a certain

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Yates, *Dzhordano Bruno i gerneticheskaya traditsiya* [Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition] (Moscow: NLO, 2000), 398.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that contemporary scholars deliberately refused Yates's term “hermeticism” as applied to the history of esoteric teaching, in the same way that they refused the more widely used term “occultism”, preferring the phrase “Western esotericism”. Wouter Hanegraaff explained this phenomenon in detail in one of his works: “In the second half of the fifteenth century, in the context of the Italian Renaissance, interest was renewed in various forms of paganism of late antiquity. One example was Neoplatonism, understood by Renaissance thinkers not simply as philosophy in the modern academic sense but as a religious system, which included a type of religious magic known as theurgy. Another example was so-called hermetic philosophy, the founding works of which (known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*) were available and translated to Latin. [...] Influential Christian religious thinkers and philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola considered these sources, in essence, to be in agreement with Christian revelation. [...] Christian perception of and reflection on such non-Christian sources led to the appearance of a new syncretic spirituality, which is often called Renaissance hermeticism. [...] A syncretic spiritual movement based on the mutual enrichment of Christian and Jewish traditions was also closely associated with this new type of “hermetic” Christianity [...], the result being known as the Christian kabbala. [...] Together with Christian hermeticism, it became the basis of the Renaissance

extent she understood its conditionality. Later, researchers would refute a number of Yates's assumptions, demonstrating that there was no single line of the hermetic tradition through history.<sup>1</sup> But Yates was not the only author who posited that Western esotericism was a single tradition which existed throughout the history of Western civilisation. This paper attempts to summarise the history of so-called "etic" approaches within this tradition.

We should first explain that the term "etic" has no semantic relationship to ethics. It was borrowed by the linguist Kenneth Pike from phonetics, the field of linguistics which studies the sonic structure of language. The etic describes the synthesis, classification and systematisation of a certain group of data, while its opposite – the emic – describes a single, concrete element in the system. In the field of anthropological research, Pike's terms acquired a somewhat different context. The emic level of description came to mean stating assertions, terminology and concepts in the same way as the researcher's subjects. Accordingly, the etic level means stating the assertions, terminology and concepts of the researcher. Here, we will consider notions of the esoteric tradition which were formed outside the scholarly circles of Western esotericism. They have a rich history: this paper will set out only key moments, beginning with the earliest conception of the single tradition, which appeared in the first centuries of the Common Era.

Early Christianity comprised a range of scholars, combining various interpretations of Christ's mission, of the essence of the church, of humankind's place in the world and its relationship to God, and so on. One of the first stages of the formation of the boundaries of the church, with a division between orthodoxy ("right opinion") and heresy (the distortion of that opinion) was Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon's *Against Heresies*, in which he contrasted the true church with a certain false structure. In his work, the key principle of the separation of truth from falsehood was the idea of succession. According to Irenaeus, the true church could be traced back to Christ and his appointment of the apostles, who, in turn, appointed their successors, the bishops, and through this line orthodoxy and the understanding of the sacraments were disseminated. Opposed to this was another line of succession which went back to Simon Magus, who is mentioned in Acts (8:9-24). According to Irenaeus, Simon was the first Gnostic, distorting and perverting the teachings of Christ, deliberately supplementing them with pagan elements, and deifying himself. Simon also had disciples, who formed an alternative Christian line of succession. This line developed in coexistence with the Christian church and was named Gnosis by Irenaeus, who called its adherents Gnostics.

project of purified Christian magic or occult philosophy, in the context of which Christian symbolic systems were enriched with new elements derived from astrology, natural magic and alchemy."

(Wouter Hanegraaff, "Dreams of Theology" in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 725–726). This diverse synthesis was named Western esotericism.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description see: Brian Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).



The aim of this paper is not a historical analysis of this concept. We will simply note that it is now the subject of much criticism. The majority of researchers believe that Irenaeus was the first to construct the opposition heresy-orthodoxy and introduced the term Gnosis to the history of thought. The idea became sufficiently widespread within late Christian theology, especially the part which was focused on apologetics, the defence of the true faith against the outside world. In the twentieth century, it acquired a clear structure in which the concept of "anticlericalism" was formed, comprising a single line of succession from the Gnostics to contemporary new religions. Normally, authors' use of the concept of anticlericalism is based on two premises on which they have not reflected: (1) that all esotericism arises out of contact between people and evil spirits; and (2) that esotericism is a form (of education?) which has a long history and a "tree-like" structure. Such authors attribute the beginning of esotericism to the alternative way of life which the serpent proposed to Adam and Eve in Heaven: "and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). The idea of being god without God personifies esotericism. And as its beginning lay in direct contact between humankind and Satan, all subsequent manifestations are based on the renewal of this contact. Renewal is consolidated within the bounds of secret societies, which derive from the pre-Christian era, but continue to exist legitimately through Gnosticism, the medieval heresies, the Rosicrucians, the freemasons, theosophy, anthroposophy, and so on, up to contemporary new age representatives. Consequently, within contemporary Christian apologetic literature, the idea of a shadowy (in relation to the church) tradition of secret societies is almost normative. This idea has, evidently, influenced the origin of untheological theories in which the question of the esoteric tradition is posed in the same way.

One of the first such theories was devised by Carl Jung, who researched various aspects of Western esotericism over many years. This research was directly related to his theory of the collective unconscious. Jung understood the collective unconscious not as a field common to everyone, like the spiritual world, but as a system of form-images which all people possess and which are expressed as archetypes. The presence of such images for everyone makes them not only collective but sees them manifested as dreams and forces people to express them in mythological form. Dream and myth share a certain common pattern, which lies within a person, and it is this pattern which is the content of the collective unconsciousness. Jung spurned Freud's extremely reductionist rationalism, which removed from the sphere of serious research philosophy, religion and anything which he could not explain: everything which works primarily with mythological images. To spite Freud, Jung wanted psychology to become the foundation for a union of all systems of human knowledge and to overcome fragmentation and disunity. For Jung, Western esotericism was an important part of the development of humankind and, for him, its main problem lay in the fact that, over the centuries, the minds of the new era tirelessly ignored it.

Jung drew up a whole philosophical history, combined with his psychological theory. In this historiography, Christianity was allotted the place



of consciousness and esotericism the unconscious. If one recalls Freud's scheme of psychological recovery—"Where Id was, Ego shall be – then it is obvious that for a culture to heal it must acknowledge its unconscious, marginal baggage. Jung sets out a line of succession from the Neoplatonists and Gnostics of the first centuries of the Common Era through alchemy to the spiritualist, mesmerist and neo-gnostic movements of his time. He characterized the situation as follows: "From 1918 to 1926 I was seriously interested in the Gnostics, who also touched on the world of the unconscious, addressing its essence, which evidently sprang from the nature of instinct. It is difficult to say how they got to that point as there are very few surviving proofs and most of those are from the opposing camp, the church fathers. I doubt that any kind of psychological concepts could arise among the Gnostics. Their aims were too far from mine for any kind of link between me and them to be observed. The Gnostic tradition seemed to me to be interrupted. For a long time, I could not build any sort of bridge between them or the Neoplatonists and modernity. Only when I began to study alchemy did I observe that it is historically linked to Gnosticism and that thanks to it there appeared a definite succession between the past and the present. With its roots in naturo-philosophy, medieval alchemy became that bridge which, on one side, related to the past and the Gnostics and on the other to the future, to contemporary psychology of the unconscious".<sup>1</sup> This quote demonstrates that Jung's psychology was intended to include a procedure for healing humankind through the integration of the unconscious (gnosis) and the conscious (Christianity). It is worth noting that the esoteric tradition plays an extremely important role in his psychological theory. In essence, it is the unconscious of humankind, displaced as a result of the historical process and expressing itself in the neurosis of enlightened rationalism, which resulted in a series of cataclysms in the history of the twentieth century. Such a vision of the esoteric tradition had considerable influence on the Eranos circle, formed at Jung's behest and including, in particular, Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem and Henry Corbin. In many ways, circle members saw their participation as a form of continuing the work of the ancient Gnostics. It is no accident that Corbin suggested for them the slogan "Heretics of the world unite".<sup>2</sup>

After Eranos, the study of esotericism went in various directions, but in the last decades of the twentieth century the majority of researchers came to the conclusion that it is not possible to speak of an unbroken line of tradition within Western esotericism, because the phenomenon is contradictory, heterogeneous and can be considered a construct which appeared in historiography. However, not all contemporary researchers refused the idea of tradition. The American author Arthur Versluis devised an original conception of succession through text.

<sup>1</sup> Carl Jung, *Vospominaniya, snovideniya, razmyshleniya* [Memories, Dreams, Reflections] (Kiev: Sinto: 1994), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 31.

For Versluis, the entire Western esoteric tradition has two basic components: “1. Gnosis or gnostic insight, i.e. knowledge of hidden or invisible worlds or aspects of existence (including cosmological or metaphysical gnosis); 2. Esotericism, meaning that this hidden knowledge is either clearly prescribed for a relatively small group of people or implicitly, autonomously limited by its complexity or subtlety”.<sup>1</sup> If the second component is understandable on a particular level – esotericism is the realm of closed groups of adepts and as such is in contrast with religions which are open to all – the first, gnosis, requires explanation. Versluis believes that it is this characteristic which defines esotericism as a phenomenon.

Gnosis is considered here in the original meaning of the term: not as knowledge received as a result of study of an external object, not as a collection of data, but as the experience of spiritual communication with another higher reality. In this way, knowledge is understood as an experience of that which is cognised. Experience gives knowledge and knowledge is experience. Gnosis is heterogeneous. It can be divided into two types: cosmological and metaphysical.

Metaphysical gnosis is defined by Versluis as “insight into the divine”,<sup>2</sup> and it too is divided into two types: visionary (corresponding to the *via positiva* of Dionysius the Areopagite) and unitive (corresponding to the *via negativa*). “The *via positiva*, or visionary approach, goes through images and the field of the imagination; the *via negativa*, or unitive approach, is the falling away of all images”.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, metaphysical gnosis gives rise to multiple poetic and artistic representations of the internal experience of the visionary, the source of which is the world of the imagination. These representations communicate the unique knowledge of the Divine which the visionary receives through gnosis. Cosmological gnosis is in itself called upon to carry definite knowledge of the fundamentals of the universe and is defined by Versluis as “insight into the hidden patterns in the cosmos”.<sup>4</sup> It opens up to experience the truly deep foundations of the world by experiencing that world and finds its reflection in such teachings as alchemy, astrology, hieromancy, geomancy and so on. Versluis stresses that his proposed division of gnosis is to a certain extent tentative and all its variety comes down to the single principle of experienced knowledge of the Supreme Being.

In this way, Versluis actually speaks of the existence of a certain “esoteric tradition”. He postulates gnosis as humankind’s experience of knowledge of a higher reality and, accordingly, he postulates that this Higher Reality actually exists. Versluis confirms that he knows of contemporary lines of thought which plainly state that there is no link between various teachings

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham: Rowman Littlefield, 2007), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Versluis, *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, and Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

and groups within Western esotericism. He completely the arguments which demonstrate that such links are impossible, but considers that precisely because of their refusal to understand esotericism primarily as a particular type of spiritual experience, earlier scholars could not propose another form of existence for the golden chain (*Aurea Catena*) of adepts.<sup>1</sup> Versluis names this form ahistorical continuity,<sup>2</sup> the existence of which is possible thanks to initiation through text. Versluis notes that “if the term initiation is taken to mean the awakening of higher levels of consciousness, then the written word can serve this function. [...] It seems obvious that poetry is intended not simply for description but also for awakening those types of consciousness which it expresses. I consider such an awakening to be an initiation”.<sup>3</sup>

Versluis thinks that the basis for understanding a text in the “Western esoteric tradition” is a story from the Book of Revelation in which St. John, before beginning to describe his recent visions, eats a book, which he is told by an angel “shall make your belly bitter, but it shall be in your mouth sweet as honey” (Revelation 10:9). Versluis interprets St. John’s eating the book as receiving internal knowledge or, in his words, “gnosis”: it is the receiving of this knowledge which enables his readers to understand the Revelation. In other words, according to Versluis the Book of Revelation contains the possibility of initiative experience, opening up to the reader the essence of the book in the same way it was opened up to St. John. This is how gnosis spreads within the “Western esoteric tradition”, creating the tradition in this way. According to him, initiation is not a rite of passage, but the acquisition of internal knowledge through reading literature created by gnostic authors who embedded in the book the possibility of such an experience for the reader.

One of the American author’s favourite comparisons is the parallel between Buddhist *koan* stories and initiation through text. A *koan* is a completed, lexically formalised expression which enables those meditating on it to have a concrete spiritual experience of Buddhist enlightenment. Versluis stresses that *koan* stories are far from irrational. They have two layers: the everyday reality of the human world (expressed through language) and the reality of the other world (grasped through the experience of meditation on the *koan*). In the West, in the absence of real initiatory traditions in literature such as the *koan*, the two layers of existence – the everyday and the sublime – combined. A reader of such a text through the achieved the sublime via the everyday level and, in this way, became part of the golden chain of knowledge accessible only to adepts, or gnosis.

Versluis is not the only contemporary scholar to have examined the phenomenon of the unity of esotericism. Ioan Petru Culianu, Elaide’s successor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, also put forward a theory regarding the unity of Western esotericism, but he suggested that the path of unity lay not outside (dependent on the form of organisation of society

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 141.

or of receiving information) but inside a person. The stimulus for this theory was Culianu's interest in the history of dualistic teachings in the West. In his 1992 work *The Tree of Gnosis*, he decided to subject it to detailed analysis. Unfortunately, due to his tragic death, this was also his final analysis. In this work, Culianu elaborated a particular morphodynamic theory of religion, within which the key point was once again the history of gnosis, as a fundamental teaching for understanding the dynamics of the history of Western religion.

Culianu's teacher, Ugo Bianchi, had posited the idea of defining gnosis as a system of invariants based on Levi-Strauss's structuralism. Believing that anti-cosmic dualism was one of the fundamentals of gnosis, he formed an entire theory of dualistic movements – from Gnosticism to Catharism – which shared the ideas of anti-cosmism, anti-somatism, reincarnation, Encratism and Dochetism. But Culianu was not wholly in agreement with Bianchi's theory because detailed research into Gnosticism had led him to observe numerous subtleties, including those which demonstrate that “some Gnostic doctrines, whether we define them as dualistic or not, are not ‘anti-cosmic’, they limit themselves to attributing the creation of human ecosystems to lower powers [...]”.<sup>1</sup>

The main problem for researchers of all types is to explain the fact that in Gnosticism one finds numerous mythological, doctrinal parallels with Judaism, Christianity, Platonism and other contemporaneous religious and philosophical systems. Earlier scholars tended towards the idea of diffusionism, in which separate cultural influences are formed as a result of the convergence of ideas and stories from various cultures. Another version of this approach is more straightforward and suggests that traditions are borrowed from other systems, in some cases proposing the existence of a chain of succession. Culianu did not accept either explanation. One can endlessly seek parallels, and a painstaking researcher can find them easily, but their existence is not evidence for real contact between cultures and their mutual influence. For Culianu, the key to the similarities of various teachings lies in humans. They are a single species, with a single system of thought which has a single set of mechanisms and, accordingly, the cultural and religious traditions humans engender may also have similar characteristics, even if they did not intersect historically. As an interesting example of the systematic nature of the development of religious ideas, Culianu cites the history of Christological disputes, which charts the path of a choice between two logical oppositions: God and man. Their correlation, combination, consolidation and division produced the variety of Christological teachings which formed the life of the modern and ancient churches. Culianu believes that the explanation lies not in transcendentalism but in the human mind, the logical thought processes of which are always inclined to choose between the alternatives offered. However, one can also not choose

<sup>1</sup> Ioan Culianu, *The Tree of Gnosis: The Untold Story of Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 56.

but “dogmatise the paradox”,<sup>1</sup> a route taken by the undivided orthodox church. The human brain can take this route at any moment: the discussion of Christology with Chicago students led Culianu to observe that even seminar participants with little knowledge of history reproduced the same kind of views in relation to God and man in Christ and reopened up virtually the entire spectrum of Christological teachings based only on their own reason.<sup>2</sup> According to Culianu, a similar story took place with Gnosticism and with all other religions.

This happened with Western esotericism. For Culianu, within Western thought Gnosticism was a type of ur-teaching, which changed its masks and forms and could be found through the entire history of Western culture. He saw the history of religion as an area of incessant morphodynamics, in which the diverse original elements of humankind’s myths and notions about itself and the world were mixed in various combinations, producing a multitude of religious teachings. Gnosticism was one of the first such mergings in the history of Western culture. Culianu notes that “Gnosticism is not a monolithic doctrine but simply a set of transformations belonging to a multidimensional, variable system that allows room for illimitable variation. This system is based on varying inherited assumptions which are stable but open to interpretation, among which the myth of the Book of Genesis is the most widely distributed. [...] But Gnostics do not found a real tradition, based on hermetic succession and, in some way, they can be defined as ‘invariants’”.<sup>3</sup> Can we speak about Gnosticism as a single phenomenon? Thanks to Culianu, we can. Or, rather, we cannot essentially define Gnosticism as something whole, but we can identify those revolutionary ideas which it introduced to culture in the first centuries of the Common Era, thus separating itself from other religious and philosophical movements of the era. According to Culianu, such features are rejection of two fundamental principles: “the first being the criterion of ecosystemic intelligence, the degree to which the universe in which we live can be attributed to an intelligent and good cause. The second is the anthropic principle, the affirmation of the commensurability and mutual link between human beings and the universe”.<sup>4</sup> To these features one can add the single method of interpreting bible stories used by all Gnostic trends, a method the scholar calls “inverse exegesis”.<sup>5</sup> In this interpretation, everything which has a positive character in the Bible is turned inside out and, in Gnosticism, has a negative meaning. The opposite is also true: that which is censured in the Bible is extolled in Gnosticism.

<sup>1</sup> Culianu notes that “Gnostics were more intellectually creative than their Christian opponents, who finally, and particularly when they had achieved sufficient power, decided to canonise the unresolved paradox of their belief”. (Ibid., 242.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., XIV.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., XV.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 121.

However, the dualistic teachings which exist in the history of the West do not fully comply with early Gnostic principles, and are their invariants. Manicheism, for example, shared almost all of its basic features with Gnosticism, but diverged on the idea of the ecosystemic principle. The Bogomils were never dualists. According to their teachings, the first elements, from which animate creatures appeared, were created by God and not the Devil. Our material universe is not the fruit of evil and, accordingly, in Bogomil theology there were no two sources which were in fact equal and coexisted in the form of incessant struggle. Such a view is inherent in Manichaeism, many Gnostic teachings and Paulicianism, but not in Bogomilism. In producing a colourful myth, elements of which are extremely similar to Gnosticism, the Bogomils did not create a strictly dualistic theology. In essence, they were not dualists and did not continue the line of succession from Gnosticism. There is a similar story with the Cathars, who were neither a continuation of Bogomilism nor a form of Gnosticism. According to Culianu, Cathar theology is reminiscent of Origen's thought. In fact, it is so similar, that the Chicago divinity scholar even writes of "the rebirth of Origenism in radical Catharism".<sup>1</sup> The Cathars were also no dualists, because in that world the Devil's work takes place with God's permission and, consequently, there can be no word of two sources.

This whole picture, with numerous invariants, demonstrates that for Culianu all human activity, whether religious, scientific or cultural, functions according to the principles of a game of chess, in which it is constantly necessary to choose from a multitude of possible variants. Theoretically the game can last for an infinite amount of time, but in life one very important factor always interferes: power. It is power which stops the game when a move begins to change the system of life. These ideas then become heretical and are subject to persecution. Blood is spilled, and Culianu is surprised that, in fact, "so much blood was shed for so little. All of these ancient heretics, unlike us, lived and died for a truth which was just one of a number of possible choices. [...] Their only sin was *thinking*. [...] Having lost in history, they lost not a game of minds but a game of power".<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, in the theory of morphodynamics we meet an uncompromising, reductionist model which completely rejects theories favoured by Jung and Versluis: of spiritual inspiration, the link to other realities, particular conditions of consciousness and a single, timeless Gnosis. For Culianu, everything is explained by the human brain, which functions according to the principles of a computer on which there is loaded a chess programme with the maximum possible number of variants. The external factor of the machine of compulsion interrupts the game at the point when the players become too engrossed. That said, with the help of this theory, Culianu explains why representatives of the etic and emic points of view considered the existence of a tradition of succession of secret knowledge to be possible.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 240.

The unity of the human mind and the way in which it functions were a guarantee of the realisation of such unity.

It seems that this digression into the history of the etic understanding of the existence of a single tradition in Western esotericism could be continued further, but our aim was simply to outline the basic landmarks in the history of religious studies in the twentieth century. This overview might be summed up as follows. At this time, there is no general agreement on the essence and functioning of the esoteric tradition, although the majority of contemporary scholars do not believe that it comprised an unbroken line of secret societies and adepts initiated into them. However, the idea of such a tradition has long become culturally established and this concept has been fertile ground for both mass and high art. Accordingly, from the point of view of cultural history, it is not so important whether a single golden chain of secret teachings exists, but that its image has played a defining role in Western culture.

Yury Rodichenkov

**THE WORLD OF THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE: ART,  
IMAGE AND IMAGINATION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF PARACELSUS<sup>1</sup>**

Could one think of anyone as famous yet as mysterious, so open still to numerous questions, the object of such never-ending arguments, as Paracelsus? This is the name by which we know the Swiss physician, alchemist and philosopher Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493–1541). But during his lifetime he was called many things. Aureol (from Latin *aureolus* – gold), perhaps because of the colour of his hair, perhaps because of his alchemical pursuits; the Luther of Medicine for his desire to radically reform the art of healing; even Cacophrastus, due to his use of harsh language, words impermissible in polite society, and his lack of moderation in argument.

Innate talent, vast practical experience, wide-ranging contacts with a variety of people, numerous travels – all contributed to create the phenomenon that is Paracelsus.

Many authors have written of Paracelsus' travels to different lands, mentioning places such as Ireland, England, Lithuania, Russia, Prussia, Poland, Hungary and Croatia. There is considerable doubt that he truly spent time in all these countries: though he probably did visit some of them, the list given in Paracelsus' curriculum vitae is clearly exaggerated. In the preface to his *Wundarznei* he himself provides a list: 'I did not content myself with lectures, manuscripts and books but sought to expand my knowledge during my travels in Granada, Lisbon, Spain and England, Brandenburg, Prussia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Wallachia, Transylvania, the Carpathians, the Wendian Mark, and other countries which there is no need to mention here.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> '... mich nit allein derselbigen leren und gschriften, büchern ergeben wöllen, sonder weiter gwandert den Granaten, gen Lizabon, durch Hispanien, durch Engeland, durch den Mark, durch Prüschen, durch Litau, durch Poland, Ungern, Walachi, Sibenbürgen, Crabaten, Windish mark, auch sonst andere lendr nit not zu erzölen...' Theophrast von Hohenheim, *Sämtliche Werke, I. Abteilung: Medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften*, ed. Karl Sudhoff, 14 vols, Berlin, 1922–1933, X: 19–20. See: Pirmin Meier, *Arzt und Prophet. Annäherungen an Theophrastus von Hohenheim*, Zurich, Ammann Verlag, 1993: 141.



Elsewhere, admittedly, in the *Spital-Buch*, the list is slightly different. Nor is there documentary evidence for such wide-ranging peregrinations.

Nonetheless, we can only be amazed by the incredible breadth and range of Paracelsus' interests. Along with medicine – the art of healing – he touches in his books on all kinds of branches of knowledge that were of interest to him: philosophy, ethics, astrology, theology, alchemy and much more. Least of all, perhaps, was Paracelsus concerned with artistic theory and though he wrote at length on art, he had no interest in theoretical discourse. Everything he says about the arts, about imagination and the source of creativity is in some way related to practice, while emphasising that practice could never be sufficient for success without an understanding of the essential truth. He sought to know and understand the world, as a whole and in all its separate manifestations. One modern writer, Pirmin Meier (b. 1947), wrote of Paracelsus that: 'He gave his energies to healing activity in the service of Science, the knowledge... found in nature.'<sup>1</sup>

Nature and mankind, matter and consciousness, the surrounding world and its image, natural and artificial – all these aspects of existence attracted our Swiss thinker's attention. Paracelsus also took a keen interest in the spiritual side of human life, although his ideas on the subject were far from unequivocal, at times even contradictory. On 5 October 1941 Carl Jung presented a paper on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Paracelsus in which he said: 'It is not easy to see this spiritual phenomenon in the round and to give a really comprehensive account of it. Paracelsus was too contradictory or too chaotically many-sided, for all his obvious one-sidedness in other ways.'<sup>2</sup>

Such a broad approach on the part of Paracelsus quite obviously meant that he could not avoid the subject of art in his thinking and his philosophical constructs. And since he could not conceive of medicine without philosophy, his philosophy was not mere empty words: in philosophising, Paracelsus laid the firm foundation for his own professional practice, the practice that gave his life meaning.

When Paracelsus uses the word 'art' it is obvious that he by no means always gives it the same meaning as we do today. Often he has in mind what was known in Antiquity as *techne* (Greek τέχνη), meaning not only the art form itself (music, painting and such like) but the physical craft of creation, and – of fundamental interest to Paracelsus – medical treatment. Moreover, over many centuries, art (great, royal or Hermetic) was a term used to describe alchemy, although this same sphere of activity was known equally as 'philosophy', 'learning' and 'science'.

So what did Paracelsus mean when he spoke of the arts? In one treatise, writing of the significance of the arts as divine gifts, Paracelsus enlarged

<sup>1</sup> 'Er strömt aus in heilende Tätigkeit im Dienste der Scientia, dem Wissen... in der Natur.' Meier, Op. cit.: 302.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Jung, 'Paracelsus als gestige Erscheinung', 1942, published in English as: 'Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon', in: *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, XIII: *Alchemical Studies*, tr. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967: 111.

on the scope of the concept, asserting: '... and all arts of the earth are divine, [and] are from God; and nothing from any other foundation. For the Holy Spirit is the igniter of the light of nature: for this reason, no one should condemn astronomy, no one alchemy, no one medicine, no one philosophy, no one theology, no one the [liberal] arts, no one poetry, no one music, no one geomancy, no one auguria, and so on for all the rest.'<sup>1</sup>

For Paracelsus, each of the arts – whether a practical craft, making music or treating the sick – was a gift from God himself. Writing about himself and about the skill in healing that he had been given, he wrote: 'The heavens did not make me a physician: God made me one. The heavens do not make physicians. It is an art that comes from God and not from the heavens.'<sup>2</sup> We should of course note that the scandalous doctor's approach to religion was somewhat unusual. Not only had he no wish to show formal respect for the authorities, but equally he had no desire to recognise formal Church ritualism. In his treatise 'On the Invisible Diseases', Paracelsus concluded: 'From this it follows that [there are] those to whom fasting and prayer can serve bad ends. This does not mean that fasting and prayer are for that reason bad things: what is bad is that which is added to it... By this I mean that we do not need any ceremonies.'<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Paracelsus was almost the first to describe the phenomenon of religious hysteria. That ritualism, those ceremonies that he saw as superfluous, could turn the virtues of faith into their exact opposite, into pharisaism, and could even lead to psychological ailments, which he called 'invisible diseases'. Pharisaian falsity and insincerity contradict the true essence of the world created by God. In another treatise, 'Paragranum', Paracelsus wrote: 'For inasmuch as God created the art[s] and gave them for the use of the human being, which is something no one can deny, art must dwell only in truth, and indeed in the certainty of truth, not in the desperation of art but rather in the certainty of the art. For God wants the human being to be truthful; not a doubter and liar.'<sup>4</sup>

That exclusivity and supreme value which comes from the Lord, felt Paracelsus, freed one from respect for Ancient authorities such as Avicenna and Galen, since their art did not accord with the truth of the world created by God. Paracelsus notes with a certain sarcasm that the chance of finding the knowledge needed in the writings of Galen and Avicenna was as high as that of a peasant finding something useful in a treatise by a learned agronomist. Tellingly, Paracelsus looked to artistic creations that were well known to his contemporaries in choosing examples to illustrate his words. With that some light sarcasm he wrote: 'It is as if someone wanted to learn to be

<sup>1</sup> Paracelsus, 'Paragranum', in: *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541). Essential Theoretical Writings*, ed. and tr. Andrew Weeks, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008: 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 91.

<sup>3</sup> Paracelsus, 'On the Invisible Diseases', in: *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541)*, *Op. cit.*: 919.

<sup>4</sup> Paracelsus, 'Paragranum', *Op. cit.*: 265.

a musicus<sup>1</sup> by relying on [the tale of] Tannhäuser and of Frau von Weißenburg.<sup>2</sup> Here Paracelsus had in mind the medieval tale of Tannhäuser, which had been published in a popular edition in 1515, and the legend and song of the Lady of Weißenburg. Since the song is known from a manuscript of 1524–1525 and since Paracelsus wrote ‘Paragranum’ in 1530–1531, we are led to ask if the famous physician and alchemist was not equally interested in folk art and the very latest developments in poetry. Although, of course, with regard to the Lady of Weißenburg, it is possible that he had in mind not the song but a medieval tale which would have been familiar long before.

A major role was played in the philosophy of Paracelsus by ideas about the visible and invisible. In many of his works he gives thought to the visible and invisible worlds, visible and invisible essences, visible and invisible diseases, and, finally, the visible and invisible parts of the human body. According to Paracelsus, ‘What is visible is the external, which is not essential.’<sup>3</sup>

We also find mention of visible and invisible images, which Paracelsus explains thus: ‘[Take] a piece of wood that lies before us. From it can be crafted an image [Bild] by the craftsman [Schnitzer] who takes from it that which does not accrue to it. This is to say that in the [piece of] wood there is an image which is not initially apparent.’<sup>4</sup> Paracelsus equates this creation of an image with divine creation. Though here he calls God ‘Highest Master Craftsman’,<sup>5</sup> responsible for creating everything, including mankind, in the right proportions and dimensions and of the necessary quality.

Paracelsus meditates on the roots and sources of art in a number of texts. In ‘Paramirum’, for instance: ‘[Take] the glazier or glass-maker – from whom does he have his art? Not from himself: one’s own reason is in no way capable of arriving at such a thing. Yet as soon as he took the subjects of his art and cast them into the fire, the light of nature showed him glass. That art has been encompassed in those containers. It is the same with the physician. Hence follows the second example. A carpenter builds a house: he can invent this himself out of his wisdom if he has wood and an axe.’<sup>6</sup> Paracelsus goes on to give thought to the art of the physician who, though armed with medical knowledge and with a patient to heal, lacks the necessary experience, and he concludes that art is something acquired during the process of creation. ‘Thus, just as the glassmaker has [received] his art of glassmaking from the fire, since he did not know beforehand what he was doing, but [in so doing] has retained the art, thus fire teaches the wisdom and art of medicine, which is the test of the physician.’<sup>7</sup> Paracelsus’ assertions thus

<sup>1</sup> The Latin word *musicus* can be translated both as ‘musician’ and as ‘poet’.

<sup>2</sup> Paracelsus, ‘Paragranum’, Op. cit.: 179.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 171.

<sup>4</sup> Paracelsus, ‘Paramirum’, in: *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541)*, Op. cit.: 387–389.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 389.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 309.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

lead one to conclude that no one can achieve success in any art (the range of understandings encompassed by that word being extremely broad) without talent given from above, but that divine gift alone is not sufficient, for one must travel the path to success, acquiring knowledge and experience on the way, mastering the necessary skills that come to the bearer of a divine gift only in the process of practice. In another treatise Paracelsus was to emphasise that: 'The art reveals itself through the things. It does not conceal itself.'<sup>1</sup>

Writing about the process of creation of any kind, Paracelsus repeatedly noted the importance of combining the visible and invisible in that process. 'However, I will have more to say about the invisible, about which first of all the following example should be heeded. The visible body has an effect on all things; and all of its motions and actions are seen by the human being. But all of this is only half of the action performed; it is only that which we see. The other half is seen by no one. It is performed by the invisible body. Imagine that a carpenter were to build a house with [what we will call] two bodies: In respect to the invisible one, he is building it in the image. With respect to the visible one, he is building that which is manifest.'<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside the extensive reflections that follow, we shall pick out Paracelsus' assertion that both the visible and the invisible body are present during the process of construction, of skilful creation or erection, each of them in accordance with its nature and purpose. The image created by the invisible body influences the work of the visible body, which is responsible for creating the material and tangible. What does Paracelsus mean by the word image? Interestingly, in explaining this concept he gives a definition, *impressio*, that is almost modern in gnosiological terms. 'Thus, your eyes see a house, and even when the house no longer stands before your eyes, you still see it.'<sup>3</sup> A modern philosopher might define *impressio* or 'impression' as the image of the object that arises through the direct effect of the latter on the sensory organs.

The visible and invisible bodies act in their own allocated spheres. The invisible creates images through imagination, the visible in the material world, on an earthly, even earthy, basis. 'A painter who wants to paint must have an earthly wall. A stonemason who wants to make things must have an earthly ground. The smithy needs an anvil of the earth. In sum, all of this means that whatever the human being makes, he has to make on something.'<sup>4</sup>

According to Paracelsus, a major role is played in the process of creation by imagination. Meditating on the participation of the visible and invisible bodies in creative activity, he directly relates the impact on physical bodies

<sup>1</sup> Paracelsus, 'On the Matrix', in: *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541)*, Op. cit.: 707.

<sup>2</sup> Paracelsus, 'On the Invisible Diseases', in: *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541)*, Op. cit.: 797–799.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 799.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 799–801

and the effect of the imagination, linking the image and work with material, earthly objects. The instruments and operations in the visible and invisible worlds are those relevant to each. As Paracelsus wrote: 'No art has been given by God without that which is necessary for its completion... The imagination is a craftsman in and of itself and possesses both the art and the entire equipment to make everything that it has in mind, whether it be cooperage, painting, metal working, weaving, or what have you. It is prepared and skilled for all these things. What else is needed? Nothing except the spheres in which it works: that is, the wall on which it paints what it chooses. There is nothing else that it lacks. It is so subtle and powerful that it is able to imitate everything that the eyes see and grasp, and indeed it can even accomplish things that the visible body cannot.'<sup>1</sup>

Writing about categories of imagination and impressions, Paracelsus relates them to concepts of the highest and lowest, to macrocosm and microcosm, to elevation and descent, in a way utterly in keeping with the principles of Hermeticism. 'What climbs up into heaven is *imaginatio*, and what falls down is *impressio* born out of the imagination.'<sup>2</sup> *Impressio* as understood by Paracelsus is not just the formation of some image in the consciousness, but rather an influence, an impression left by heavenly, macrocosmic influences on the microcosm, on the individual.

Paracelsus' ideas about imagination, which he sees as linking the visible and invisible worlds and as being a source of influence on material objects, were to have their own effect on many alchemical philosophers. In his famous *Alchemical Lexicon*, one of Paracelsus's followers, Martin Ruland (1569–1611), wrote: 'Imagination is the star within man, the heavenly or supra-heavenly body.'<sup>3</sup> In another article he explained what is meant by supra-heavenly bodies (*corpora supercoelestia*): 'Supra-heavenly bodies are those which are experienced by the mind only through imagination and not through physical vision. They are miraculous subjects of the effect of spagyria.'<sup>4</sup>

It is thought that it was Paracelsus who introduced – along with many other revolutionary innovations – the term spagyria, defining something which was, like alchemy, also described as an art. Scholars disagree as to the meaning of this word.

Many alchemists and scholars of alchemy see no difference between the two words spagyria and alchemy. Others differentiate between them. The Italian

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: 801.

<sup>2</sup> 'und das herauf kompt in himel, ist imaginatio und wider herab felt, ist impressio, die geboren ist aus der imagination.' English translation cited in: Heinz Schott, "'Invisible diseases' – Imagination and Magnetism', in: Ole Peter Grell, ed., *Paracelsus: the Man and his Reputation, his Ideas and their Transformations*, Leiden: Brill, 1998: 315.

<sup>3</sup> 'Imaginatio, est astrum in homine, coeleste sive supracoeleste corpus.' Martin Ruland, *Lexicon Alchemiae, sive Dictionarium Alchemisticum*, Frankfurt: apud Johannem Andream & Wolfgangi, 1612: 264.

<sup>4</sup> 'Corpora supercoelestia, sunt ea, quae per mentem in imaginatione solunt, & non per oculos carnos cognoscuntur. Spagyrorum subiecta sunt mirabilium operum.' Ibid.: 175.

alchemist, apothecary and physician Angelus Sala (1576–1612) wrote: ‘Spagyrian art makes up that part of chemistry which deals with natural bodies: vegetable, animal and mineral. Adepts of this art perform the necessary operations with the intention of applying these bodies in medicine.’<sup>1</sup>

With no doubt that the gift of art came from God, Paracelsus – probably in response to accusations of heresy and sorcery – raised an acute question in the treatise ‘On the Invisible Diseases’. It can be summarised thus. If all arts come from God, then how do we understand those arts that are viewed as dubious by Christianity, such as divination, fortune-telling, alchemy and such like? And how should the possessor of a gift deal with the fact that in using the art he has been given, and thus in helping others, he must violate all the rules, even biblical commandments? With all his innate wit and colourful expression, Paracelsus was unequivocal in his answer: ‘Let us suppose that the entire devil himself is involved in the art that comes into my hands. Yet the helping is in my hands as well. At that point, [the art] is no longer the devil’s. It is mine... For this reason, I can appropriately demonstrate what sort of things one has called “sorcery” and misrepresented with other names of the kind. We are called upon to help to another. Would it be wrong, if the devil were standing before me and I were to say to him: “Go help the horse out of the ditch in my stead,” and he did it? ... Rather, it would be in true faith that I would command the devil or a spirit to do such a thing... For it would be appropriate that the devil should be obedient to someone who is faithful.’<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Ars Spagyrica sit illa Chymiis pars, quae pro subjecto habet corpora naturalia Vegerabilium videlicet, Animalium, ac Mineralium: in quibus quicquid operatur, id ad utilem in Medicina finem tendit.’  
Angeli Salae, *Vicentini Opera medica-chymica hactenus separatim diversisque linguis excusa, nunc uno volumine, Latinoque idiomate edita*, Frankfurt: apud Hermannum à Sande, 1682: 221.

<sup>2</sup> Paracelsus, ‘On the Invisible Diseases’, Op. cit.: 903.

Ovanes Akopyan

**MARSILIO FICINO, NEOPLATONISM / HERMETICISM  
AND ICONOLOGY: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ESTABLISHED  
STEREOTYPES<sup>1</sup>**

The culture of the Renaissance continues to be shrouded in numerous myths. On the one hand this is perpetuated by the standard perception of the Renaissance as the age in which reason, science and the arts triumphed over superstition. On the other hand, we are told that the Renaissance did not create anything radically new, since the roots of all of its achievements can easily be identified in medieval culture. If the second assertion should be seen simply as a somewhat naive attempt to increase interest in the Middle Ages, the first remains deeply rooted in the public consciousness. This article looks at one myth about Renaissance culture, the victim of which is Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499).

Ficino, first translator of Plato and Plotinus into Latin and one of the leading thinkers of the second half of the fifteenth century, undoubtedly occupied a key place in Renaissance philosophy, which inevitably led to a variety of later interpretations and – or so it seems to me – notable distortions of his work.<sup>2</sup> Much has been done in recent years to return to the ‘authentic’ Ficino, unfettered by the heavy chains of those numerous commentaries that so often cloud our understanding of his own thinking,<sup>3</sup> yet these long-established

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> For a biography and general survey of Ficino’s work see: Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficino (1433–1499)*, Paris: Les belles lettres, 1958. On the fate of Ficino’s texts and oeuvre: Paul Oskar Kristeller, ‘Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years’, in: Gian Carlo Garfagnini, ed., *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, 2 vols, Florence: Olschki, 1986, II: 15–196.

<sup>3</sup> Several collections published over the last fifteen years have played an important part in this: Michael J.B. Allen, Valery Rees, eds, with Martin Davies, *Marsilio Ficino: his Theology, his Philosophy, his Legacy*, Leiden–Boston–Cologne: Brill, 2002; Stéphane Toussaint, Sebastiano Gentile, eds, *Marsilio Ficino: fonti, testi, fortuna*, Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2006; Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, Valery Rees, eds, *Laus Platonici Philosophi. Marsilio Ficino and his Influence*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2011. For many years Valery Rees has organised special Ficino sessions at the annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America. She is currently preparing *A Companion to Marsilio Ficino*, to be published by Brill.



stereotypes seem hard to uproot. Moreover, there is an entirely separate problem in that the scholarly literature traditionally and all too often mistakenly attributes to Ficino many phenomena in Renaissance literary culture. It seems to be *de rigueur* to make some reference to his writings and such were the breadth of his interests, the scope of his writings in the impressive *Opera omnia*, that with high-quality modern publications of his works readily accessible, it is easy to find a suitable quotation.<sup>1</sup> It soon becomes clear, however, that references of this kind are usually employed to bolster a particular scholar's own arguments and are in fact entirely unconnected to Ficino's own thoughts or the complex context of Florentine intellectual life in the second half of the fifteenth century. This author has come across many examples of such a superficial interest in Ficino's writings.<sup>2</sup> The textbook example is probably the popular and widely circulated concept of *dignitas hominis* which, though never a central subject in Ficino's philosophy or that of his younger contemporary Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), fits so well with contemporary understandings of so-called 'Renaissance humanism'.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I shall deal with three different questions. Above all, the Platonic Academy that supposedly existed in Florence, headed by Ficino. Secondly, the extremely influential viewpoint of Frances A. Yates regarding

<sup>1</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Marsilii Ficini florentini, insignis philosophi platonici, medici atque theologi clarissimi opera, in duos tomos digesta*, Basileae: ex officina Henricpetrina, 1576. Of the more recent publications of his works, we might cite: *Platonic Theology*, tr. Michael J.B. Allen with John Warden, Latin text ed. James Hankins with William Bowen, 6 vols, Cambridge, MA–London: Harvard University Press, 2001–2006; *Commentaries on Plato*, I, *Phaedrus and Ion*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen, Cambridge, MA–London: Harvard University Press, 2008; *Teologia platonica*, ed. Errico Vitale, Milan: Bompiani, 2011; *Commentaries on Plato*, II, *Parmenides*, ed. and tr. Maude Vanhaelen, Cambridge, MA–London: Harvard University Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Amongst the numerous possible examples we might cite Mikhail B. Yampolsky, *Ткач и визионер. Очерки истории репрезентации, или О материальном и идеальном в культуре* [Weaver and Visionary. Essays on the History of Representation, or On the Material and the Ideal in Culture], Moscow: NLO, 2007; Aleksandr V. Markov, 'Исихастское искусство толкования и ренессансный филолог Кристофоро Ландино' [The Hesychastic Art of Interpretation and the Renaissance Philologist Cristoforo Landino], in: *Правда. Память. Примирение. XV международные Успенские чтения* [Truth. Memory. Reconciliation. XV International Uspensky Readings], Kiev: Dukh i Litera, 2017: 201–13.

<sup>3</sup> On which see: Brian Copenhaver, 'The Secret of Pico's Oration: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26, 2002: 56–81; Ovanes L. Akopyan, 'Что такое "гуманизм"? От Ренессанса к современности' [What is 'Humanism'? Renaissance Ideas and Modern Interpretations], *Диалог со временем. Альманах интеллектуальной истории* 45 [Dialogue with Time. Almanach of Intellectual History 45], 2014: 117–130; Ovanes L. Akopyan, 'Ренессансная магия как духовное явление (на примере текстов конца XV–начала XVI вв.)' [Renaissance Magic as a Spiritual Phenomenon (The Example of Late Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-century Texts)], *Диалог со временем. Альманах интеллектуальной истории* 57 [Dialogue with Time. Almanach of Intellectual History 57], 2016: 76–92.

the dominance of the Hermetic tradition in the writings of a whole series of Renaissance thinkers from Ficino to Giordano Bruno. Lastly, I shall touch on the special but contradictory place in the history of Renaissance art and aesthetics traditionally allocated to Ficino since the first half of the twentieth century and still very much accepted today. As will be demonstrated, the shaping of these historiographical trends owed much to representatives of the school of Aby Warburg and the staff of the Warburg Institute, or scholars working closely with them. It may be that the longevity of these stereotypes was determined by the influential standing of those involved in their emergence. But the time has come to put an end to such myths, allowing us to take a fresh look at Renaissance culture in the second half of the fifteenth century and to rehabilitate Marsilio Ficino himself, revealing him to be a figure of even greater interest than is usually thought.

To take the first question, that of the Florentine Platonic Academy, we can firmly state that, in reality, it never existed. In the famous introduction to his translation of Plotinus' *Enneads*, Ficino states that when Georgius Gemistus (Pletho) attended the Council of Ferrara-Florence as part of the Byzantine delegation he made an indelible impression on the European humanists and supposedly prompted Cosimo de' Medici to revive the Platonic Academy.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth there were to be endless disputes as to the precise meaning of his words.<sup>2</sup> There is a widespread opinion that a whole group of thinkers gathered around Ficino, united by a common love for Platonic philosophy. This group supposedly included Cristoforo Landino, Angelo Ambrogini (Poliziano), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and many other leading figures in Florentine intellectual life of the second half of the fifteenth century. The most recent research, however, has convincingly shown that there was no such circle of like-minded thinkers around Ficino. Two of his younger and perhaps most famous contemporaries, Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola, repeatedly criticised Ficino quite openly.<sup>3</sup> There is also considerable doubt that they were particularly admiring of Plato's authority. Although Pico della Mirandola undoubtedly took the Neoplatonic tradition as his basis in his first

<sup>1</sup> Marsilio Ficino, 'Marsilii Ficini florentini in Plotini epitomae', in *Opera*, Op. cit.: 1537.

<sup>2</sup> For the two views on the question: James Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly* 44/3, 1991: 429–475; James Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici and the "Platonic Academy"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53, 1990: 144–62; Arthur Field, 'The Platonic Academy of Florence', in: Allen, Rees, Davies, Op. cit.: 359–376. On the rediscovery of Plato see also: James Hankins, *La riscoperta di Platone nel Rinascimento italiano*, Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2009 (first edn, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, Leiden–New York: Brill, 1990); Ovanes Akopyan, 'Платон и Ренессанс: "древняя теология" и примирение с Аристотелем' [Plato and the Renaissance: *prisca theologia* and Reconciliation with Aristotle], in: Irina A. Protoporova et al, eds, *Платоновский сборник (Приложение к Вестнику Русской христианской гуманитарной академии)* [Plato Collection (Supplement to the Bulletin of the Russian Christian Academy for the Humanities)], Moscow–St Petersburg: Russian State University for the Humanities–Russian Christian Academy for the Humanities, 2013, II: 320–340.

<sup>3</sup> Anna De Pace, *La scepsi, il sapere e l'anima. Dissonanze nella cerchia laurenziana*, Milan: LED, 2002.

truly philosophical text, his *Commento sopra una canzone d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni* (Commentary on a Poem of Platonic Love),<sup>1</sup> he was thereafter to take a different path: he saw his task, particularly in the early stages of his career, as being to unite all philosophical and theological thought under the overall auspices of Christian teaching.<sup>2</sup> Plato and the Neo-Platonists were but one of many sources, however important. In Pico's later writings Plato gradually receded into the background: if his treatise *De ente et uno* (On Being and the One) still touches on how Plato's followers distorted his thought,<sup>3</sup> in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* (Disputations against Divinatory Astrology), no particular attention is paid to Plato at all, in contrast to, for instance, Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> Thus to apply the term ardent 'Renaissance Neo-Platonist' to Giovanni Pico is incorrect, for he was never any such thing.

Nor do the sources provide support for the common opinion that members of the Academy gathered at regular symposia to discuss pressing philosophical questions. We know from Ficino's own letters of two possible meetings of this kind, in autumn 1468. In the first letter Ficino mentions a conversation he had with three of his 'academy' pupils in the house of Francesco Bandini in Florence, in the second he likens his colleagues who gathered at the Villa Careggi to the participants in Plato's 'Banquet' (*Symposium*).<sup>5</sup> This remark had serious historiographical consequences: it became the basis for the idea that Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (1469) was inspired by a real banquet. Despite the obvious appeal of such an interpretation, it seems more

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'Commento alla Canzona d'amore', in idem, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin, Turin: Aragno, 2004: 445–581; Unn Irene Aasdalen, 'The First Pico–Ficino Controversy', in: Clucas, Forshaw, Rees: Op. cit.: 67–88; Michael J.B. Allen, 'The Birth Day of Venus: Pico as Platonic Exegete in the *Commento* and the *Heptaplus*', in: M. V. Dougherty, ed., *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 81–113.

<sup>2</sup> This was reflected in Pico's most important early work, his *900 Theses*: Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): the Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The two best editions of this are: Stéphane Toussaint, *L'esprit du Quattrocento. Le De Ente et Uno de Pic de la Mirandole*, Paris: Champion, 1995; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, ed. Raphael Ebgi with Franco Bacchelli, Milan: Bompiani, 2010. *De ente et uno* contains criticism of Marsilio Ficino, who did not hesitate to respond to his younger colleague in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*; see: Maude Vanhaelen, 'The Pico–Ficino Controversy: New Evidence in Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*', *Rinascimento* 49, 2009: 1–39.

<sup>4</sup> See further: Ovanes Akopyan, 'The Light of Astrology: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on Celestial Influence', in: Ovanes Akopyan, Charles Burnett, eds, *Anti-Astrology in Early Modern Europe: between Philosophy, Theology, and Science*, London–New York: Routledge, 2018 (forthcoming). See also: Ovanes Akopyan, *Споры об астрологии в ренессансной мысли второй половины XV – начала XVI века* [Controversies on Astrology in Renaissance Thought of the Second Half of the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century], Candidate dissertation, Moscow: Moscow State University, 2014: particularly 271–312.

<sup>5</sup> James Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', Op. cit.: 446.

likely that Ficino's words were but a device, with no roots in reality.<sup>1</sup> Ficino may well, of course, have discussed Platonic philosophy privately with people in his circle, such as Lorenzo de' Medici, and even have taught it for a while,<sup>2</sup> but this does not negate the fact that there never were any general meetings of a 'Platonic Academy'. Lastly, the legend that Ficino kept a lit lamp before a bust of Plato as a mark of respect to the Ancient Greek philosopher does not stand up to criticism.<sup>3</sup>

The myth of the existence of the Platonic Academy in Florence was markedly political in nature. First Cosimo de' Medici and then his descendants who had returned to Florence in the first half of the sixteenth century sought to raise their own prestige by claiming the city as the cultural capital of the Italian and European Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> When speaking of the 'academy', however, Ficino insisted that Florence was, though important, merely another link in the preservation of the Platonic heritage, and that he himself, who had been responsible for bringing Plato's original thinking to European soil, simply continued the work of his predecessors, above all Plethon, with whose works he was familiar.<sup>5</sup> Thus Ficino's 'academy' should be understood not as an established institution or 'scholar's club', but merely as a metaphor for Platonic philosophy.

Nonetheless the image of the Academy seemed to give unity to intellectual life in Renaissance Florence and consequently proved extremely convenient and thus persistent in textbooks and serious research publications. First put

<sup>1</sup> Sebastiano Gentile, 'Per la storia del testo del *Commentarium in Convivium* di Marsilio Ficino', *Rinascimento* 21, 1981: 3–27, particularly 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Davies, 'Marsilio Ficino: Lecturer at the Studio fiorentino', *Renaissance Quarterly* 45/4, 1992: 785–790.

<sup>3</sup> Those involved in creating the myth of the lamp were followers of Girolamo Savonarola, who was sharply critical of the pagan interests of Florentine intellectuals in the second half of the fifteenth century. This legend thus reflects not so much historical fact as aspects of the political and ideological conflict that unfolded in Florence after 1492: Arnaldo Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Firenze*, Florence: Carnesecchi, 1902: 640; Marcel, *Op. cit.*: 293–294.

<sup>4</sup> James Hankins, 'The Invention of the Platonic Academy of Florence', in: James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols, Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003–4, II, *Platonism*: 350–395, particularly 368–371; James Hankins, 'The Platonic Academy of Florence and Renaissance Historiography', in Luisa Simonutti, ed., *Forme del neoplatonismo. Dall'eredità ficiniana ai platonici di Cambridge*, Florence: Olschki, 2007: 75–96, particularly 78–81.

<sup>5</sup> The Biblioteca Riccardiana has the manuscript copy of Plethon's writings studied by Ficino: Brigitte Tambrun, 'Marsile Ficin et le Commentaire de Pléthon sur les "Oracles Chaldaïques"', *Accademia (Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin)* 1, 1999: 14. Kristeller, *Op. cit.*: 97–98. On Plethon's influence on Ficino overall see: Ilana Klutstein, *Marsile Ficin et la théologie ancienne. Oracles Chaldaïques, Hymnes Orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus*, Florence: Olschki, 1987; Sebastiano Gentile, Paolo Viti et al., *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, exh. cat., Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence: Le Lettere, 1984: 25–27; Brigitte Tambrun, 'Pléthon et les mages disciples de Zoroastre', in: Pierre Magnard, ed., *Marsile Ficin: les platonismes à la Renaissance*, Paris: Vrin, 2001: 169–80; Brigitte Tambrun, *Pléthon. Le retour de Platon*, Paris: Vrin, 2006: 241–259.

forward by an Italian historian of an older generation, Arnaldo della Torre,<sup>1</sup> the myth of the Academy was taken up in Italy and beyond. At the insistent request of the Fascist curator of the humanities Ernesto Grassi, Eugenio Garin and his colleagues in Italy had to recreate the pagan myth of the Italian state but then, after the fall of Mussolini, they donned Communist attire and looked to 'Renaissance humanism' as it was understood within the context of the new ideology.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of the Academy found its supporters outside Italy – in part thanks to the efforts first of Ernst Cassirer, who was close to the circle of Aby Warburg, and then of Erwin Panofsky and André Chastel. The unity of thought in Florence during the second half of the fifteenth century that they constructed was interwoven with other stereotypes about the Renaissance era. Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos* was to mark an important stage in forming a picture of Renaissance man.<sup>3</sup> This work, which so clearly reflected the humanist direction of German post-war intellectual life, made no allowance even for the possibility that Renaissance thought of the period was fragmentary and contradictory. That triad of Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was, for Cassirer, the bearer of new thoughts about the individual's place in the world, although the latter two knew nothing of the work of the former.<sup>4</sup> As part of the debate about the essence of 'humanism' in the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, *The Individual and the Cosmos* remains a key text of its time, but its value for scholars of the Renaissance can be thrown into doubt.

Erwin Panofsky trod a somewhat different path. In his now classic work of 1924, *Idea. A Concept in Art History*, Panofsky concluded that Ficino remained purely a theoretician with regards to art.<sup>5</sup> Setting out the boundar-

<sup>1</sup> Della Torre, Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Akopyan, 'What is 'Humanism'?', Op. cit.: 119–120. On different approaches to the interpretation of Renaissance humanism see: James Hankins, 'Two Twentieth-Century Interpreters of Renaissance Humanism: Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller', in: James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, Op. cit., I, *Humanism*: 573–590; Riccardo Fubini, 'L'umanesimo italiano. Problemi e studi di ieri e di oggi', *Studi francesi* LI, 2007: 504–515; Stéphane Toussaint, *Humanismes / Antihumanismes. De Ficin à Heidegger*, I, Paris: Les belles lettres, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Leipzig–Berlin, 1927; English edn *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, tr. with an introduction by Mario Domandi, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Although Ficino was interested in a number of texts that once attracted Cusa, notably the works of Proclus and the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, he never cited him in any of his own writings. The supposed similarity between certain passages in the writings of Cusa and Ficino is purely hypothetical, put forward by a number of scholars who provide no factual basis. Nor is there a single mention of Cusa in the writings of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. To judge by a surviving inventory of Pico's personal library he owned no works by Cusa.

<sup>5</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Idea. Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Leipzig–Berlin, 1924; Eng. edn *Idea. A Concept in Art Theory*, tr. Joseph J.S. Peake, second corrected edn, New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

ies of ideal beauty and of 'art' itself, Panofsky concluded that Ficino was a faithful follower of Plato and Plotinus and was never interested in the second concept, the *artes* themselves. According to Panofsky, Ficino could not have ignored Plato's famous maxim that there was no place for an artist in an ideal state. Panofsky saw Ficino as preaching an ideal of beauty that was new in the Renaissance, as supporting the idea of a projection of the all-powerful and most beautiful One in this, our world, whilst at the same time opposing *techne* or practical art. Proclaiming the theoretical limitations of Ficino's thought, Panofsky contrasted him with Alberti, who came to his ideal of beauty not only through philosophical study but through practical knowledge, mathematics and the applied arts.<sup>1</sup> Panofsky nonetheless concluded that Ficino's aesthetics, set out mainly in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, had numerous followers and were reflected in a whole series of works of art in the second half of the fifteenth and the sixteenth century.

This Neo-Platonising reading of *ars* in the work of Ficino was quickly taken up by other scholars: we have only to recall the many works devoted to the influence of Ficino's Neo-Platonic philosophy – notably his theory of love – on Renaissance culture and art. Panofsky himself continued to develop the theme, reflected in successive publications, such as *Studies in Iconology* (1939).<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of Ficino's thought, Panofsky undoubtedly took as his starting point the research of his friend Paul Oskar Kristeller. We should not be misled by an apparent discrepancy in the chronology: although Kristeller's *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* was published only in 1943, the first manuscript in German had been completed by 1937, but for obvious reasons Kristeller (a German Jew who fled when Hitler came to power) was unable to publish it and thus he prepared an Italian version in 1938. Then when Italy too commenced persecution of the Jews he hastened to America, where it at last became possible to publish his fundamental work.<sup>3</sup> But if Kristeller demonstrated the great influence on Ficino's thought of scholasticism and of Thomas Aquinas, Panofsky saw the medieval aspects of Ficino's writings as negligible: the emphasis in *Studies in Iconology* continued to be on the Platonic, or rather Plotinian, element and the theoretical nature of *ars*.

Countering Panofsky, the 'moderate' Warburgian, is a second interpretation of Ficino's understanding of *ars* that proposes a radical new look at the question of *techne* and a rejection of the image of Ficino as theoretician

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: 52–59. For criticism of Panofsky's approach and two views of *ars* in Ficino's work, see:

Stéphane Toussaint, 'L'ars de Marsile Ficin, entre esthétique et magie', in: Philippe Morel, ed., *L'art de la Renaissance: entre science et magie*, Paris: Somogy, 2006: 453–467.

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> The most recent edition is Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino*, Florence: Le Lettere, 2005. On Kristeller's difficult life see: John Monfasani, 'Paul Oskar Kristeller, 22 May 1905–7 June 1999', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145/2, 2001: 208–211; Paul Oskar Kristeller, Margaret L. King, 'Iter Kristellerianum: The European Journey (1905–1939)', *Renaissance Quarterly* 47/4, 1994: 907–929.



of Neo-Platonic beauty. At its roots was a whole group of scholars whose lives were closely bound up in the Warburg Institute in London. Their approach would have warmed the heart of the Institute's founder: according to them, Ficino's concept of *ars* was linked to natural magic, being something necessary to subdue and swallow up the demonic element and thus transform original Chaos into Cosmos. Unlike Panofsky and his followers, who saw the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* as the central text of Ficino's aesthetic programme, the opposing group of Warburgians based their reading of *ars* on well-known passages in Ficino's treatise *Three Books on Life*, particularly the third, 'Obtaining Life from the Heavens', published in 1489.<sup>1</sup> Frances Yates paid particular attention to this text in her celebrated book on the Hermetic tradition and Giordano Bruno.<sup>2</sup>

Ficino's *ars* took on a technical dimension because it was impossible without the production of those 'devices' through which one obtains life from the heavens, i.e. talismans. Music was another use of art to draw down positive heavenly influences;<sup>3</sup> in this case Ficino was undoubtedly heir to the Orphic tradition and we know that he translated some of the compositions attributed to the legendary 'ancient theologian' Orpheus, although for some reason he decided not to publish them.<sup>4</sup> A second important source for Ficino's musical interests was Plato's *Timaeus*, on which the Florentine wrote an extensive commentary. In it Ficino particularly stressed music's healing effect on the human soul and the link between musical structure and the workings of the universe.<sup>5</sup> According to one legend, at particularly difficult and important moments Ficino himself played a musical instrument,

<sup>1</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life. A Critical Edition and Translation*, tr. and ed. Carol V. Kaske, John R. Clark, Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> On Ficino's musical magic see: D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000: particularly 3–29; Stéphane Toussaint, 'Quasi lyra: corde e magia. Nota sulla lira nel Rinascimento', in: Alessandro Magini, Stéphane Toussaint, eds, *Il teatro del cielo. Giovanni Bardi e il neoplatonismo tra Firenze e Parigi (Cahiers d'Accademia. IV)*, Lucca: San Marco Litotipo, 2001: 117–132; Angela Voss, 'Orpheus redivivus: the Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino', in: Allen, Rees, Davies, Op. cit.: 227–241; Jacomien Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World: Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> In 1462 Ficino decided to translate the Orphic Hymns, but they were never published. It is thought that the reason lay in the criticism of Orphic magic addressed to Plethon by George of Trebizond in his *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platonis*. Ficino, still young and uncertain, probably simply had no wish to contradict the more influential thinker: D. P. Walker, 'Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16/1–2, 1953: 100–120, particularly 107–109.

<sup>5</sup> There has as yet been no critical publication of Ficino's *Timaeus* commentary. The first modern publication of Ficino's treatise is currently being prepared by Jacomien Prins as part of the project to publish key Italian Renaissance texts, *I Tatti Renaissance Library*. This two-volume publication should be completed in 2018.



above all a lyre, in the hope of finding favour with the heavenly forces. The situation was similar with regard to talismans, although in this instance Ficino was hardly an innovator, since there was a rich medieval tradition behind him.<sup>1</sup> Ficino explains the reason why an artist starts to create, calling the *artifex interior* or internal impulse that correlates to the divine essence and which creates through and outside the artist.<sup>2</sup> With the aid of this curious image Ficino was able on the one hand to explain the essence of the creative process and on the other to reveal the artistic *techne* through the creation of talismans and Orphic music. It is not only Yates that has studied Ficino's natural magic, as set out in his *Three Books on Life*, but other scholars too, notably her colleague at the Warburg Institute Daniel P. Walker. And although there has been frequent criticism in recent years of the Yates–Walker thesis, it remains popular.

Thus, according to one's academic preferences Ficino's *ars* can be understood in two ways: either as a Neo-Platonic interpretation of beauty, as set out by the more rational Panofsky, or as a magical art linked with Hermetic philosophy and the acquisition of life from Heaven.

The problem is that both viewpoints, widely reflected in the secondary literature, can be thrown into doubt. Not only is Panofsky's thesis regarding Ficino's purely theoretical understanding of *ars* and his rejection of *techne* disproved by the sources – in fact Ficino saw the arts as beneficial to the soul and called on people to devote their time to the artistic practices, above all music – but it touches on an important methodological question often forgotten by scholars. In most instances there is no factual basis for the assertion that Renaissance artists read Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* or that they used this text in any way when resolving questions of iconography. The applied method of seeking analogies between Ficino's treatise and works of art in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is retro-active.

Nor should we forget three essential factors affecting the repercussions of Ficino's treatise. Firstly, it is a complex philosophical composition that could hardly be seen as accessible to the less knowledgeable: although Ficino himself prepared an Italian translation, its complex texture still limited the number of potential readers. Secondly, although the *Commentary* was well known among European intellectuals in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, it had to compete with other writings in a similar genre and of similar content, such as the extremely popular *Dialogues of Love* by Leone Ebreo, reprinted 25 times in the course of the sixteenth century and translated into all the main European languages.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, as we will show and as his contem-

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les 'images astrologiques' au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance. Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII–XV siècles)*, Paris: Champion, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical foundation for this is set out in: Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, Op. cit., 4/XIII:3: 168–182. See also: Stéphane Toussaint, *L'ars de Marsile Ficin*, Op. cit.: 457–460.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Canone, 'Introduzione', in: Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Delfina Giovannozzi, Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2008: XVIII–XIX.

poraries were well aware, the Neo-Platonic theory of love was not the main theme of Ficino's *Commentary*.

Panofsky's thesis thus needs to be revised. No less susceptible to criticism is the interpretation in which magic and the Hermetic tradition are seen as underlying Ficino's *ars* and *techne*. It would be hard to find a book as outstanding and yet contradictory as Yates' study of Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition. It might seem that everything in the book has long been reassessed, including the main thesis of the primarily Hermetic nature of Bruno's philosophy and the influence of Hermeticism on the history of learning,<sup>1</sup> yet it remains one of the most widely read books on the history of Renaissance magic. Some passages are still used to justify a variety of conclusions as to place of astrology, alchemy, Hermeticism and other occult sciences in the Renaissance. This is not the place to linger on the numerous errors in Yates' book and we shall limit ourselves to pointing the interested reader towards those works devoted to its excessive magical-Hermetic interpretation of the writings of, for instance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola<sup>2</sup> and Cornelius Agrippa.<sup>3</sup> But we cannot move on without giving a brief analysis of what Yates understands as Ficino's natural magic.

In the chapter on Ficino's natural magic and his *Three Books on Life* Yates asserts confidently that the Hermetic tradition was a central element in his thinking; moreover, she says, the order of Ficino's translations – first the Hermetic corpus, then Plato, Plotinus and other Neo-Platonists – tells us that for

<sup>1</sup> For instance: Robert Westman, 'Magical Reform and Astronomical Reform: the Yates Thesis Reconsidered', in: Robert Westman, J. E. McGuire, eds, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977: 2–91; Brian Copenhaver, 'Natural Magic, Hermeticism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science', in: David C. Lindberg, Robert S. Westman, eds, *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 261–301. On Bruno's cosmology, which has no particularly link with Hermeticism, see, in particular: Robert S. Westman, *The Copernican Question. Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 2011; Dario Tessicini, 'Giordano Bruno on Copernican Harmony, Circular Uniformity and Spiral Motions', in: Migule Á. Granada, Patrick J. Boner, Dario Tessicini, eds, *Unifying Heaven and Earth. Essays in the History of Early Modern Cosmology*, Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona Edicions, 2016: 117–157.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, Op. cit.: 115–132.

<sup>3</sup> In her book Yates states that Agrippa's text 'does not fully give the technical procedures, nor is it a profound philosophical work, as its title implies, and Cardanus, a really deep magician, despised it as a trivial affair'; Yates, Op. cit.: 130. The most recent research shows, however, that Agrippa's work was not as banal as it might seem. Agrippa was involved from the start in the revival of the Sceptical tradition, which was probably reflected in his treatise *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Thus the scorn for Agrippa that characterises Yates' book is inappropriate. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Dell'incertitudine e della vanità delle scienze*, ed. Tiziana Provvidera, Turin: Aragno, 2004; Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2007: 115–182; Vittoria Perrone Compagni, 'Tutius ignorare quam scire: Cornelius Agrippa and Scepticism', in: Gianenrico Paganini, José R. Maia Neto, eds, *Renaissance Scepticisms*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009: 91–110.

the Florentine thinker Hermes was not just the oldest in the hierarchy of ‘ancient theologians’, but the most important.<sup>1</sup>

Yates leaves aside any facts that do not fit into her system: that Ficino saw Zoroaster as the first of the ‘ancient theologians’, that he worked on many other magical, Neo-Platonic and theurgic texts before his translation of Hermes.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, Yates and the supporters of magical *ars* in Ficino’s thought choose to ignore the fact that some 25 years passed between the publication of the Hermetic Corpus and the treatise *On Life*. For a quarter of a century Ficino worked unceasingly, his productivity was remarkable: during this period he prepared the whole of the Platonic Corpus (published 1484), translated the *Enneads* in record time – just 22 months,<sup>3</sup> wrote a whole series of his own compositions, including the fundamental treatise *On the Christian Religion* (completed in 1474) and *Platonic Theology on the Immortality of the Soul* (first version completed in 1474, the final version published in 1482). There are no significant traces of Hermeticism in these works. Episodic references to the writings of Hermes should not lead us astray: Ficino indeed thought Hermes, along with Zoroaster, Orpheus and Pythagoras, to be among the ‘ancient theologians’ who preceded Christian theology, but in no way did he single him out among the rest of these semi-mythical figures.

It was, moreover, intended that *Three Books on Life*, completed in 1489, would become a commentary on one of the fragments of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, which Ficino was then translating.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he was translating another influential Neo-Platonic treatise, Iamblichus’ *On the Egyptian Mysteries*. Although the publication of the latter had to wait eight long years, the translation was ready by early 1489.<sup>5</sup> Ficino’s extensive commentaries on the treatise are a markedly Christianised text that is very far from the theurgic original, suffused with magic. As Brian Copenhaver has convincingly

<sup>1</sup> Yates, *Op. cit.*: 78–79.

<sup>2</sup> Briefly on the succession of translations of the ‘ancient theologians’ and the very concept of *prisca theologia* see in: Akopyan, ‘Plato and the Renaissance’, *Op. cit.*: 324–329.

<sup>3</sup> Stéphane Toussaint, ‘Introduction’, *Plotini Opera omnia. Cum latina Marsilii Ficini interpretatione et commentatione. Facsimilé de l’édition de Bâle, Pietro Perna, 1580*, ed. Stéphane Toussaint, Villiers-sur-Marne: Phénix, 2005: I–II.

<sup>4</sup> Although the translation of the *Enneads* was ready by 1486, Ficino continued to improve it over the next six years. The first Latin translation of Plotinus thus appeared only in 1492. On the history of Ficino’s work on the *Enneads* see: Henri D. Saffrey, ‘Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 49/3, 1996: 488–508; Christian Förstel, ‘Marsilio Ficino e il Parigino greco 1816 di Plotino’, in: Toussaint, Gentile, *Op. cit.*: 65–88; Albert M. Wolters, ‘The First Draft of Ficino’s Translation of Plotinus’, in: Gentile, Viti, *Op. cit.*: 305–329.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols, Florence: Olschki, 1937, I: CXXXII–CXXXIV. For a general analysis of the text: Guido Giglioni, ‘Theurgy and Philosophy in Marsilio Ficino’s Paraphrase of Iamblichus’s *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*’, *Rinascimento* 52, 2012 [2014]: 3–36. The text itself was published: ‘Iamblichus. *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum* Marsilio Ficino interprete’, in: Angelo-Raffaele Sodano, ed., *Giamblico. I misteri egiziani*, Milan: Bompiani, 2013: 539–634.

demonstrated, it was Iamblichus, and not Hermes, who – along with Plotinus – was to be one of two main sources for the magical speculations of *Three Books on Life*;<sup>1</sup> the third source was the medieval medico-astrological tradition that placed particular emphasis on the production of talismans: Nicolas Weill-Parot's superb 900-page study brilliantly brings out the medieval sources of Ficino's talismanic magic, which modern commentators so frequently prefer to forget.<sup>2</sup>

It is thus not hard to conclude that it is not only – and indeed not so much – Hermeticist philosophy that stands behind Ficino's *artifex interior*. To understand the true basis of Ficino's aesthetics, we must return to his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, or rather to a key passage in the third chapter of the first book.

Here he says: 'The fire that follows we call the growth of love; greater closeness – a burst of love; its formation – the perfecting of love. The aggregate of all forms and ideas is called in Latin *mundus*, and in Greek *cosmos*, that is the ordered world. The feature of this world and order is beauty, to which the love that has been born has drawn and fascinated the mind; the mind that was without form, to that same, now beautiful mind. Thus the nature of love lies in that it attracts us to beauty and brings together both the beautiful and the ugly.' Three *substantiae* are responsible for organising this world, *substantiae* that transform chaos into order: 'Thus there are three worlds, and three chaos. In all of them love accompanies chaos, precedes the world, sets the immovable in motion, illuminates darkness, brings the dead to life, gives form to the formless, perfection to the imperfect.'<sup>3</sup> It is not hard to guess what

<sup>1</sup> Brian Copenhaver, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in: James Hankins, John Monfasani, Frederick Purnell Jr., eds, *Supplementum Festivum. Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987: 441–455; Brian Copenhaver, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: "Ennead" 4.3–5 in Ficino's "De vita coelitus comparanda"', in: Garfagnini, Op. cit.: 351–369.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 32.

<sup>3</sup> 'Incendium sequens, amoris dicimus incrementum. Appropinquationem, amoris impetum. Formationem, amoris perfectionem. Formarum omnium idearumque complexionem, mundum Latine, Grece κόσμος, id est, ornamentum vocamus. Huius mundi et ornamenti gratia pulchritudo est, ad quam amor ille statim natus traxit mentem atque perduxit, mentem ante deformem ad mentem eandem deinde formosam. Ideo amoris conditio est, ut ad pulchritudinem rapiat ac deformem formoso coniungat... Tres igitur mundi, tria et chaos. In omnibus denique amor chaos comitatur, precedit mundum, torpentia suscitatur, obscura illuminatur, vivificat mortua, format informia, perficit imperfecta'; Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour. Commentarium in Convivium Platonis, de amore*, tr. and ed. Pierre Laurens, Paris: Les belles lettres, 2012, I. 3: 13–15. For a clear example of how Ficino combines the Christian theology of the Trinity with Neo-Platonic motifs: 'Tres apud eos mundi sunt, tria itidem chaos erunt. Primum omnium est deus, universorum auctor, quod ipsum bonum dicimus. Hic mentem primo creat angelicam, deinde mundi huius animam, ut Plato vult, postremo mundi corpus. Summum illum deum, non mundum dicimus, quia mundus ornamentum significat ex multis compositum. Ille vero penitus simplex esse debet,

Ficino understands by the traditional Latin theological term *substantia* or *hypostasis* in Greek – it certainly has nothing to do with Platonic love. This brief but extremely important fragment shows most clearly that the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* has nothing to do with love, Eros and other images that are so keenly attributed to it: it is in fact a text about the second hypostasis, i.e. Christ. We find the same thing with two other well known treatises by Ficino, *The Book of the Sun* and *On Light* (1492): although they are traditionally linked to astrological symbolism and Neo-Platonic light theory, at their heart is Light – Christ himself.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as Dilwyn Knox perceptively pointed out, Ficino presents his thinking with great finesse in the *Commentary*: in the third chapter of the first book (1.3), Ficino speaks of Three in One, thus referring to the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> It is not difficult to conclude that since at the foundation of Ficino's whole discourse lie two categories, love and light, both of them irrevocably associated with the second hypostasis, Christ, then all the following thoughts on *ars*, *techne* and aesthetics should be seen as deriving from his Christological thesis. It was no coincidence that the *Commentary* was one of only two treatises that Ficino personally translated into Italian. The second, strange as it may seem, was the treatise *On the Christian Religion*.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, we know that Ficino's contemporaries saw and understood the theological meanings in the *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*: we find evidence for this, for instance, in the *Three Books on Love* by an admirer

sed mundorum omnium principium atque finem ipsum asserimus. Mens angelica primus mundus est a deo factus. Secundus universi corporis anima. Tertius, tota hec quam cernimus machina. In his utique mundis tribus, tria et chaos considerantur. Principio deus mentis illius creat substantiam, quam etiam essentiam nominamus'; *ibid.*: 11. Characteristically, the term *substantia* is used exclusively with regard to the second state, i.e. to Christ; *principio*, the first word of the Book of Genesis, and the passage on the 'formless and dark being' ('hec in primo illo creationis sue momento informis est et obscura', compare with the Vulgate: 'terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas'), serve as a direct reference to the Creation of the world by the triune God. The Russian translation (Marsilio Ficino, 'Комментарий на «Пир» Платона, о Любви' [Commentary on Plato's Symposium, on Love], tr. Aleksandr Gorfunkel, Vladimir Mazhuga, Ilya Chernyak, in: *Эстетика Ренессанса* [Renaissance Aesthetics], 2 vols, Moscow: Iskustvo, 1981 I: 146–147) relies entirely on the Neo-Platonic reading of the theory of love. If nothing else, evidence of this is provided by the translation almost throughout of the word *amor* as Eros, thereby utterly distorting the meaning of the word as used by Ficino.

<sup>1</sup> Marsilio Ficino, 'Liber de Sole. Liber de lumine', in *Opera*, Op. cit.: 965–986.

<sup>2</sup> I would to thank Professor Knox for pointing out this interesting detail, and along with Valery Rees and Michael Allen for introducing me to the fascinating world of Ficino's theology. Professor Knox is currently preparing a new bilingual publication of Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* for I Tatti Renaissance Library.

<sup>3</sup> Ficino prepared two versions of the treatise, in Latin and in his own Italian translation. The Italian appeared first, in 1475; the Latin followed a year later: Cesare Vasoli, *Quasi sit deus. Studi su Marsilio Ficino*, Lecce: Conte, 1999: 120. On the treatise see above all: Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology. 1461/2–1498*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008: 205–77. I am currently preparing an edition of this treatise along with a Russian translation.

of Ficino's work, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, where those same thoughts on light-bearing hypostasis are repeated in the same chapter 1.3.<sup>1</sup>

My conclusion is that Ficino became a victim of the desire to create large, clumsy constructs, whether art historical, philosophical or historical. This attempt to fit Ficino into some apparently integral picture is, however, at variance with primary sources. Should we not, at last, reject all generalisations and return to Ficino himself, the melancholic recluse in the Villa Careggi?

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, *I tre libri d'amore*, Venice: de' Ferrari, 1561, 1:3: 20–24.

Anna Korndorf<sup>1</sup>

**HERMIT VS HERMETISM.<sup>2</sup> HERMITS AND THE HERMETIC  
TRADITION IN EUROPEAN ART OF THE SEVENTEENTH  
AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES**

*Hannah:* The hermitage of Sidley Park... was placed in the landscape exactly as one might place a pottery gnome. And there he lived out his life as a garden ornament.

*Bernard:* Did he do anything?

*Bernard:* Oh, he was very busy. When he died, the cottage was stacked solid with paper. Hundreds of pages. Thousands. Peacock says he was suspected of genius. It turned out, of course, he was off his head. He'd covered every sheet with cabalistic proofs that the world was coming to an end. It's perfect, isn't it? A perfect symbol, I mean.

*Tom Stoppard, Arcadia*

Tradition has it that the origins of the widespread fashion for park hermitages in the second quarter of the eighteenth century lay above all in the cult of English landscape gardening and the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But the discovery of a whole series of earlier structures described as “hermitages” and the unquestionable commonality of their artistic programmes forces us to doubt the validity of this accepted view. They indicate the existence of another, perhaps less obvious, trend underlying how public interest in the phenomenon was shaped, and it is this trend that we will seek to discover.

First, however, it must be recalled that the concept of a “retreat” which would allow the owner to withdraw (alone or with a narrow circle of friends) without utterly rejecting the pleasures of ordinary life, in order to devote themselves to philosophical meditations, learned or creative occupations,

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> The preferred term, used in this book, is Hermeticism, but the alternative form given in this title only is also used and here specifically emphasises the link with the word “hermit”.



to “escape” the bustle of the city and become as one with nature, had existed long before the appearance of the first park hermitages. Roman villas, Renaissance villas and Baroque country estates were all essentially the embodiment of such ideas of retreat. At the same time, domestic churches and chapels in houses and parks had long provided sufficient space for solitary prayer and the satisfaction of personal religious needs. Hermitages seem to have emerged at the juncture of these interests, growing to become one of the most fashionable garden features of the Age of Enlightenment.

Their original function, I might dare suggest, had little to do with – or at least was not exclusively limited to – the ascetic religious experience of genuine Christian anchorites, or with the secular tradition of intellectual and aesthetic escapism. It is not that simple, however, to determine precisely what that function was. For eighteenth-century hermitages had little in common in either appearance or purpose. Some stood empty, awaiting the moment when their gentle-born owners or their guests would be overcome with melancholy and the desire for contemplative seclusion. Others sheltered hired hermits and monks who were always prepared to come out and show themselves to viewers, turning isolated existence into a performance of everyday austerity.<sup>1</sup> Yet another group contained wax, mechanical or sculptural figures of hermits that amazed viewers with all kinds of unexpected effects.

Perhaps the only thing that united all these natural and artificial caves, thatched huts or log cabins, temple-pavilions and even cosy little palaces, was the implicit figure of the hermit, whether he was the owner engaging in role-play, a real monk or a thematic sculptural composition.

In the hope of understanding the reasons why hermitages appeared in European parks and gardens, apparently as if from nowhere, this seems the place for a small digression from the subject of park architecture in order to take a closer look at the notional but obligatory inhabitant of these retreats.

#### “REJECTED KNOWLEDGE” AND THE CULT OF HERMITS

It might seem at first sight that the figure of the hermit in seventeenth-century art barely differed from examples in early Christian iconography. The range of hagiographical subjects from the life of hermit saints seen in the Early

<sup>1</sup> This practice of hiring hermits was common in Protestant lands in the eighteenth century, particularly in Britain and the German principalities. “Decorative” hermits had to live in the hermitage and observe all the rules of the game: to wear rags, sleep on a bed of hay, remain celibate, eat a lean diet, engage in daily readings of sacred and philosophical texts and preach sermons to the owner’s guests. Such employment was in general unusually well paid for the time and it was not particularly difficult to find those willing to assume the role of “hermit”. In England, for instance, advertisements for the post of garden hermit appeared in newspapers from the 1730s to 1770s. But the practice all too often resulted in disillusionment on the part of both the hermitage’s owner and its inhabitant and there are a notable number of recorded cases of the “hermit” being sacked for drunkenness and immoral behaviour.

Christian and medieval periods remained unchanged. In parallel, one consequence of the Reformation was an almost total disappearance of religious asceticism and cenobitic monasticism in Protestant lands,<sup>1</sup> while the Catholic response and religious wars in turn led to papal disapproval of hermitic practice outside the recognised monastic orders.

And yet... in place of the reduction in interest in hermitic retreat that one might have expected, we see its relevance growing over the course of the century, spreading to cover wide swathes of Europe: Florence and Naples, Britain, the German principalities, Bohemia and the neighbouring territories and the Scandinavian kingdoms.

Contacts between the different European centres of intellectual thought were extremely close in the early seventeenth century. There has been detailed study of the unceasing Italo-Anglo-German cross-influences of the ideas of Giordano Bruno, John Dee, Tommaso Campanella, Johannes Andreae, Robert Fludd, Michael Maier and their contemporaries and followers,<sup>2</sup> and there is no need to describe them again. Of far greater interest here is the heritage of Hermetic (in the broadest sense) philosophy in the middle of the century, when the polemical heat of Casaubon's critique of the *Hermetica* was cooling, when the mighty waves of witch

<sup>1</sup> Unlike Catholicism, in theory the Protestant faith does not allow for monks or clergy who see themselves as endowed with particular grace that enables them to mediate between God and believers. The few small Lutheran and Anglican monastic communities place greatest stress not on isolation but on selfless public works.

<sup>2</sup> Starting with the classic works by Eugenio Garin (*Ermetismo del rinascimento*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1988) and Frances A. Yates (*Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge, 1964; *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972; *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London–Boston: RKP, 1979), then in extensive studies by their followers and critics: Brian Vickers, *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; Margaret J. Osler, Paul Lawrence Farber, eds, *Religion Science and Worldview: Essays in Honor of Richard S. Westfall*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Donald R. Dickson, *The Tessera of Antilia: Utopian Brotherhoods & Secret Societies in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Leiden: Brill, 1998; Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000; Lisa Jardine, Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East And West*, London: Reaktion, 2000; Roelof van den Broek, Cis van Heertum, eds, *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2000; Hartmut Lehmann, Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds, *Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis: Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001; Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al, *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006; Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, ed., *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption – Integration – Konfrontation* (Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung, Band 37) Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008; Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment*, Leiden–New York: Brill, 2012. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2013; etc.

hunts that marked the first decades of the seventeenth century abated and the long-awaited political and religious calm arrived in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>1</sup>

It was hardly coincidence that the first wave of widespread interest in the subject of hermits and asceticism came at the time when the esoteric tradition finally lost its dominant position in European thinking. Weakened by the re-dating of the Hermetic texts, the collapse of any hope of a Protestant Union of German states and the emergence of followers of “rational learning”, who were obstinate in their battle against the magical and animist aspects of Renaissance philosophy, it fell irrevocably from the heights it had occupied in the writings of the contemporaries of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

Those repressive measures of which the Holy Inquisition was still capable could annoy, but could no longer crush. Even the trial of Galileo in 1633 was relatively lenient, allowing him to keep his post as court mathematician and philosopher in Florence. Now the war was not between thought and dogma but between different scholarly methods, and the doctrine of Western esotericism was clearly being forced to cede territory. A view of the world that had once seemed largely to determine the direction of intellectual thought became the concern of secret societies and narrow circles. If there were a large number of various Christian sects and brotherhoods across Europe who continued with some form of the Renaissance Hermetic-cabalistic and alchemical tradition, closely bound up with religious ideas, by the end of the century, for all their influential status and mystic charm they too had gradually dropped away from the main path, a path which now led on to a new approach, to Cartesian mechanistic philosophy and non-magical means of dealing with natural forces.

Squeezed out by the new dominant trends, Renaissance Hermeticism (Hermetism) found itself “in the territory of occultism”, dissipated amidst all kinds of alchemical and Christian mystical ideas.<sup>2</sup> The figure of the Renaissance magus blended with the image of the alchemist, the Rosicrucian and the hermit philosopher, giving themselves up to meditation and to learned occupations in secret seclusion and voluntary exile.

Passing over those impulses that sent the Hermetic tradition underground, into the world of esoteric societies, we shall concentrate on how that steady process was reflected in something like a cult of hermits in contemporary “learned” art.

<sup>1</sup> When the Thirty Years’ War came to an end it turned out that the endless wars over the previous century, first between sects and then between states, had wrought few changes in the religious map of Europe. The Church in Rome preserved its extensive territories which had seemed to have been lost in the middle of the previous century, and the only part of Europe to be Protestant was that which had been such in the lifetime of Luther himself.

<sup>2</sup> “sul terreno dell’occultismo.” Eugenio Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*. Ricerche e documenti, Florence: Sansoni, 1961: 144.

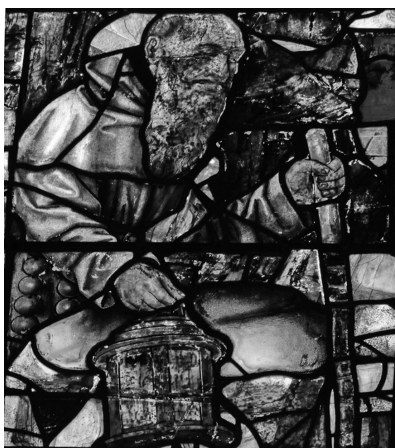
## SAINTS, MAGI, NATURAL PHILOSOPHERS



By the second third of the seventeenth century a number of locally revered saints had joined the traditional list of renowned Christian anchorites, after which the image of the anonymous hermit became an established figure in both art and literature. There had, of course, already been chivalric romances filled with countless un-named hermits who met the heroes on their travels, giving them shelter and offering wisdom at moments of spiritual crisis, inspiring them in their campaigns against unbelievers, healing their wounds, giving advice, teaching them the knightly code of honour or foretelling the glory awaiting them and their descendants. And the image of the anonymous hermit was well known in traditional Christian iconography. According to the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, for instance, as he carried the Infant Cross on his shoulders through a rushing stream St Christopher was

Matteo Pérez  
de Alesio. Saint  
Christopher. 1584  
Cathedral of Seville

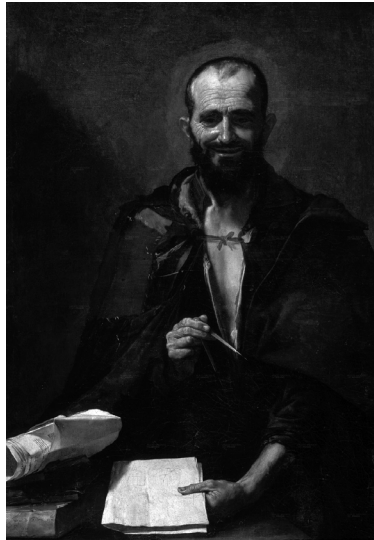
always accompanied by an unknown hermit holding a lamp to light his path. Not surprisingly, therefore, no one saw anything unusual in the dozens of anonymous hermits who featured in the canvases of Jusepe de Ribera, Salvator Rosa, Alessandro Magnasco, Francisco de Zurbarán and others in the second half of the seventeenth century. All the more telling, therefore, is the increasing similarity between images of Christian hermit saints and Ancient philosophers, such as St Jerome and Pythagoras in the works of Ribera, or *The Hermit* and *Democritus Meditating*, or an even



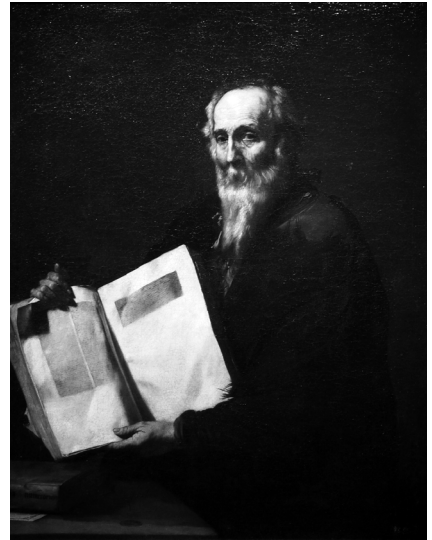
Peter Paul Rubens  
Saint Christopher  
1612. Alte Pinakothek,  
Munic

Fragment of stained  
glass with  
St. Christopher  
The Hermit with  
the Lantern and Stick.  
Circa 1550. Angers  
Cathedral

Jusepe de Ribera  
Democritus. 1630  
Oil on canvas. Prado  
Museum, Madrid



Jusepe de Ribera  
Pythagoras. Circa 1630  
Oil on canvas. Museum  
of Fine Arts of Valencia

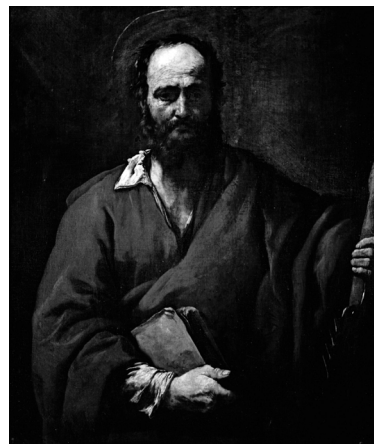


more mysterious character engaged in some unidentified magical procedure in the work of Rosa. This last image is particularly notable: known by an old title given it by a former owner, *The Witch*, it is traditionally linked with a cycle of works dealing with Sabbath scenes and devil-worship. In recent times, however, scholars have been less accepting of this historical assessment of the content, hypothesising that the picture may instead show a follower of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition, a hermit natural philosopher, magus and cabbalist.<sup>1</sup>

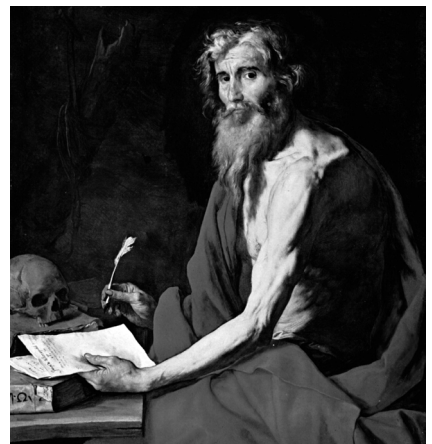
Indeed, the study of the intellectual context in which these works were created gives many reasons for such increasing identification/similarity.

<sup>1</sup> Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, "Una strega", in: Salvator Rosa. Tra mito e magia, exh. cat., Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, 2008: 178

Jusepe de Ribera  
St. Simon. 1630  
Oil on canvas. Prado  
Museum, Madrid



Jusepe de Ribera  
Saint Jerome. 1630  
Oil on canvas  
National Museum  
of Capodimonte,  
Naples

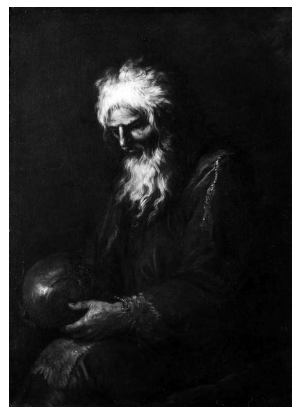




In the first half of the seventeenth century Naples, where Ribera was working, was still a centre of the old Renaissance culture, while the artist himself, who worked on numerous commissions for the Viceroy, was closely associated with Nicola Antonio Stigliola, a philosopher, geographer and physician and an ardent supporter of the ideas of Copernicus and of Pythagorean cosmology, natural magic and Hermetic ideas. As a recent study has shown,<sup>1</sup> the artist was well aware of the latest trends in Neapolitan learning as represented by Giambattista della Porta, Tommaso Campanella and Ferrante Imperato and their writings, and even developed his own epistemological system based on ideas about the flawed nature of sensory and visual perception.

Salvator Rosa's unfading interest in philosophical questions and scientific studies also largely shaped his circle of friends. Those Florentine (and later – Roman) learned men with whom the artist, his friends and clients mixed provided a consistent guide, determining his intellectual preferences, from a youthful taste for the ideas of the Cynics and Stoics to a later admiration for the Pre-Socratics, natural philosophers and magicians “engaged in an intrepid quest for the secrets of nature”.<sup>2</sup>

When he arrived in Florence as court artist to Cardinal Giancarlo de' Medici, Rosa came into contact with the latter's witty and frivolous literary academies, the “learned” programmes of court commissions and palace wall-paintings that were still very much tied up with the heritage of the previous century's Neo-Platonism. Giancarlo's uncle, Cardinal Carlo de' Medici, had been a passionate alchemist who enjoyed fame as a “magus”<sup>3</sup> and lived above his famous laboratory / study in the Casino di



Salvator Rosa  
A Hermit Contemplating  
a Skull. Circa 1640–1649  
Oil on canvas. Christ  
Church Picture Gallery,  
Oxford

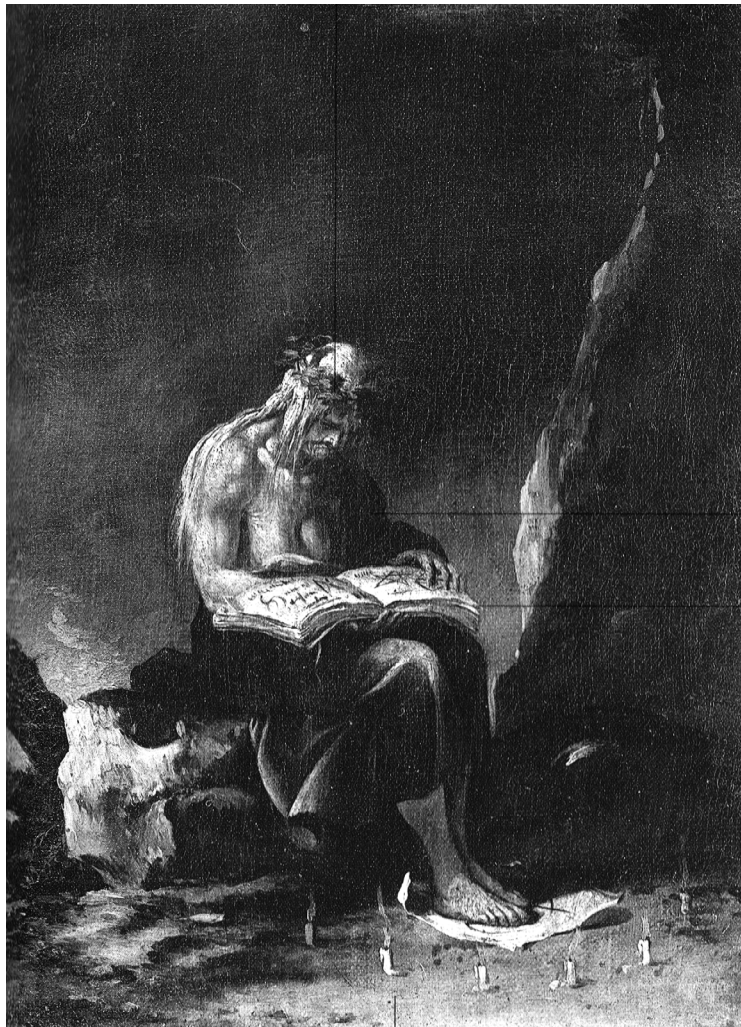


Salvator Rosa  
Democritus  
in Meditation. 1662  
Etching

<sup>1</sup> Itay Sapir, “Ribera and the Neapolitan Doubt”, *The Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting Program and Abstract Book*, New York: Renaissance Society of America, 2014: 689.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Langdon, “The Representation of Philosophers in the Art of Salvator Rosa”, *kunsttexte.de* 2, 2011: 12.

<sup>3</sup> Marco Chiarini, “La cucina dell'alchimista”, in: Salvator Rosa. Tra mito e magia, *Op. cit.*: 256.



Salvator Rosa  
A Witch. 1646  
Oil on canvas  
Capitoline Museums,  
Rome

San Marco,<sup>1</sup> while his library made available to those in his circle the full corpus of the latest German alchemical and Rosicrucian publications. We know that the nephew – and perhaps all the Medici court artists responsible for developing complex allegorical programmes for festivities for the Duke and the cardinals – was acquainted at least with some of them.

Whatever the case, it becomes clear that the key virtues of the hermit life – isolation, concentration and contemplative peace – were in keeping with the new outlook and, enhanced by the idea of possessing secret

<sup>1</sup> On the Medici dukes' interest in alchemy and the laboratory at the Casino see: Marco Beretta, "Material and Temporal Powers at the Casino di San Marco (1574–1621)", in: Sven Dupré, ed., *Laboratories of Art. Alchemy and Art Technology from Antiquity to the 18th Century*, Cham: Springer, 2014: 150–156.





knowledge, helped make the old authorities of the Hermetic tradition into the heroes of a new cult. This was true above all of Agrippa, who spoke of the need for an isolated, calm life as part of the religious experience (his example being God's revelation to Moses in the wilderness) and of the solitary approach to contemplation of the comprehensible essence. And of Ramon Llull, whom Bruno called "the omniscient and almost divine hermit doctor".<sup>1</sup> Lastly, of Paracelsus, whose life of retreat – its fame largely his own creation – was tied up with the place of his birth, the small Swiss town of Einsiedeln (German *Einsiedelei* – hermitage or wilderness), which grew up around the retreat of St Meinrad to become a powerful Benedictine abbey.

At the same time, however, Cynics and Stoics – above all Diogenes of Sinope – entered the pantheon of hermits. Rosa found a rich source of iconographical subjects and motifs in the works of the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli and the moral philosopher Paganino Gaudenzi, who studied the life of Diogenes and his follower Crates of Thebes.<sup>2</sup> Their discussions were built around a central question: can a wise man and philosopher live in comfort at court while retaining his independence and engaging

Caesar van Everdingen  
Diogenes Seeks  
a True Man. 1652  
Oil on canvas  
Mauritshuis, The Hague

<sup>1</sup> J. Lewis McIntyre, Giordano Bruno, New York: Macmillan, 1903: 54.

<sup>2</sup> Langdon, Op. cit.: 2.



Carlo Dolci. Diogenes  
Mid-17th century  
Oil on canvas. Palatine  
Gallery, Florence

in unbiased intellectual thought or must he, as the Cynics and Stoics insisted, develop wisdom in total ascetic isolation? And thus, can one see Diogenes and Crates' decisive gesture of rejecting all earthly benefits as an example of long lost heroism in a "Golden Age" or was it merely an eccentric but ultimately pointless ploy?

Under the influence of such conversations and writings – Bartoli even dedicated one of his publications to Rosa<sup>1</sup> – the artist produced a diptych<sup>2</sup> capturing the critical moment in the life of each philosopher. Diogenes tosses away his cup, the last superfluous object of possession, and gestures to summon his companions to follow the example of the youth drinking water directly from the stream. Having turned all his worldly goods into gold coins Crates – one of Diogenes' most important pupils and followers, a philosopher of Thebes who preached the virtue of poverty, self-sufficiency and solitary oneness with nature – stands on the shore throwing them into the sea, thereby ridding himself of possessions, power and success in one go, opening up his path towards virtue and freedom.

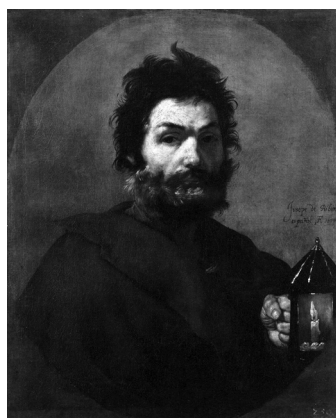
Not satisfied with the purely pictorial effect of his paintings, Rosa composed his own satirical dialogue in the style of Lucian, *Dialogue on Contempt*

<sup>1</sup> This is the Florence edition of Bartoli's *Uomo di Lettere*, published in 1645 with a dedication to Salvator Rosa. We know that the treatise circulated widely in Europe and Queen Christina of Sweden (founder and head of a female secret society) ordered a copy for her library. See: Langdon, Op. cit.: 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Crates throwing his Riches into the Sea* (priv. coll., Broughton Hall, Skipton, Yorkshire) was commissioned from Rosa in 1640–1641 by Marchese Carlo Gerini and was conceived as a pair to *The Forest of Philosophers* (Palazzo Pitti, Florence).

Jacob Jordaens.  
Diogenes Searching  
for an Honest Man  
1641–1642  
Oil on canvas  
Gemäldegalerie Alte  
Meister, Dresden





for Riches,<sup>1</sup> in which he defended Crates against the accusation of stupidity, citing many benefits of the simple life and independence from earthly wealth and fame.

Even more popular in art of the 1740s was the image of Diogenes hiding away from the vanity of existence in a barrel or searching for a “true” (sometimes translated as “honest”) man with a lamp. Over the course of just two decades, Rosa, Ribera and artists of the Neapolitan and Florentine schools – but also Bellotti, Poussin, Jordaens, Everdingen, the artists around Rubens and many other contemporaries – created a vast gallery of portraits of the philosopher holding a lamp in his hand.

**Jusepe de Ribera**  
**Diogenes.** 1630s  
Oil on canvas. Private collection, Europe

**Pietro Bellotti**  
**Diogenes with the Lantern.** Mid-17th century. Oil on canvas. Private collection, Europe

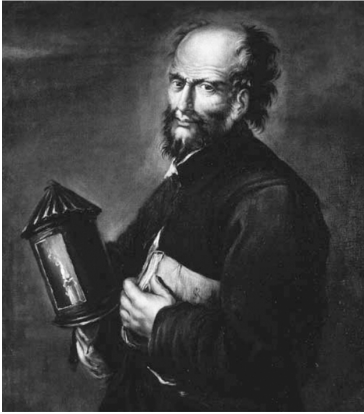
**Jusepe de Ribera**  
**Diogenes.** 1637  
Oil on canvas  
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden

<sup>1</sup> According to Caterina Volpi, Rosa’s *Dialogo del disprezzo delle ricchezze*, intended for declamation, is today in the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte, Palazzo Venezia, Rome; Caterina Volpi, *Salvator Rosa (1615–1673) “pittore famoso”*, Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore, 2014: 435. It was published in: Leandro Ozzola, *Vita e opera di Salvator Rosa, pittore, incisore, con poesie e documenti inediti*, Strasbourg: J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1908: 232.



**School of Peter Paul Rubens.** **Diogenes Seeking a True Man.** 1740s. Oil on canvas. Städtisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main





Circle of Salvador  
Rosa. Diogenes  
17th century  
Oil on canvas. Private  
collection, Europe



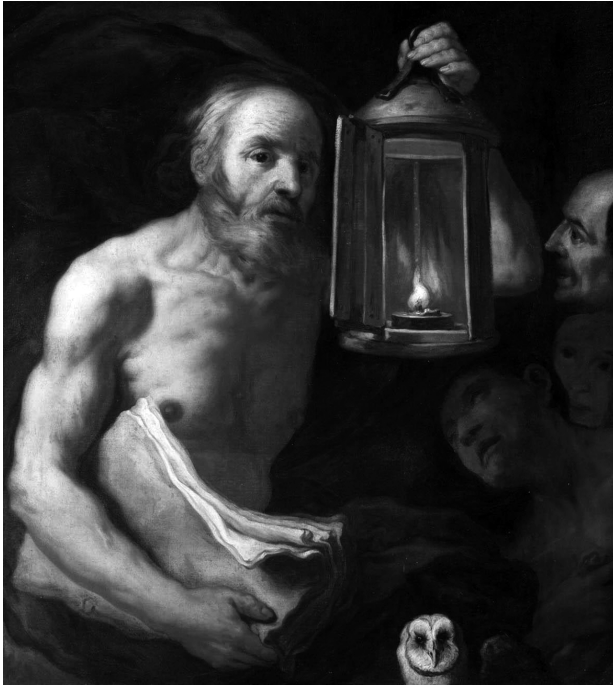
Mattia Preti. Diogenes  
and Plato. 1649  
Oil on canvas  
Capitoline Museums,  
Rome

That choice of Diogenes wandering with a lamp from among all the many striking incidents in which the philosopher's life was so rich, was surely no accident. For a start, it could readily be linked to the existing iconography of a hermit lighting the way for St Christopher. Secondly, it allowed for depiction of the Cynic of Sinope in the spirit of the esoteric tradition. Many depictions of Diogenes searching for a true man, lamp in hand, seem to be a quite literal paraphrase of one of the most famous emblems in Michael Maier's book *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Print XLII shows the philosopher holding his lamp, carefully studying the traces left by Nature, the image accompanied by a philosophical commentary: as he follows the path of Nature "he that is employed in Chemistry shall have Nature, Reason, Experience and Reading as his Guide, Staff, Spectacles and Lamp".<sup>1</sup>

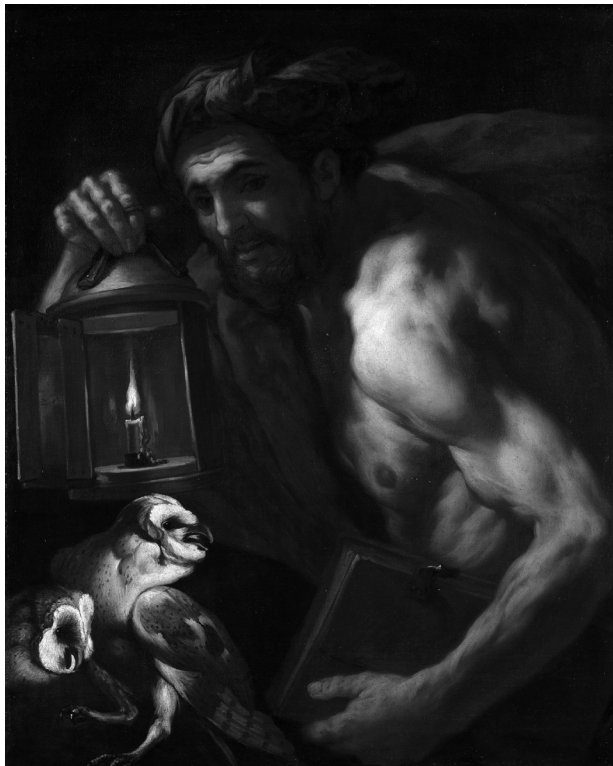
<sup>1</sup> This scene echoes the foreword to *De specierum scrutinio* by Giordano Bruno, written in 1588 when the philosopher visited Prague, with a dedication to Rudolf II. In the foreword Bruno turns to his favourite theme, calling on the reader to study "the prints made by Nature's feet", to avoid religious discord and instead to hark unto Nature, "which cries out everywhere – those with ears shall hear".

Emblem 42 from  
*Atalanta Fugiens*  
(Fleeing Atalanta)  
by Michael Maier. 1617  
(Michael Maier.  
*Atalanta Fugiens*,  
hoc est, Emblemata  
Nova de Secretis  
Naturae Chymica,  
Accommodata partim  
oculis et intellectui,  
figuris cupro incisus,  
adjectisque sententiis,  
Epigrammatis et notis,  
partim auribus... 1617)





Antonio Zanchi  
Diogenes with  
the Lantern and Owl  
Second half  
of the 17th century  
Oil on canvas. Private  
collection, Europe



Johann Karl Loth  
Diogenes with  
the Lantern. 17th century  
Oil on canvas. Minneapolis  
Institute of Arts



Gerrit Bleker. Diogenes with the Lantern and Staff. 1637  
Oil on canvas. Royal Łazienki Museum, Warsaw

If we look at depictions of Diogenes as continuing Maier's interpretation of the image of the philosopher, then paintings by Johann Carl Loth and Antonio Zanchi, who presented the myth at night, take on a new interest. Their Diogenes, surrounded by owls and clasping a book in his hands, has much more in common with the character wandering in the dark in *Atalanta Fugiens* than with the Ancient philosopher proclaiming on busy town squares his famous phrase "I am seeking a true Man" by the light of day.

Another curious moment in this context is the transformation of Aristotle into a hermit with a lamp in the fifth book of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published after the author's death (in 1553) with additional chapters.<sup>1</sup> These later chapters, reworked in editions issued in the first third of the seventeenth century, include the tale of the Kingdom of Quintessence, where, according to most commentators, the anonymous author depicts "alchemists, astrologers and empiricists... mocking Aristotle's view of "Entelechy" and many other empty and transparent sciences."<sup>2</sup> Leaving Queen Whims, Pantagruel's squadron arrives in the Country of Tapestry, "land of false perceptions", where the first person our heroes meet is "Aristotle holding a lantern in the posture in which the hermit uses to be drawn near St Christopher".<sup>3</sup> The philosopher is occupied in close observation, "watching, prying, thinking, and setting everything down".

### THE "HERMIT" OF THE MAGIC CARDS

Another subject relevant to our subject here is no less worthy of note: the metamorphosis that takes place in the seventeenth century in the symbolism of the Ninth Card of the Major Arcana of the Tarot. Setting aside disputes regarding the origins of the Tarot cards<sup>4</sup> and wheth-

<sup>1</sup> See further: Mirelle Huchon, "Rabelais grammairien. De l'histoire du texte aux problèmes d'authenticité", PhD dissertation, Université de Paris IV – Sorbonne; published as vol. XVI in the series *Études Rabelaisiennes*, Geneva, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Engelgard, in: Франсуа Раблэ. Гаргантюа и пантагрюэль. Первый русский перевод [François Rabelais. Gargantua and Pantagruel. The First Russian Translation], tr. and comments by Anna Engelgard, with illustrations by Gustave Doré, St Petersburg: Novyy zhurnal Inostrannoy literatury, 1901: 13.

<sup>3</sup> François Rabelais, *Gargantua and his Son Pantagruel*, Book 5, Chapter XXXI.

<sup>4</sup> Two of these versions seem to offer the most likely explanations. The first presupposes a common source for all Early Renaissance cards in triumphal parades inspired by Petrarch's poem *Triumphs* (*I trionphi*), and thus sees the principle determining the order of the emblematical personifications as each successive character's "triumph" over the previous one. The second hypothesis links the Tarot images with the Hermetic art of memory and the fifteenth-century fashion at the courts of Ferrara and Milan for cards bearing mythological and allegorical designs that were part of the game but were at the same time suffused with the deep Hermetic symbolism used in the magical art of memorisation.

er or not their original purpose lay in the magical art of memory or in occult rituals, we turn to the aspect most important to us, the iconography.

All the known Tarot cards of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – from those of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan onwards – depicted one of the most important images in the Major Arcana as an allegory of time, sometimes as Saturn / Cronos, sometimes as the Old Man / Hunchback (*El Gobbo, Il Vecchio*) holding an hourglass. In the seventeenth century, however, this character increasingly and consistently takes on iconographical features associated with the hermit type described above. He walks a path with a staff and a lamp and, starting with the Paris Pack of the first half of the seventeenth century, we find a cartouche at the bottom with the caption *L'Ermite*. It was thus that the card was henceforth to be known.

These examples seem to my mind to be sufficient to establish that by the eighteenth century a range of recognisable hermit attributes had become a commonplace in the iconography of the philosopher – whether Diogenes, John Dee or some philosophically-inclined British aristocrat.

It is interesting to compare the structure of Mantegna's cards with Camillo's "theory of memory" (described by Giuseppe Barbieri in "At the Theatre of Memory: Uncertainty as a Research Canon" in: *Memory as the Subject and Instrument of Art Studies*, Moscow: State Institute of Art History, 2016: 74–79), which reveals their incredible similarities. Both set out a symbolic perception of the Hermetic universe and serve as a magical instrument that can be used to run the world with the aid of the occult art of memorisation.

Petrarch himself may have had the idea of using triumphal parades as a technique for memorisation, with later artists simply taking it up in the early Tarot cards. See further: Kenneth Clark, "The Angelo Parrasio Hypothesis", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* LXII/360, March 1933: 142–143.

#### Tarot cards:

- 1) Time. The Visconti-Sforza tarot deck. Circa 1440
- 2) Saturno. Tarocchi Cards of Mantegna. Circa 1480
- 3) The Old Man. Giuseppe Mitelli's Tarocchino Bolognese. Bologna. 1665
- 4) The Hermit. The Tarot de Paris deck. Early 17th century
- 5) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jean Noblet. Circa 1650
- 6) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jacques Vieville. 1650
- 7) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jean Dodal. 1701
- 8) The Hermit. Tarot cards of Nicolas Bodet. Early 18th century





### THE PHILOSOPHER'S STUDY

Inevitably, the cult of the hermit as bearer of the Hermetic tradition and the revival by seventeenth-century secret societies of the myth of the Pythagoreans as a close brotherhood guided by principles of discipleship and initiation, were followed by a wave of built hermitages, which could then be used to realise these practices. Initially, this realisation was intellectual. In the letters of Elias Ashmole, for instance, the celebrated English alchemist, supporter of the Rosicrucian brotherhood and Freemason, we find a reference in 1648 that he had at last found a "pleasant Hermitage"<sup>1</sup> on the estate of his fiancée Mary, Lady Mainwaring at Bradfield, where he could give himself up to his favourite occupation, natural magic. In that same decade, the poet in John Milton's poem *Il Penseroso* dreamed "And may at last my weary age / Find out the peaceful hermitage"<sup>2</sup>

"The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
What worlds, or what vast regions hold  
The immortal mind that hath forsook  
Her mansion in this fleshly nook:  
And of those demons that are found  
In fire, air, flood, or under ground,  
Whose power hath a true consent  
With planet, or with element."

It is noteworthy that two sources provided the models for the first hermitage structures: the caves of ancient anchorites, which remained a place of pilgrimage, and numerous prints showing the hideaways of alchemists and the Hermetic garden conceits of the Renaissance.

Modern scholars have traditionally seen Ashmole's "pleasant Hermitage" exclusively as a literary metaphor for the learned man's retreat.<sup>3</sup> In fact, behind that poetic phrase lies a very specific toponymic truth. Just five miles from Bradfield, where the English natural philosopher and naturalist found refuge, was a village called Hermitage,<sup>4</sup> which surely served as Ashmole's inspiration.

But the first hermitage to be erected in the seventeenth century specially for the owner to pursue learned pursuits was the Italian garden of the renowned

<sup>1</sup> Tobias Churton, *The Magus of Freemasonry: The Mysterious Life of Elias Ashmole—Scientist, Alchemist, and Founder of the Royal Society*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006, Chapter 6: 147.

<sup>2</sup> We might point out that Russian translations of Milton's poem do not use the Russian word "ermitazh" but a more literal translation, "skete" or "monastery".

<sup>3</sup> Churton, *Op. cit.*: 147.

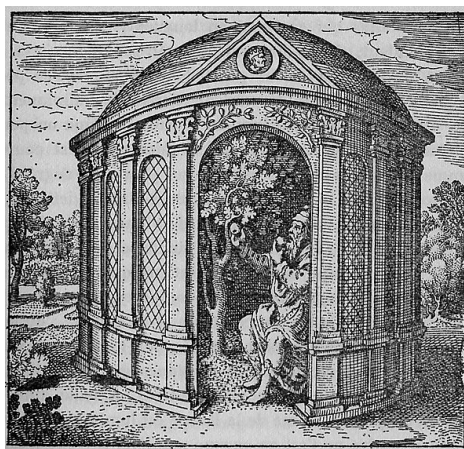
<sup>4</sup> First mention of the village of Hermitage dates from 1641, when the extensive lands of the county of Berkshire included "some land at the Heath, Hermitage". There is no agreement as to the origins of the village's name but local legends all link it to a medieval hermit who enjoyed a reputation as a healer and magician.

Hungarian philosopher, alchemist and public figure György Lippay, Archbishop of Esztergom. Created in the 1650s, the garden itself was rebuilt a century later in the English landscape fashion and no longer survives. But five detailed images engraved by Mauritz Lang in 1663, and a description of all the garden buildings published immediately work was completed,<sup>1</sup> give us a good idea of the arrangement and function of the archbishop's so-called *Ermitorium*.

A surviving general plan of the archbishop's estate at Bratislava<sup>2</sup> makes clear that the prototype was the garden of the Villa Medici at Pratolino, which Lippay had visited during a stay in Tuscany. Like Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany and owner of the villa at Pratolino, the Archbishop of Esztergom was a great admirer of alchemy and was proud of his collection of natural "rarities" and strange plants. He liked to spend time alone in his gardens and grottoes. After all, did Lippay not write three treatises in Hungarian on gardening in addition to his most famous *opus magnum*, an extensive text on applied and philosophical alchemy entitled *Mons Magnesiae Ex Quo Obscurum sed Verum Subiectum Philosophorum effonditur et Expresse denominatur*?<sup>3</sup> And behind all his works lay a single alchemical principle: the most important thing in transmutation is substance, "which contains the Four Elements: earth, water, air



The Kabbalistic Alchemist. Engraving from *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*



The Alchemist in a Cave. Engraving from *Speculum Sopicum Rhodostauroticum* (The Mirror of the Wisdom of the Rosy Cross») by Theophilus Schweighardt. 1618

Emblem 9  
Atalanta Fugiens  
(Fleeing Atalanta)  
by Michael Maier. 1617

<sup>1</sup> Johann Jakob (Joachim) Müller (1658), cited in: Gergely Hajdu Nagy, *Rusztikus Épipmények a Magyar Kertművészetben. Romok, Grották, Remeteségek*, Budapest: Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, 2011: 142.

<sup>2</sup> Mauritz Lang, *The Archbishop's Palace at Esztergom*. Line engraving. 1663.

<sup>3</sup> Hajdu Nagy, *Op. cit.*: 142–144.

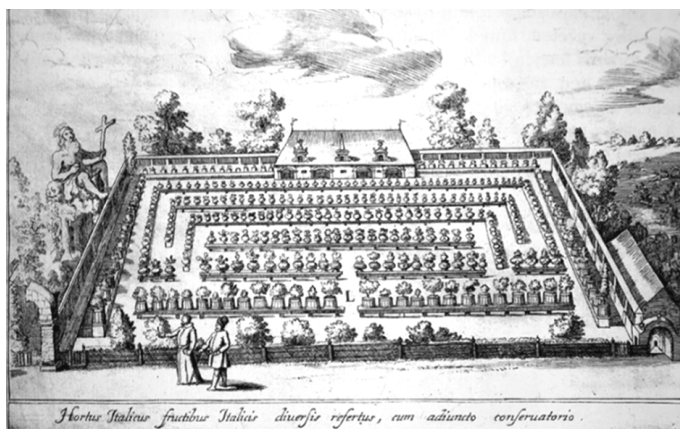
and fire; three elements: salt, sulphur and mercury, the male and female united as one... and, lastly, material of the sun.”<sup>1</sup>

Following this principle of consistent “transmutation of the original chaos of primal material”, the archbishop’s park differed from its Tuscan prototype in having an overtly regular plan, subordinated to a considered system of special effects. The dominant motifs in this natural “theatre” were artificial hills, grottoes, nymphaea, aviaries and water features, everything needed to symbolise the nature of the Four Elements.

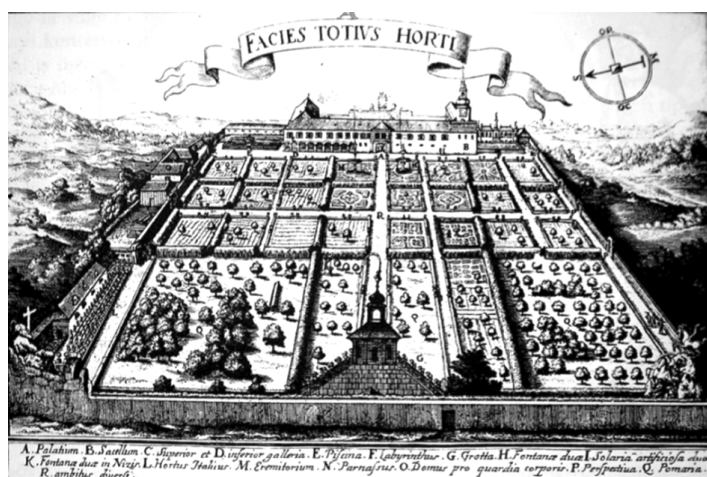
One such symbolic garden *Kunststück* was to be the Ermitorium or Italian Garden, which appears in the lower left corner of the plan. Here, following the Tuscan duke’s example, Lippay erected a colossal sculpture. But in place of Giambologna’s “chthonic” figure of Appennino, the archbishop preferred to set a gigantic statue of St Jerome as a hermit seated on a rock holding the crucifix. Ranged around him were artificial caves, moss-covered grottoes, and four smaller statues of hermits: St Anthony, St Paul, St Albert and St Andrew Zorad, as well as a figure of Emperor Leopold I as Solomon in prayer, with a skull beside his golden crown. Notably, it was to Leopold, with his passionate interest in the alchemical transmutation of base metals into gold, that Lippay dedicated his alchemical treatise.

In their variety and meaningful iconography, the sculptural compositions in the grottoes were intended to glorify the virtue of mystical Christian retreat, part of the natural flowing of life, predetermined by divine will and manifested through the arrangement of the planets. The garden iconography was dominated by mythological and allegorical motifs, personifications of the natural elements and cycles drawn from alchemical, astrological and magical concepts. According to a guide published in 1658, lighting effects meant that everyone who entered the dark vaults of the Ermitorium grotto saw the statues of saints “as if alive”, “coming to life”, and thus giving visual form to their creator’s direct succession to the Hermetic tradition, above all to that part

Mauritz Lang  
Hortus Italicus  
 (“Italian Garden”)  
in the palace  
of the Archbishop  
of Esztergom. 1663  
Engraving



<sup>1</sup> Hajdu Nagy, Op. cit.: 142–144.



of it linked with – using Campanella’s classification – “magia artificiale reale” or true artificial magic.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the grotto structures of the Italian garden referred back to the “Saturnine” temperament, so important to Mannerism and the Baroque, which characterises the genius made wise by learning, experience and intuition. Tellingly, it was in the Ermitorium that Lippay had his own study, filled with the latest innovations in technical instrumentation, where he engaged not only in scientific research but also in esoteric ritual practices and in preparing a conspiracy against the emperor.<sup>2</sup>

The next two hermitages of which we know also emerged in the Holy Roman Empire, though only after Lippay’s death. Their construction commenced 1695–1697 on the Bohemian estates of Count František Antonín Špork, newly returned home from the Netherlands. Špork was an honorary member of the secret Christian brotherhood known as the Amici crucis or Friends of the Cross, which was made up of White Mountain Czech émigrés.<sup>3</sup>

Mauritz Lang  
The palace  
of the Archbishop  
of Esztergom. 1663  
Engraving

<sup>1</sup> “La magia artificiale reale produce effetti reali. Così Architetta fabbrica una colomba volante da legno, e recentemente a Norimberga, secondo il Botero, furono fabbricate un’aquila e una mosca. Dedalo fabbrica statue che si muovevano per l’azione di pesi o del mercurio... L’arte non può produrre effetti stupefacenti, se non per mezzo di moti meccanici, pesi, e tronzioni, o impiegando il vuoto, come si fa negli apparecchi penumatici ed idraulici, o applicando le forze alle materie.” Cited by: Frances Yates, “Magia e scienza nel rinascimento”, in: *Magia e scienza nella civiltà umanistica*, ed. Cesare Vasoli, Bologna, 1976: 215–37.

<sup>2</sup> After the conclusion of the Peace of Warsaw in 1664 the Bishop of Esztergom, unhappy with the pro-Turkish policies of the ruling powers, joined Count Ferenc Wesselényi, Palatine of Hungary, in a conspiracy against the emperor. He died before the conspiracy was discovered.

<sup>3</sup> The consequences of the Battle of White Mountain and the fall of Frederick V of the Palatine (head of the Protestant Union and the Bohemian “Winter King”, with whom the period of “Rosicrucian enlightenment” is associated) proved catastrophic for Czech culture. The battle laid the basis for the Thirty Years War and was the last element in the Bohemian Revolt, marking the start of the “Dark Age”, as the period from 1620 to the 1770s became known. The Hapsburg



A remarkable individual, Špork was a passionate gambler, a lover of the theatre and opera, member of a Christian secret brotherhood, Jansenist, philosopher, esoteric, philanthropist and freedom-loving grandee. His biography reveals him to be one of the most notable figures in Central European cultural and intellectual life at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historians often describe him as the founder of the lodge known as “The House of the Three Stars”, although any connection with the Bohemian branch of the Freemasons is mere legend. Yet Špork’s activities were extremely varied and largely quite genuinely aimed at spreading faith and enlightenment and giving aid to those in need. Living the life of a “Freemason without an apron”, Špork did not restrict himself to the observation of strict spiritual vows, but zealously studied geomancy and nature’s own streams of energy and took pleasure in compiling cryptograms and symbols. He signed his letters *Fagus*, an anagram composed of the first letters of the German form of his full name, Franz Anton Graf von Sporck, and also the name for the god of the beech, sacred tree of the Celts, of wise men and druids, symbol of wisdom.

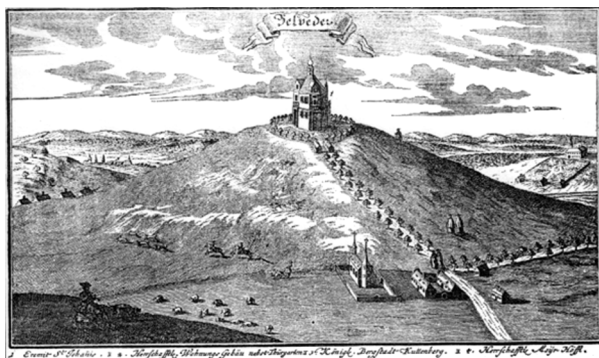
Inheriting considerable wealth and estates on the death of his father, Špork decided first to build a single-storey Belvedere chapel at his Malešov estate on a hill in the village of Vysoká. According to František Grimm, construction came to end in 1697 and the following year the chapel was dedicated to John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup> The architect was almost certainly the Italian Giovanni Battista Alliprandi, then working on other commissions for Špork.<sup>2</sup> We cannot be entirely clear today as to the specific purpose of the building, which seemed to unite the apparently contradictory functions of pleasure pavilion, chapel, hermitage and venue for Baroque festivities. We know only that the Belvedere was originally intended for three aged Augustinian monks who came specially from the abbey in the neighbouring town of Lysá nad Labem.<sup>3</sup> An alley of lime trees linked the Belvedere to the count’s palace at Roztěž, from where there was a superb view over Vysoká and its buildings: a Lusthaus or pleasure pavilion, a pheasant pavilion and the “hermitage of John the Baptist”. In 1699 the count sold his estate but monks continued to occupy the Hermitage right into the middle of the eighteenth century. A print commissioned by Špork in 1715 shows the Belvedere on the hill.

religious repressions that followed and the mass wave of noble emigration they led to, in turn gave rise to a huge interest in mystic trends and the appearance of all kinds of prophets. While the radical wing of Czech White Mountain émigrés – the Unity of the Brethren – looked to the intellectual heritage of the last bishop of the community, John Amos Comenius, the more moderate part of the movement concentrated its interests on spreading the theosophy of Jakob Böhme, developing the idea of millennialism and creating secret Christian brotherhoods.

<sup>1</sup> František Grimm, *Vysoká, vrch a zřícenina u Kutné Hory* [Vysoká, a Hill and Ruins near Kutná Hora], Kutná Hora: Státní tiskárna, 1937 (Offprint from the Magazine of the Society of Friends of the Antiquities of Czechoslovakia): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Markéta Flekalová, Lenka Kulišťáková, “Landscape of Franz Anton von Sporck in Roztěž Surroundings”, *Acta Universitatis Agriculturae et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis* 62/3, 2014: 453.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



Malešice. The Hermitage of Count Franz Anton von Sporck (František Antonín Špork). 1695–1697  
Engraving from a 1715 description of the estate

In parallel to the small hermitage at Vysoká the count developed a similar project on a far grander scale at his Kuks estate near Prague. The discovery of healing springs there prompted Špork to transform it into a spa, with his own castle on one bank of the Elba and a hospital for veteran soldiers on the other. Construction of both was completed in 1710, the dominant element of the hospital being the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity, designed by Alliprandi. Špork could then turn his thoughts to a symbolic programme that would determine the decorative elements in the park. From Matthias Braun he commissioned a cycle of religious compositions, including allegorical sculptures of twelve Virtues and twelve Vices, which were installed on the hospital terrace.

At the same time the count erected five small hermitages on the estate, dedicating each to a particular heavenly patron, the holy hermits Paul, Anthony, Francis, Giles and Bruno, and settling in each of them a real hermit, a member of his brotherhood, with whom he worked on his publishing programme. Depictions of these small retreats appear in Špork's biography, published in 1720,<sup>1</sup> so we know that they were modest wooden structures in the national style. With the aid of his "merciful brothers", over a number of years Špork illegally published Jansenist literature, as well as mystic and alchemical treatises banned by the papal censor. Michael Heinrich Rentz and Joseph de Montalegre, two of the best engravers in the kingdom, worked in his printshop and over ten years his little estate produced some 150 books on philosophical and religious subjects.<sup>2</sup>

Such activities did not endear the count to the Holy Inquisition. As a warning, in 1720 three of his hermits were accused of spreading heresy and summoned to an ecclesiastical court.<sup>3</sup> The others then at Kuks abandoned their patron. Špork, however, pretended not to take the hint. He replaced the living hermits with sculptural groups – with almost no damage done to the

<sup>1</sup> Gottwald Caesar Stillenau, *Das Leben eines herrlichen Bildes*, Amsterdam, 1720; cited in: Gordon Campbell, *The Hermit in the Garden. From Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013: 9–10.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens*, Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985: 171–172.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, *Op. cit.*: 9.



Figures of hermits  
in the Hermitage  
of Kuks. 1710s

overall symbolic concept – and continued working. This led to the creation of Bethlehem, Matthias Braun's most interesting work at Kuks, a cycle of reliefs and sculptural groups made of the local sandstone and painted with colour, which played out a Baroque "spectacle" from the life of hermits in the forest surrounding the estate.

The name Bethlehem in fact came into use only later, from the double relief in one cave showing the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi. Not far from Bethlehem were a sculptural group showing *St Hubert's Vision in the Forest*, a figure of Mary Magdalene, a gigantic statue of the anchorite the Venerable Onuphrius meditating with a skull in his hands, a depiction of John the Baptist in the wilderness and an expressive composition depicting *The Hermit Juan Garin leaves His Cave*. This "sculpture park" may well have been inspired by the series of prints by Jacques Callot dedicated to repentant sinners, hermits and anchorites and known under the broad title of *Penitents*. At any rate, the range of saints chosen by the count almost entirely coincides with the heroes of Callot's posthumously published prints,<sup>1</sup> the image of Juan Garin – a sinful hermit who was turned from the path of righteousness by



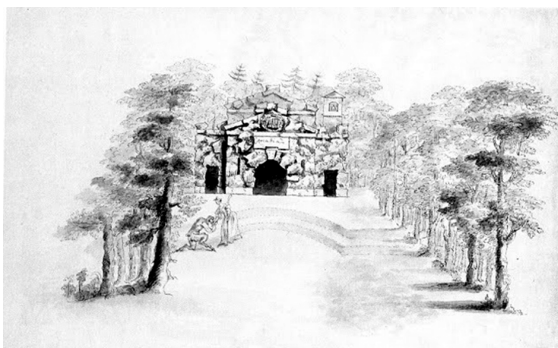
<sup>1</sup> Jacques Callot's late series *Les pénitents et pénitentes* consists of five figurative etchings engraved by Callot himself in 1632 plus a frontispiece by his pupil Abraham Bosse. Callot's prints show four Christian saints – Francis of Assisi, the infant John the Baptist, the repentant Mary Magdalene and St Jerome holding a skull – as well as Mary Magdalene on her deathbed. Scholars have often pointed out that the title is not entirely in keeping with the content and probably indicates that the series, published posthumously, was unfinished when Callot died. The most likely explanation is that the series was put together for publication by Callot's publisher Israël Henriet, responsible for printing Callot's works from 1630 onwards. In addition to images of sinners who repented and devoted themselves to God (e.g. Mary Magdalene and Francis of Assisi) the series could have been intended to include wholly righteous hermits and anchorites.



the temptations of the flesh – superbly complementing the series overall.

Having concluded the creation of a gallery of hermits lying in wait for those walking in his forest, Špork turned one of the now empty hermitages into his own “philosopher’s house”, where he stored the books he had published and “the most incredible objects, all kinds of works of art created by the most famous masters, amazing instruments and equipment, about which the most improbable rumours circulated.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the purpose of the hermitage as a locus of mystical, Hermetic knowledge is brought to the fore. Yet Špork led a public life, often inviting imperial officials, court intellectuals, writers and musicians to Kuks, offering them noble pastimes such as hunting, theatrical productions performed by his own troupe, concerts and, lastly, “the art of the word, assembled in numerous books at guests” disposal, forcing them to meditate on important questions of human life”.<sup>2</sup> In 1725 Špork even sent to Vienna to ask for approval for a proposal to organise a “way of the Cross” surrounded by sculptures of hermits, leading from the Jesuit residence in the neighbouring town of Žireč to his own forest hermitage, although his request was rejected. Several years later the count himself was accused of heresy. In 1729 the emperor sent a special military detachment to Kuks, which presented Špork with a decree confiscating all the books in the “philosopher’s house” and placing him under house arrest. Our fashionable hermit was faced with possible confiscation of all his property, the burning of his library, a fine of 100,000 zloty and life imprisonment. His trial began only in 1733 and a few years later the count was pardoned, the sentence reduced to just 25,000 zloty and payment of court costs. But it marked the end of his activities as a “friend of the Cross” and of the history of the garden hermitages at Kuks.

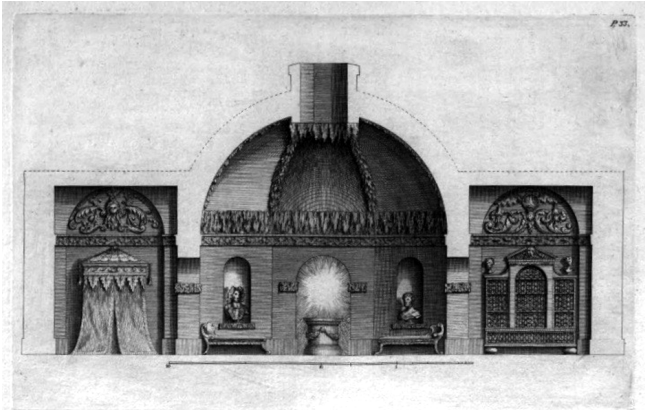
It is at about this same time, at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that we see the appearance of Queen Caroline’s famous hermitage in the grounds of Richmond Lodge and the hermitage palace of the Margrave of Bayreuth between the huts of court hermits in the park grove, where he held meetings and initiation ceremonies of his own secret order. At the Margrave’s hermitage there were no paths and the individual spirit undergoing trial had to wander in the “gloomy forest”, independently seeking the path to the light of truth. If the Margrave of Bayreuth preferred a moving mechanical statue of a hermit reading Paracelsus’ treatise, the British queen’s hermitage had traditional busts of natural philosophers and natural scientists – Newton, Boyle and Locke.



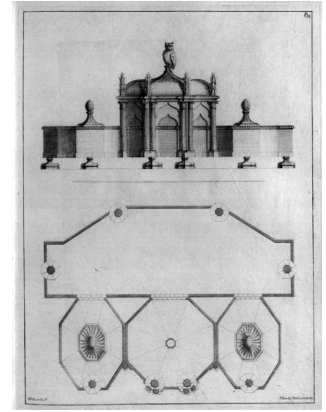
William Kent  
The Hermitage  
of Queen Caroline  
at Richmond. Pen  
and ink and  
watercolour on paper  
Soane Museum,  
London

<sup>1</sup> Tomáš Halík, Hrabě František Antonín Špork a Kuks za jeho doby, Dvůr Králové nad Labem: Karel Trohoř, 1905: 9–10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Plan and interior  
of the Hermitage  
by William Kent  
from *Some designs*  
of Mr. Inigo Jones  
and Mr. Wm. Kent  
Published by John  
Vardy, 1744



The Hermitage interior  
from *Some designs*  
of Mr. Inigo Jones  
and Mr. Wm. Kent  
Published by John  
Vardy, 1744

Thereafter the number of hermitages in parks and gardens was to increase each year throughout the eighteenth century. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of them, but our hypothesis that these hermitages and the first secular hermits were rooted in the Hermetic tradition allows us to take a new and very different look at the process by which the real hermit was transformed into a mechanical *Kunststück* or automaton, a process which could hardly have been possible without magic and the Hermitic tradition.

Olga Kleshchevich

**THE ALCHEMICAL “IMAGE OF THE WORLD” IN THE ALLEGORICAL PROGRAMME OF THE GARDENS AND PARK AT PETERHOF<sup>1</sup>**

In connection with my research interests, which include the semantics of the cultural codes of the alchemical tradition, I made a study of the hieroglyphics of the gardens and park at Peterhof, which were created during the baroque era, a time saturated with the spirit of hermetic philosophy and the ideas of the Rosicrucian movement, which were reflected in architectural and landscape design. In my opinion, a serious approach to the interpretation of the design of the gardens and park at Peterhof, based on the hermetic background to baroque culture, provides a significantly broader view of the cultural horizons of the beginning of the New Era in Russia than is generally accepted. Thanks to this approach, the ensemble as a whole acquires a robust system of coordinates (vertical and horizontal) and a polyphonic sound.

In expanding the information on Peter the Great's interest in the alchemical tradition set out in British scholar Robert Collis's article “Alchemical Interest at the Petrine Court”<sup>2</sup> and independently establishing parallels between Peter's actions and aspirations and the spirit of Rosicrucian documents, I came to the conclusion that the future Emperor was not simply aiming to glorify Russian weapons and introduce a new allegorical language with the design and layout of the main official residence when he initiated building work there in 1714–1715. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, it had become a tradition in western Europe that an enlightened leader who sympathised with or was driven by hermetic ideas aimed to position their monuments, churches, cities and gardens “in such a way that ‘higher forces’ could find manifestation in them”, and “the constructions themselves must be ‘an imitation of reality’, ‘an image of the heavens’, or ‘a copy of eternity’”.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this approach to its design and construction, Peterhof as a combination of site, nature and architectural objects subtly transforms a walk

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Collis, “Alchemical Interest at the Petrine Court”, *Esoterica*, VII, 2005, [www.esoteric.msi.edu](http://www.esoteric.msi.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval, *Vlast' Talismana* [Talisman: Sacred Cities, Secret Faith] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), 260.

in an ancient park into a holy journey inside oneself, immerses the visitor in another reality and indicates the possibility of "another world". It may be that, sharing Cicero's thoughts, Peter the Great aimed to "have at his disposal a large number of good places, well lit, placed in strict order at a certain distance from one another, and also images which were effective, bright and moving, that could meet the soul and penetrate it".<sup>1</sup> He and his descendants created an ensemble which produces in visitors the feeling that their perception of the world has become more intense, vivid, light and, simultaneously, precise.

If one pays attention and tunes in to perceiving what is happening inside the gardens and park at Peterhof, one can sense when stepping over the threshold of this unusual place something like another dimension, an impersonal space which offers freedom from worldly problems and invites one to look inside oneself. Being here, a person begins to recall their ability to understand their surroundings as a whole (something they do not utilise in everyday life), without lacunae, intervals, ambiguity and ignorance. A person learns to see with their being, their whole body. The transformation takes place very gently and imperceptibly, without noise or fuss, as one moves into gardens, when it seems after a few steps that all extraneous sounds, even those from the busy road nearby, exist in another dimension. Gradually, step by step, a balanced perception appears, which matures with time and becomes independent power. It seems to order the visitor to "read the book of Nature", studying hermetic wisdom, discerning the extent of its otherworldly vision, like heavenly harmonies filling the universe, piercing the sphere of the heavens and diving into the objects of the world that surrounds us, completing an Action that only those who have "correct sight" will notice. This is the message of the Peterhof gardens, presenting the visitor with a vision of Knowledge concealed behind allegorical hints, which are packed in a frame reworked in the baroque version of nature. Knowledge of the purified nature of Heaven returned to humanity, assimilated in the baroque period in the more sophisticated images of the regular garden, with its "grand visual rhetoric and dramatic broad perspectives", as garden scholar Christopher McIntosh put it.<sup>2</sup> Unlike in many other gardens worldwide, the comprehension of this Knowledge in the gardens of Peterhof is accompanied by a distinctly outlined initiatory journey leading to an absolute meaning which is hidden behind a hermetic veil. This is why a specific unique Petrine style<sup>3</sup> can be felt here, imbued with the spirit of the age which pervaded in Russia at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, "Ob oratore [On the Orator], 2, 87" in *Tri traktat ob oratorskom iskusstva* [Three Treatises on the Orator's Art] (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher McIntosh, *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic and Meaning* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitry Likhachev, *Poeziya sadov: K semantike sadovo-parkovykh stilei* [The Poetry of Gardens: Towards a Semantics of Style of Parks and Gardens] (St. Petersburg: Logos, 2008), 131.

Following the baroque fashion of his time, Peter created his garden like a complex visual text, devised to transmit messages on various levels. The baroque style mixed such varied tendencies as: 1) theocentrism (humans are puppets in God's hands); 2) stoicism (combining religious perception with an understanding of humans' independence and responsibility, for example Justus Lipsius;<sup>1</sup> 3) a satirical or picaresque position,<sup>2</sup> which is characteristic of the creators of alchemical treatises.

Russian scholars such as A.V. Ananieva and A.Y. Veselova note that "on the level of *semantics*, garden and text can be mutual sources and the reason for the appearance of a whole object – a garden or park or a work of literature – or a separate fragment, detail or motif of a garden in a text or a text in the space of a garden. The material presence of text in a garden is possible as quotes, for example, a garden inscription or scenes from a literary work reproduced in the space of the garden".<sup>3</sup> At Peterhof, the possibility of the assimilation of an alchemical treatise in the garden is indicated not only by the interest of Peter the Great and his allies in the ideas of the Great Work but also by the establishment of the "hermetic field" in the culture of the New Era as an "intersection of two axes. There is a horizontal axis that opposes the subject as an eccentric, disembodied observer and the world as an assembly of purely material objects, including the human body. The vertical axis then stands for the act of world-interpretation through which the subject penetrates the surface of the world in order to extract knowledge and truth as its underlying meanings".<sup>4</sup> The baroque garden is simply created for the embodiment of such ideas, because in it "the complexity of semantic presentation is at the forefront",<sup>5</sup> flowing from the hermetic conception of interpretation of the point of intersection of these two axes as a theurgic act.<sup>6</sup>

In essence, the idea of "multi-layered depths" of symbolism at Peterhof is in the air. The Soviet scholars N.I. Arkhipov and A.G. Raskin noted, without going into detail, that in Peterhof's Grand Cascade "every statue, every bas-relief had a definite allegorical meaning and together they comprised an elaborate coded narrative".<sup>7</sup> In the twenty-first century, V.S. Turchin, who

<sup>1</sup> Justus Lipsius (1547–1608) was a Flemish philosopher, publisher, scholar of Seneca and one of the founders of neo-Stoicism.

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Farkhutdinova, *Dialogicheskaya priroda kul'tury barokko* [The Dialogical Nature of Baroque Culture] (Tomsk: TML-Press, 2009), 34–35.

<sup>3</sup> A.V. Ananieva and A.Y. Veselova, "Sady i teksty (Obzor novykh issledovaniy o sadovo-parkovom iskusstve v Rossii)" [Gardens and Texts (A Review of New Research on Garden and Park Design in Russia)], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 75/5, 2005, 351.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Proizvodstvo prisutstviya: Chego ne mozhnet peredat' znachenie* [Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Dmitry Likhachev, *Russkoe iskusstvo ot drevnosti do avangarda* [Russian Art from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde] (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvi-SPb, 2009), 318.

<sup>6</sup> See also: Olga Kleshchevich, *Alkhimiya: vykhod iz spagiricheskogo labirinta* [Alchemy: Out of the Spagyric Labyrinth] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo RKhGA, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Nikolai Arkhipov and Abram Raskin, *Petrodvorets* (Leningrad/Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), 54.

passed away recently, wrote: "In the residence (at Peterhof – O.K.) there were several semantic layers of symbolic 'texts', superimposed on one another: one was 'true', clear only to the owners, and the other was a 'cover' aimed at guests and the general public. Shortly before his death, Peter the Great, who had conceived his Peterhof on the deserted bank of the Gulf of Finland, wrote a programme of what needed to be done there in future and how, 'without him, but as if together with him'. It included, as the project had during his lifetime, the concept of 'dual' reading of every structure in the parks and palaces: for initiates and the uninitiated".<sup>1</sup> No one has yet discovered documentary evidence of such a programme, but it was not without reason that theologian Feofan Prokopovich, who shared the tsar's "alchemical interests", wrote that there were two types of fiction, the second of which exists "to indicate a certain secret, a divine power, an aid, wrath, a punishment, a revelation of the future".<sup>2</sup> With his interest in hermetic philosophy, it is entirely possible that Peter the Great could have incorporated in the landscape and other natural resources at Peterhof the idea of reflecting the alchemical process on the place, "aiming to cover it with as many 'meaningful' objects as possible, giving the gardens an instructional character".<sup>3</sup>

The heirs to Peter's ideas "produced what he had planned, over time strengthening the 'covering' external and elegant symbolism and thus decorating the internal".<sup>4</sup> In addition, at the beginning of the New Age the presence of allusions and allegories in texts, including "garden texts", would become an indicator of an appeal to a select group: readers who shared the author's views or understood the references.

One indicator (at first glance the main one) of possible alchemical allusions within the gardens and park at Peterhof is the fact that the plan is in the shape of an alchemical retort. This demonstrates that the idea of the Alchemical Vessel (first, during the Petrine era, in the "cup" of the Lower Gardens, which in 1738, under Anna Ioannovna, were joined to the Upper Gardens and began to be transformed into a "retort") had been incorporated in the ensemble as its emblem and foundation at the design stage, influencing all future construction and landscaping. At the same time, it indicates that one of the semantic layers of Peterhof could be alchemical, based on the genre principles of the alchemical treatise. The general plan of the park, in the form of an alchemical emblem, becomes the title page of the garden-treatise and, simultaneously, contains an allusion to the alchemical laboratory of power, in which Peter the Great performed the transmutation of matter, the object of the Great Work: from the "vulgar Mercury" of backward, Traditional Rus to the "gold" of a progressive European country. Alchemists are known to have called their

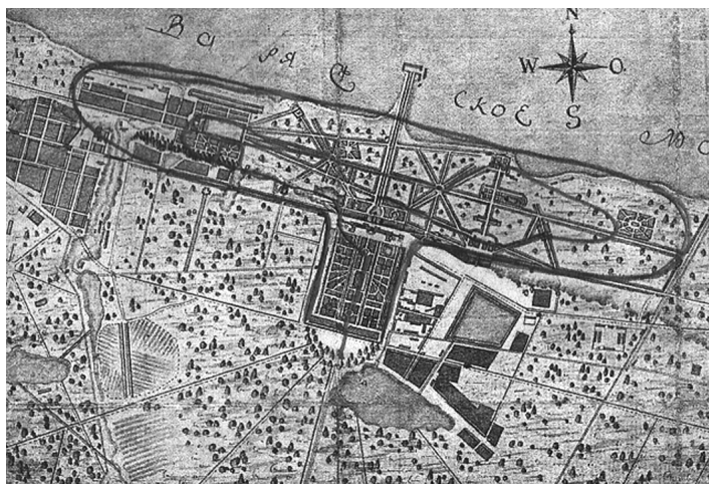
<sup>1</sup> Valery Turchin, "Peterhof: simvol, emblematy, estetika vody [Peterhof: Symbols, Emblems, the Aesthetics of Water]", *Nashe nasledie*, 66, 2003, 216–217.

<sup>2</sup> Feofan Prokopovich, "O poeticheskom iskusstve [Poetics]" in *Feofan Prokopovich. Collected Works* (Moscow/Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1961), 403.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitry Likhachev, *Poeziya sadov*, op. cit., 121.

<sup>4</sup> Valery Turchin, op. cit., 217.





Plan of the Lower Park and Upper Gardens, working drawings, 1760s  
The thick line marks the emblematic presence of the alchemical retort within the park's plan

alchemical vessels “mother”,<sup>1</sup> because the within it, as in the womb, the Great Work takes place and the Philosopher’s Stone is formed.

So, before us is the plan of the Peterhof park and gardens in the form of an emblem of the Great Work – a retort – a vessel “with a long neck”.<sup>2</sup> Here the long neck is the Upper Gardens and the broad body is the Lower Gardens.

At Peterhof it is obvious that the founders aimed to set out material didactically, based on the methods of the “hermetic kabbalah” (the alchemical “language of the birds”), suggesting that the visitor move along an initiatory route laid to help those seeking knowledge of the spiritual life. Here it operates through observation of the route’s external expressions (in this case the symbolism of the fountains and their location in the gardens), through work on revealing their allegories and allusions, to experiencing the internal spiritual meaning of one’s own life. Fulcanelli wrote that “all alchemists are obliged to make a pilgrimage. Albeit in the figurative sense, because this is a *symbolic journey* and he who wishes to benefit from it does not leave the laboratory even for a second. He constantly observes the vessel, matter and flame”.<sup>3</sup> This is the same way in which a journey through the Peterhof park and gardens implies a symbolic journey inside the retort, inside the laboratory of the human soul, “the original condition of one’s matter as *an image of the world*”<sup>4</sup> embodied in the space of the alchemical garden.

The fact that the Plan of the gardens includes an image of an alchemical Retort indicates that the Peterhof park and gardens should be seen not simply

<sup>1</sup> Francis van Helmont, “157 Alkhimicheskikh Kanonov [157 Alchemical Canons]” in Olga Kleshchevich, *Alkhimiya*, op. cit., 243.

<sup>2</sup> Fulcanelli, *Taina soborov i ezotericheskoe tolkovanie germeticheskikh smyslov Velikogo Delaniya* [The Mystery of the Cathedrals] (Moscow: Enigma, 2008), 214.

<sup>3</sup> Fulcanelli, *Filosofskoe obiteli i svyaz' germeticheskoi simvoliki s sakral'nym iskusstvom i ezoterikoi Velikogo Delaniya* [The Dwellings of the Philosophers] (Moscow: Enigma, 2003), 282–283.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 164.



Image of a retort  
from the alchemical  
treatise *Mutus Liber*  
(1677)

as an Alchemical retort in which the Great Work takes place but, simultaneously, as an Alchemical treatise – the description of an alchemical process – since “old parks should be ‘read’ like books, turning one page-period after another, imagining the long process of construction, finding in it the traces of events, the ‘signature’ of the founders, the struggle between various artistic trends, the poetic echoes of time, the original evidence of a bygone age. [...] However, one must remember that gardens and parks were never simply works of art, but a unique expression of philosophical views of the epoch and the relationship of humankind to nature”.<sup>1</sup>

Interest in the garden-treatise or garden-book appeared in many European countries in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

<sup>1</sup> Arkady Vergunov and Vladislav Gorokhov, *Russkie sady i parki* [Russian Gardens and Parks] (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 6–8.

The quintessential such garden was the park that Frederick V<sup>1</sup> and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart (daughter of the English king James I) began to build in 1620 at their residence in Heidelberg, the capital of the Palatinate in south-west Germany. The garden, which was situated on the steep banks of the river Neckar, was divided into several terraces, each of which had its own geometric plan. Hortus Palatinus (the Garden of the Palatinate) had all of the elements of a Renaissance garden: fountains, grottos and a labyrinth. However, the main element of the garden was its programme. It incorporated an image of the world, a cosmological structure of the universe through which the visitor could travel symbolically.<sup>2</sup> This garden gave a definite “vector of initiatedness” to baroque gardens, as at this time none one saw “anything reprehensible in copying good artists, or even imitating them completely”.<sup>3</sup> The Peterhof park and gardens ensemble-meditation sets out the journey of an adept, which is actually a description of the Great Work, the great Journey which a person who has decided to change as a result of the transmutational elements of the alchemical process.

In the process of research, I defined four sections of the compositional plan which aid in the interpretation of the alchemical treatise:<sup>4</sup>

I. Understanding the object of the Great Work: On Mercury

II. Understanding the Agent of the Great Work: learning “How the Great Work takes place” and progressing through the “Stages of the Great Work”

III. Understanding the Aim of the Great Work, the Philosopher’s Stone

IV. Receiving instruction on Methods of the Great Work and Advice of the Master.

I applied these sections to the plan of the park and then virtually (and many times in real life) followed the route inside the garden-retort, finding explanations for the alchemical fountain compositions-pointers in works by alchemical authors.

As a result, my theory of Alchemical Peterhof found a visible embodiment. The “neck of the retort” – the Higher Gardens – became the Preface or the Preamble of the garden-treatise.

The first three sections of the compositional scheme (“On Mercury”, “On the Agent of the Great Work” and “On the Philosopher’s Stone”) fit the following areas of the gardens and park at Peterhof: the west side of the park, including the Marly palace; its centre – the Adam and Eve

<sup>1</sup> The first ruler to attempt to bring alchemical Rosicrucian dreams to life. See Frances Yates, *Rozenkreitserskoe Prosveshchenie* [The Rosicrucian Enlightenment] (Moscow: Aleteia/Enigma, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Boris Sokolov, *Severnii man'erizm. Barokko, Klassitsizm* [Northern Mannerism, Baroque, Classicism], [www.gardenhistory.ru](http://www.gardenhistory.ru)

<sup>3</sup> Natalya Pakhsaryan, “XVII vek: klassitsizm i barokko [17th century: Classicism and Baroque]” in *Evropeiskaya poetika ot antichnosti do Prosveshcheniya. Entsiklopedicheskii putevoditel'* [European Poetics from Antiquity to the Enlightenment. An Encyclopaedic Guide] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Kulaginoi – Intrada, 2010), 184.

<sup>4</sup> See Olga Kleshchevich, *Alkhimiya*, op. cit., 75–88.

fountains – as a reflection of the Chemical Marriage; Monplaisir palace and its garden, the traveller’s rest, and the Sun fountain.

The fourth section (Methods of the Great Work and Advice of the Master) relates to the rest of the eastern side of the Lower Gardens: the fountains Garden of Fortune (Labyrinth) and Pyramid, the cascade Chessboard Hill, the Orangery fountain and then the nucleus of the garden-treatise, the Grand Cascade. We will examine each part of Peterhof’s “alchemical complex” in order.

#### THE NECK OF THE RETORT. PREAMBLE

The upper gardens at Peterhof are a “symbolic introduction” to the garden-treatise, created in the classical style of a baroque garden parterre.<sup>1</sup> Here the visitor is given a brief summary of the initiatory journey and, it is assumed, takes on the role of neophyte, the “vulgar mercury” of alchemists – identified with arcana 0 of the tarot, “The Fool”—by the first fountain, Mezheumny (Midway), which in old Russian meant “blockhead”, “fool” or “idiot”.<sup>2</sup> The next fountains on the route from the gates to the palace, especially the Neptune fountain provides sufficient food for thought in order to penetrate the alchemical symbolism and make a firm decision as to which part of the park to move after the “neck of the retort”. Since at the end of the Higher Gardens the sacred yet playful moment of the baroque garden comes into play, the Labyrinth, which, according to René Guénon, “opens or prevents, depending on the situation, access to a particular place where one should not enter without analysis, as only the “qualified” can progress to the end, with others meeting difficulties or getting lost along the way”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he noted that the meaning of the labyrinth “could belong in the same way to the entrance any place of initiation or any sanctuary that is intended for ‘secrets’ and not for public rituals”,<sup>4</sup> which is unarguably the role of the “neck of the retort” as a passage to the main place of action of the Magistry, the Lower Gardens. It is here that the traveller is faced with the choice of taking the correct direction, which confirms (or not) the level of their “hermetic training”. Without going into detail regarding the argumentation of this choice for lack of space, we note that one should move westwards, as indicated by the female statue of the Square Ponds fountain, as if to confirm her understanding of the passive, feminine receiving principle of the Great Work as a step on the way from the condition of “vulgar Mercury” to that of the “imperfect” and then “perfect” Mercury of the alchemists.

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Sokolov, *Printsip Raya: glavy ob ikonologii sada, parka i prekrasnogo vida* [The Principle of Heaven: Chapters on the Iconology of the garden, the park and the beautiful view] (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2010), 436.

<sup>2</sup> Zinaida Aleksandrova, *Slovar’ sinonimov russkogo yazyka: prakticheskii spravochnik* [Dictionary of Russian Synonyms: A Practical Guide] (Moscow: Russki yazyk, 1989), 177.

<sup>3</sup> René Guénon, *Simvoly svyashchennoi nauki* [Symbols of Sacred Science] (Moscow: Belovod’e, 2004), 222.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

### The body of the retort

I. Sandy Pond. The Whale fountain used to stand at the centre of the pond, a large, carved and painted wooden “whale-fish” which, for alchemists, symbolised “foundation matter” and alluded to Jonah’s adventure in the belly of the Whale. This was a preparatory process for transmutation, which involved the familiarisation of the neophyte with his own imperfection. For this reason one can relate it to the first section of the compositional scheme of alchemical treatises, “Understanding the object of the Great Work: On Mercury.

II. Lion Cascade. The cascade is a “Temple of water”. At its centre is a sculpture of the nymph Aganippe, the protector of Mount Helicon and its “source of abundant streams”, the allegorical embodiment of the inspiration and strength of the alchemist, Light, Flame and Spirit, the so-called “Philosophical Heaven” which has two forms, fiery and watery. The cascade embodies the understanding of the watery form of the agent of the Great Work and relates to the second section of the compositional scheme of alchemical treatises, “Understanding the Agent of the Great Work”.

III. Next comes the third section of the compositional scheme of alchemical treatises, Stages of the Great Work.

1. The first alchemical stage is *nigredo*, represented at Peterhof by the Marly gardens and park, the design and decoration of which contains allusions to Deucalion’s flood. This is the four Triton Bell fountains, heralding with four strikes “the coming end of the fourth epoch, which completes the earthly cycle”,<sup>1</sup> and the paired Menager fountains, which previously featured golden balls on the top of the spouts, allegorically embodying “the Globe, which is under the power of water and fire. This ball is supported by the waves of the stormy sea”,<sup>2</sup> like the Golden Hill cascade, where at the top of the golden staircase – among other gods of the Greek pantheon which are favourite symbols of alchemical writers – is Triton, blowing into a seashell and signalling Deucalion’s flood to recede. If below, Triton – in the form of four young Tritons with bells, signalled the End of the World four times – here he creates a sound from his shell-horn which gives hope that the burdens and ordeals of the Great Work will soon be over.

### Central part of the park

#### West side

2. The second alchemical stage: *albedo*.

- The Eve fountain embodies the alchemical woman, the passive principle and, at the same time, indicates the beginning of the *albedo* stage, symbolised by the Moon and silver.

- The Adam fountain embodies the alchemical man, the active principle of Work.

<sup>1</sup> Eugène Canseliet, “Predislovie k tret’emu izdaniyu [Foreword to the Third Edition]” in Fulcanelli, op. cit., 39.

<sup>2</sup> Fulcanelli, op. cit., 516.



The combination of the Adam and Eve fountains contains an illusion to the Chemical Marriage, a joining of the passive and active principles in the process of the Great Work, which was seen by alchemists as a theurgic procedure of conjoining the "divine flame": its rays and light and the human soul. This energy was used by alchemists for a specific task, the purification of the object of the Work of that which they called "dross" to leave what they considered "pure". The Chemical Marriage produced an androgyne which, with time and continued application of Mastery, was transformed into alchemical Medicine and the Philosopher's Stone.

At the same time, the architectural complex which includes the paired sculptures of the Adam and Eve fountains underlines the baroque rhetorical antithesis of the western and eastern sides of the park. Here, the west is a description of *nigredo* and the passive principle of the Work, and the east is hope for the future related to attaining and operating with the active principle of the Work.

- Monplaisir is a place of rest for the Traveller. The palace and gardens are full of alchemical symbols. The Sheaf fountain embodies the idea of alchemy not only as "heavenly agriculture", but as the kernel – the alchemical Ceres – of the seed of transmutation. The paintings on the ceiling of the central hall at Monplaisir also contain alchemical allusions, repeating according to the four corners of the world the semantics of distribution of mythological figures throughout the Peterhof garden-treatise. The same can be said of the frescoes which adorn the side pavilions of the galleries of the main complex. They depict scallops, alchemical shells which were worn by those making the pilgrimage to the church of St. James, the patron saint of alchemists, at Santiago de Compostela.

- The Sun fountain embodies the understanding of alchemical Sun-Gold as the fiery incarnation of the active agent of the Work on the eastern side of the park. It is the antithesis of the watery incarnation of the Lion Cascade, the Temple of Water on the western side.

### East side

After the Sun fountain, the garden-treatise reaches the last stage of the initiatory journey and the fourth stage of the compositional scheme of alchemical treatises: IV. Receiving instruction on Methods of the Great Work and Advice of the Master. It includes:

1. The Garden of Fortune (the so-called Labyrinth). Our concept of the park-retort, with its integral initiatory route, supports the conclusions of archaeologist Viktor Korentsvit that the planting is nothing like a labyrinth. The wheel with spokes which can be seen in its plan is a type of Ouroboros, directing the Traveller on a new stage of the journey, to the kernel of the Work. It is also an allusion to the endless reproduction of the main operation of the Great Work, theurgic praxis.

2. The Pyramid fountain is a triumphal monument: Long Live the Great Work! The fountain's form is reminiscent of the "hieroglyph of flame" and



the pyramid is “nothing other than an *athanor* or *philosophical oven* where the Great Work is done”.<sup>1</sup> As a whole, the fountain incorporates the idea of a monument, the Memorial, in honour of the tireless creative strength of the hermetic Flame-Logos and the “Temple of Invisible and the Higher Divinity”.<sup>2</sup>

3. The cascade Chessboard Hill. The chessboard which is laid out on the drainage of the cascade, is an embodiment of the alchemical gryphon, a hermaphrodite, an androgyne, a creature with human (black squares) and divine (white squares) elements after firing in the “philosophical fiery oven”. Above, by the grotto, there are three winged dragons, the three stages of Mercury: vulgar, imperfect and perfect. They visually demonstrate the process in which “the Dragon, devouring his own tail and sloughing his old skin according to legend, achieves youth with a new skin”,<sup>3</sup> according to the alchemical maxim “One must be able to die in order to live and become immortal”.<sup>4</sup> The cascade includes an accompanying narrative, which is hidden in the arrangement of the statues on either side of the chess board, thus adding to its semantics the polyphony of alchemical symbols. It is a wonderful example of a “false didactic story” typical of the baroque style of presenting alchemical treatises, which explains the presence at the top of the cascade of three rather than the traditional two alchemical dragons.

4. The Triton fountain in the Orangery complex is a description of the preliminary results of the neophyte’s journey as he is transformed step by step into an adept who is ever closer to achieving the aim of the Great Work, the Philosopher’s Stone. Having paid tribute to the alchemical Flame and the Work itself in the form of the watery Pyramid, and having experienced much of the essential nature of the alchemical Dragon – in the form of the monsters of the Chessboard Hill cascade and as the protectors of the treasure of the Heavenly garden which is embodied by the Orangery complex – the traveller through the Peterhof retort appears here in the image of the god Triton, the son of Neptune. It was he, as we recall, who sounded the horn which signalled that Deucalion’s flood would recede and here he personifies the end of the alchemical experiment. Having slain the dragon, Mercury transformed from “vulgar” to “imperfect”, he confirms his art of perfecting the object of the Work into a “valuable metal”, completing the alchemical stage *albedo*, which began with the conjoining in Chemical Marriage of the “passive” and “active” alchemical principles.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>2</sup> Manly P. Hall, *Entsiklopedicheskoe izlozhenie masonskoi, germeticheskoi, kabbalisticheskoi i rozenkreitserskoi simvolicheskoi filosofii* [An Encyclopaedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy] (Moscow/St. Petersburg: Eksmo/mirgord, 2007), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Maier, *Ubegayushchaya Atalanta, ili Novye Khimicheskie Emblemy, otkryvayushchie tainy estestva* [Atalanta Fugiens, that is, New Emblems of the Secrets of Nature] (Moscow: Enigma, 2004), 113.

<sup>4</sup> Papus, *Genезis i razvitiye Masonskikh simvolov: Istoriya ritualov. Proiskhozhdenie stepenei. Posvyashcheniya. Legenda i Khirame (To, chto dolzhen znat’ Master)* [Genesis and the Development of Masonic Symbols] (Moscow: Enigma, 2006), 84.

Finally, the semantic core of the Peterhof park and gardens, the Grand Cascade, is a "treatise within a treatise". It is a major concluding coda to the alchemical oratory of fountains, the apotheosis of the story of the Peterhof park and gardens, where numerous elements of decoration are employed in a polyphony typical of baroque style. At the end of the eighteenth century, the cascade was likened to a church with three communion tables, in the Rosicrucian spirit, where the sculptures of the cascade depicted the earthly life of the hero of the narrative; the Lower Grotto and the space in front of it symbolise his transformation as a result of alchemical practices; and at the semantic centre of the cascade we see the triumphant Completion of the Great Work. In the struggle with the hermetic lion, which embodies matter processed by the philosophers using alchemical arts, Samson-Heracles rips from his jaws "the moisture of the Sun and the saliva of the Moon",<sup>1</sup> the symbol of the Universal Medicine which can "act on the three kingdoms of nature in order to overcome imperfection, illnesses and 'flaws'".<sup>2</sup> Thus, at the alchemical stage *rubedo*, ends the initiatory epic of the main character of the Peterhof alchemical garden-treatise, which began at the gates of the Upper Gardens, at the top of the virtual alchemical retort.

The analysis of the alchemical layer in the interpretation of the park as a whole, and particularly the Grand Cascade, demonstrated that there it does not contain a single "mute or superfluous element". The statues, vases, bas-reliefs, grottoes and fountains are placed in a logical order of unfolding of the alchemical narrative in which "vulgar Mercury" becomes the Philosopher's Stone, the acquisition of which is embodied in the central sculptural group Samson Tearing Open the Lion's Jaws. This concept counters the traditional point of view in which Peterhof "unlike its western and northern prototypes (Versailles in France and Drottningholm in Sweden – O.K.), primarily glorifies not the person of King but the victory of the Russian Emperor over the Swedish kingdom. Paraphrasing the expression attributed to the Sun King – 'I am the state' – one can say that at Peterhof it is not the person of the Emperor which is identified with the State, but the State with the person of Peter the Great".<sup>3</sup> However, in the course of my research I have become increasingly convinced that this is only the upper, politicised and relatively recent layer of the polyphonic fabric of the ensemble's semantics. The Peterhof park and gardens is a substantial and detailed tale of the neophyte who, having completed the complex path of perfection, became a master and can now elevate "vulgar Mercury" to his level. The story is in the form of an alchemical treatise using the specifics of the conduct and assertion

<sup>1</sup> Dom Pernety, *Mify Drevnego Egipta I Drevnei Gretsii* [Myths of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece] (Kiev: Por-Royal, 2006), 423.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Evola, *Germeticheskaya traditsiya* [The Hermetic Tradition] (Voronezh: Terra Foliat, 2010), 272.

<sup>3</sup> Vyacheslav Lyotin, "Tsarstvo severnogo Apollona: Allegoricheskie programmy Drottningholma (Shvetsiya) i Petergofa (Rossiya) [Kingdom of the Northern Apollo: The Allegorical Programmes at Drottningholm (Sweden) and Peterhof (Russia)]", *Vestnik KGU im. N.A. Nekrasova*, 6, 2006, 138.

of Transformation in Russian history of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, perceived as the alchemical transmutation of a whole state due to the strong will of an initiated monarch equipped with Divine Grace (Alchemical “Vertu”), “strength”, “goodness”, and “the Ability to transmute imperfect Metals into Gold and Silver”.<sup>1</sup> The main theme of the tsar’s concept was a commitment to new ideas, their power and irreversibility – plus the great effort and challenges involved in bringing new ideas to life – not the glorification of Russian arms or the person of the ruler. This is supported indirectly by the fact that there is not a single figure of Mars, the god of war, in the ensemble, something which would have been logical in a military memorial complex and in the style of that period.

As a result, the fragmented and disjointed material on the landscaping and architecture of the Peterhof park and gardens, if interpreted using the symbolism and cultural codes of the alchemical tradition that are widely used in the design of gardens and parks during the Renaissance and the early years of the New Age, enables us to bring it together in an easily-read, logical sequence. This, in turn, leads to a deeper and more considered perception of other semantic layers, which are traditionally expressed when describing this wonderful monument to Russian baroque. In endowing the park at Peterhof with alchemical symbolism, Peter the Great left us a message about the necessity of spiritual work through reflection and of contact with spiritual powers both virtually and in reality, bringing together in an indivisible Whole two externally separate “images of the world”: “his own material” and “the cosmological structure of the universe”, the microcosm and macrocosm of alchemists. To help those who wished to read the messages and their followers – continuers of the alchemical idea of the garden such as Carlo Bartolomeo Rastrelli and Mikhail Zemtsov, the latter’s pupils Ivan Blank and I. Davydov, Nicholas Benois, Andrei Stackenschneider, and the members of the commission of the Academy of Arts which decided to change the design of the Grand Cascade at the end of the eighteenth century there were clues which, in the distinct and legible genre of the alchemical treatise, described the steps necessary for the neophyte to approach hermetic Truth. In the Peterhof park, the richness and benefit of such reflections and searches is defined not only by the visitor’s level of preparedness of the visitor, but also by the intuitively or consciously chosen route through the emblematic retort of the garden-treatise, which matches the logic of the stages of alchemical transformation and the aim of transmutation that, without doubt, takes place thanks to the spirit and charm of this magical place with Peter the Great left to us.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard of Treviso, “Pokinutoe slovo [Abandoned Word]” in Claude d’Ygé, *Novoe Sobranie khimicheskikh Filozofov [A New Collection of Chemical Philosophers]* (Moscow: Enigma, 2010), 241.

Maria Demidova

**HORAPOLLO'S *HIEROGLYPHICA* AND ITS POSSIBLE INFLUENCE  
ON DEPICTIONS OF THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI  
IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE<sup>1</sup>**

Over the course of the last century iconological studies have successfully demonstrated that Renaissance art was not only guided by the principle of *imitatio*, but was filled with symbolic allusions. Inevitably, in comparison with the medieval period, the nature of the allegorical language changed, as did the sources chosen by artists and by those compiling visual programmes.

An important factor in this change in the nature of the symbolism was the spread of Neo-Platonic philosophy. Its establishment in Florence is usually linked with those humanists whose activities largely unfolded in the second half of the century, with Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Cristoforo Landino. But Florentine interest in Plato and his later followers first emerged at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1397, several decades before Ficino's birth, a department of the Greek language was set up at Florence University in 1397 through the efforts of Niccolò de' Niccoli and Palla Strozzi, with the renowned Manuel Chrysoloras – who had been sent to Italy on a diplomatic mission by the Byzantine emperor – at its head. It became possible not only to study Greek as a language but to look at Greek literature and philosophy. Manuscript copies of Plato's writings available in Florence could now be read and analysed. Cosimo de' Medici, Niccolò de' Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini made every effort to bring more and more Ancient manuscripts and medieval copies of the writings of the great authors of Antiquity to Florence. The Council of Florence in 1439 marked yet another milestone in furthering knowledge of Neo-Platonic teachings. Educated Florentines – among them Cosimo de' Medici, then *gonfaloniere* of justice – conversed with Archbishop Bessarion and with Georgius Gemistus (Plethon), celebrated specialist in Plato. It is thought that it was Cosimo's personal interest in Neo-Platonic teachings that later turned Marsilio Ficino to the translation of and commentary on the writings of Plato and the Late Antique Neo-Platonists. Although the humanists

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

understood that the religious and philosophical teachings of Antiquity did not cover the full range of Christian tenets, they saw them as presaging Christian beliefs and felt that they contained the key to long forgotten secrets about the universe. *Pax philosophica*, the reconciliation of Christian teachings and Ancient philosophy, was a widespread concept that continued to develop throughout the Renaissance era. We know that Pico della Mirandola repeatedly turned to Plato's writings while he was working on his commentary on the Book of Genesis, *Heptaplus...* (1489).<sup>1</sup> And even as Neo-Platonism was emerging in Italy there was an active interest in Ancient Egyptian culture, which many humanists thought to be the source of the wisdom of both Greeks and Romans.<sup>2</sup>

Into this atmosphere of heightened interest in Neo-Platonic ideas and Egyptian culture in Florence came a manuscript containing three Ancient texts. One was the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollon, an Egyptian priest whose work had been translated into Greek by one Philippus.<sup>3</sup> Acquired on the island of Andros by the Florentine merchant Cristoforo Buondelmonti in 1419, the manuscript arrived in Florence around 1422–1423, immediately becoming the object of considerable attention.<sup>4</sup> Several copies were almost immediately made of Horapollon's treatise: there is documentary evidence that one was made for Niccolò de' Niccoli, a childhood friend of Cosimo de' Medici and a man who enjoyed a high reputation as a scholar of Antiquity. The original manuscript later found its way into the Medici library.

Attempts were made to use Horapollon's text, a description and interpretation of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (although without any illustrations), to read the inscriptions on obelisks.<sup>5</sup> We know that Francesco Filelfo used

<sup>1</sup> André Chastel, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique. Études sur la Renaissance et l'Humanisme platonicien*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959: 85.

<sup>2</sup> Karl H. Dannenfeldt, "Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in the Renaissance", *Studies in the Renaissance* VI, 1959: 7–27.

<sup>3</sup> This Greek manuscript is in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, MS Plut. 69 cod. 27. In addition to Horapollon's text it includes Proclus' *Elements of Physics* and *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus of Lemnos.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Giehlow, *Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance*, Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1915; Eng. edn *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance*, tr. with an introduction and notes by Robin Raybould, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History): 38–47. Erik Iversen, "Hieroglyphic Studies of the Renaissance", *The Burlington Magazine* C/658, January 1958: 16; Rudolf Wittkower, "Hieroglyphics in the Early Renaissance", in: Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, New York – London: Thames and Hudson, 1987: 116 (first published in B. S. Levy, ed., *Developments in the Early Renaissance. Papers of the Second Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. Binghamton, NY, 4–5 May 1968, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Such attempts were made by Niccolò de' Niccoli, who had already tried to read and interpret Egyptian hieroglyphs on the basis of the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus. In 1424 de' Niccoli accompanied Cosimo de' Medici on a trip to Rome, where he sought to apply his newly-acquired knowledge to the inscriptions on Roman obelisks.

the *Hieroglyphica* as a serious historical source, notably in seeking to establish whether it was the Jews or the Egyptians who invented the hourglass. That there was unceasing interest in Horapollo's text is demonstrated by a note in the records of the Medici library for 20 April 1486, telling us that a copy of the codex bearing Filelfo's initials had been returned by one Demetrius Kalkodilas of Athens, the Florentines having asked him to explain several parts of the text they could not understand.<sup>1</sup> Karl Giehlow felt that this inability to fully comprehend the meaning contained within this mysterious work served as a deterrent to publication of the *Hieroglyphica* in the fifteenth century.

Quattrocento humanists made use of a wide range of Ancient texts in their study of Ancient Egyptian cults, from the *Preparations for the Gospel* of Eusebius of Caesarea, the first five books of Diodorus' *Library of History* and Herodotus to the writings of Iamblich, Plotinus (studied by Marsilio Ficino) and Plutarch. In comparison with all those Ancient sources, however, Horapollo's treatise was more specific, meaning that it could potentially be used as a textbook in "symbolic grammar". From the writings of Ancient authors (Herodotus, Plotinus, Plutarch, Diodorus, Apuleius, Macrobius, Porphyry, Proclus, Tacitus etc.), scholars had concluded that every element of Egyptian writing was a pictogram imbued with philosophical semantics. The *Hieroglyphica* allowed for further understanding of their meanings. This was something that resonated closely with the general mood among Neo-Platonist humanists, who thought that "by contemplating a visible thing we can gain insight into the invisible world."<sup>2</sup>

From the *Hieroglyphica*, for instance, it followed that the kite signified the female essence, the mother, since – the Ancient Egyptians thought – there were no male kites; the elephant stood for a ruler, endowed with the gift of foresight; the baboon was the moon, the universe, letters, a priest, anger or sailing; the snake swallowing its own tail was the sky and eternity; the number 1095 was dumbness (since a child usually starts to speak within three years – 1095 days); the ibis was the heart and Hermes; peoples obedient to the ruler were represented by bees. To fifteenth-century Florentines, Horapollo's treatise was a priceless collection that decoded all Ancient knowledge about the Universe and its mysteries.

In the Renaissance it was thought that the *Hieroglyphica*, like the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, had been written in Antiquity. Later scholars were to demonstrate that it dated from around the late fourth or fifth century CE, being in effect a by-product of attempts by the priestly caste to formulate their own exclusive knowledge.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that this secondary source had almost nothing in common with true Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics,

<sup>1</sup> Giehlow, *Op. cit.*: 51.

<sup>2</sup> Pico della Mirandola, summarised in: Ernst H. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae. The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XI, 1948: 168.

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Sbordone, "Introduzione", *Hori Apollinis hieroglyphica*, Naples: Loffredo, 1940: XVIII–XIX.



with the result that all attempts to use it to decode inscriptions on the walls of Ancient tombs and on papyrus – right up to those of Champollion in the early nineteenth century – ended in failure.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the contemporary tendency to seek new visual symbols inevitably meant that the *Hieroglyphica* became a source of inspiration, an alternative to medieval bestiaries.<sup>2</sup> In the minds of fifteenth-century thinkers the hieroglyph became a magical symbol, miraculously encapsulating the wisdom of the Ancient world. Echoes of this keen interest in hieroglyphs were even found in the writings of Leon Battista Alberti and Antonio Filarete.<sup>3</sup>

First published in Greek by Aldus Manutius in 1505, by the end of the sixteenth century Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica* had been repeatedly translated, going through at least fifteen editions, many of them illustrated by Renaissance artists. One of the first Latin translations was a manuscript by Willibald Pirckheimer, produced at the start of the Cinquecento, although it was not complete and contained some errors. Discovered in Vienna by the German art historian Karl Giehlow, the manuscript includes illustrations based on drawings by Albrecht Dürer.<sup>4</sup> Giehlow studied Dürer's oeuvre,<sup>5</sup> including the giant woodcut depicting a triumphal arch for Maximilian I (composed of 36 sheets and measuring 357 × 295 cm) created 1512–1517 under the celebrated German artist's direction. The programme behind the "structure" – only ever intended to be shown in print and not to be built – was the work of the humanist Johannes Stabius, astronomer, poet and historiographer to the emperor. The manuscript in Vienna also contains a Latin translation of Stabius' commentary on an image of the emperor which was to crown the triumphal arch. Giehlow looked in parallel at several original drawings by Dürer that recalled the images in the manuscript translation and which bear inscriptions in Pirckheimer's hand on the back. Analysing all the sources at his disposal, Giehlow became convinced that Horapollon's treatise lay behind the programme for the top part



Albrecht Dürer,  
Hieroglyphic Image  
of Emperor  
Maximilian. 1515.  
Woodcut

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: X.

<sup>2</sup> The *Physiologus*, the main source for medieval bestiaries, would also seem to have been written in Alexandria in the second to third centuries CE.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *Ten Books of Architecture*, I/VIII.4; Filarete (Antonio di Pietro Averlino), *Treatise on Architecture*, XII.

<sup>4</sup> Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS Cod. 3255. Giehlow, *Op.cit.*: 20–21. Giehlow writes that only two drawings (which he does not name) in the manuscript may be the work of Dürer, the others presumably being by a pupil.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Giehlow came to the study of art history in 1895, at the relatively late age of 32, but in just a few years he became a leading specialist on Albrecht Dürer, an artist much admired by Aby Warburg. Robin Raybould, "Introduction", in: Giehlow, *Op. cit.*: 15.



Albrecht Dürer,  
Sheet with Drawings  
to Willibald  
Pirckheimer's  
translation  
of the *Hieroglyphica*.  
Coll. Adalbert E.V.  
Lanna

of Maximilian's arch. This also provided an explanation for Stabius's declaration that the decoration of the arch had links to the Egyptian cult of Osiris.<sup>1</sup>

Works of this kind, created for the glorification of a ruler, were always marked by hyperbole and rhetoric. But in the printed image of Maximilian I these qualities seem to have been utterly transformed, turning it into a ludicrous phantasmagoria. So far is this image from contemporary perceptions of majesty that to a viewer in the twenty-first century it might seem to present a fairytale figure such as the Forest King: surely this cannot be a great ruler holding the fate of all Europe in his hands? This print developed images from Horapollo's treatise, albeit at times considerably "corrected" or adjusted to give just the right meaning:<sup>2</sup> the globe in the emperor's left hand with an eagle seated upon it indicates a glorious victor; the sceptre wound round with a snake in the right hand symbolises one who rules most of the world; the rays falling upon the emperor are in fact dew, indicating his gifts; the papyrus indicates the ancient roots of his house; the dog with a table is an image of the most excellent of princes; the crane symbolises vigilance; the lion protome symbolises strength; the bare feet touching the waters, set somewhat apart, represent the impossible (in this instance indicating that the emperor had foiled the intrigues of his main enemy, the French king). Dürer's print

can be seen as the first documented example of the use of images from the *Hieroglyphica* in art.

But there can be no doubt that so famous a source as Horapollo's treatise could not have lain unnoticed by Renaissance artists for nearly a hundred years before being taken up in German art at the start of the sixteenth century. A large number of scholars who have looked at the treatise for different reasons have even insisted that active use was made of the *Hieroglyphica* in Quattrocento art. In an article on Dürer's work for Maximilian, Erwin Panofsky wrote: "... long before Andrea Alciati and the host of his followers had published their emblem books, and even before the original text of the *Hieroglyphica* had been printed in 1505, Horus Apollo's concoction had left its mark on Italian medals and funeral monuments, on the woodcuts in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*, and on the paintings and drawings by Mantegna, Pinturicchio, Giovanni Bellini and Leonardo da

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that these words were already being mocked at the end of the sixteenth century by the German poet Johann Fischart, who felt that the decoration on the arch meant nothing and was pure fantasy.

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky stated that all the symbols used, save the imperial eagles and Gallic cockerel, had been borrowed from the *Hieroglyphica*: Erwin Panofsky, "Dürer's Activity for Maximilian I; the "Decorative Style", 1512/13–1518/19", in: Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 3rd edn, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948: 177.

Vinci.”<sup>1</sup> In a recent monograph on the new symbolism attached to the animal world in the Renaissance, Simona Cohen noted: “Although first printed by Aldus in 1505, the *Hieroglyphica* was already exploited as a new source of symbolic imagery in Florence, Venice and Germany from the mid fifteenth century.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the author does not cite a single example.

When we look to the subject of the Adoration of the Magi, however, we recognise here a suitable intellectual field in which the symbols from Horapollo’s treatise could be used. Not only was the theme itself closely bound up with ideas about and images of ancient wise men, but the *Hieroglyphica* provided a whole arsenal of new interpretations of representatives of both the animal and feathered worlds so often seen in the train of the magi.

To investigate our hypothesis regarding the influence of the *Hieroglyphica* on the iconography of the Adoration of the Magi in Quattrocento Florence, we shall look at three famous works: an altarpiece by Gentile da Fabriano (1423; Uffizi, Florence), a tondo by Domenico Veneziano (c. 1440; Staatliche Museen, Berlin) and Benozzo Gozzoli’s fresco cycle in the chapel of the Palazzo Medici (1459–1460).<sup>3</sup> For none of them is there any documentary evidence

<sup>1</sup> Panofsky, *Op. cit.*: 173. Although Panofsky did not cite any particular source, all the examples he gave were borrowed from Giehlow. There can be no doubt that the placing of the Ouroboros in the reserves of medals was due to the *Hieroglyphica*: Marsilio Ficino also cites the treatise when explaining the sign. As regards the author of the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*, however, it has recently been suggested that Colonna was totally unacquainted with – or purposely ignored – Horapollo’s system of symbols: Mino Gabriele, in: *Andrea Alciato. Il Libro degli Emblemi*, introduction, ed. and commentary by Mino Gabriele, Milan: Adelphi, 2009, p. LXI. Bernardino Pinturicchio probably looked to Annio da Viterbo’s fabricated “Ancient Egyptian” writings; Wittkower, *Op. cit.*: 121–122. As for Leonardo, he created his own bestiary, most likely based on two specific medieval sources, the fourteenth-century *Fiore di Virtù* and the *Acerba* by Cecco d’Ascoli (1269–1327).

<sup>2</sup> Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2008: 68.

<sup>3</sup> I should here explain the nature of the source texts of the *Hieroglyphica* used for this study. There are several recognised modern translations. The key source for all specialists is the critical edition compiled by Francesco Sbordone, *Hori Apollinis hieroglyphica*, Naples: Loffredo, 1940. Ten years later an English translation was published as *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, tr. George Boas, New York: Pantheon Books, 1950. Boas was translating from Latin expositions of the Greek source early eighteenth centuries. Since we are dealing in this article with Quattrocento artists, we have felt it more productive to concentrate on the Greek version of the text known to fifteenth-century humanists, who often experienced problems in translating specific terms or phrases. We have thus also used a French translation from the Greek text which is that recognised by scholars of Antiquity: “Traduction des Hieroglyphica d’Horapollon”, tr. B. van de Walle and J. Vergote, *Chronique d’Égypte* 18, 1943: 39–89, 199–239; agenda *ibid.* 22, 1947: 251–59; available online: <http://asklepious.chez.com/horapollo/horapollon.htm> (accessed 24 July 2018). There is also a Russian translation by Armen G. Aleksanyan, available online: <http://www.egyptology.ru/antiq/Horapollo1.pdf>.

We shall cite the French translation by van de Walle and Vergote and the recent re-issue of the English translation by Boas: *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, tr. and ed. George Boas, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

for the use of symbols from the *Hieroglyphica*. But then, we have no written evidence for any aspect of how their programmes were shaped. There are just a few letters touching on the last two. Our analysis can thus be based only on oblique indications and the factual context.

From the very start we would like to accentuate two key points. Firstly, the use of interpretations from the *Hieroglyphica* might help us explain some of the more unusual aspects of the works in question. Secondly, Emperor Maximilian I would hardly have permitted the use of so extravagant a literary source for his triumphal arch if there had been no precedent.<sup>1</sup>

In the fifteenth century, or so it seems to us, Horapollo's treatise was applied in a manner very different to that seen later at the court of Emperor Maximilian I, where the purpose was to inform Europe of the ruler's enlightenment. Moreover, as Erwin Panofsky noted, the "literary" approach was in keeping with the wider "propagandistic spirit" of German culture: "It bears witness, further, to the peculiar predicament of a humanistic movement which could neither rely on the resources of cosmopolitan centers like Rome and Venice, nor on the protection of an aristocracy which produced an unlimited supply of erudite and art-loving princes and cardinals".<sup>2</sup> A lack of direct evidence for the use of the *Hieroglyphica* in fifteenth-century Italian art may have several explanations. On the one hand, open use of the source might have led to demands to explain the whole text to an educated Florentine public, which, as we have seen, was a somewhat difficult matter. On the other, the clients who commissioned a work may well have enjoyed the "secret" nature of the treatise, seeing it as some mysterious symbolic language known only to a select circle, in the way it had been perceived by the Ancient Egyptian priests themselves. It is no coincidence that the epigraph by the prelate Gentile de' Becchi with regard to the concept behind the Chapel of the Magi in the Palazzo Medici, dealt with here, ends with an exclamation and a warning: "O profane crowd, do not dare set foot in here."<sup>3</sup>

Painted depictions of the Adoration of the Magi in Florence are thought to have been directly influenced by the ceremonies held on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Brotherhood of the Magi, which played such an important role in life in fifteenth-century Florence, had probably been formed in the

<sup>1</sup> The imperial triumph remained purely on paper in the form of 36 woodcut sheets; the procession appeared in a number of watercolours and prints published by Archduke Ferdinand, brother of Emperor Charles V, in 1526. Even in this form, however, it was a source of considerable of pride. The programme of the triumph was not perceived in Europe as extravagant excess. On the contrary, the French humanists tended to look to the complex programmes drawn up to glorify German emperors that followed on from that of Emperor Maximilian.

<sup>2</sup> Panofsky, *Op. cit.*: 175.

<sup>3</sup> Cristina Acidini Luchinat, "The Chapel of the Magi", in: Cristina Acidini Luchinat, ed., *The Chapel of the Magi. Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Ricardi Florence*, London-New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994: 12-13. The verse part of Gentile de' Becchi's text reads "The gifts of kings, the prayers of celestial spirits, the mind of the Virgin, these are the holy things of the altar. O profane crowd, do not dare set foot in here."

previous century, and certainly the first recorded description of the Feast of the Adoration of the Magi dates from 1390. Rab Hatfield, author of a study of all the documents relating to the Compagnia de' Magi, pointed out its ambiguous nature.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, under the patronage of the Medici for some sixty years it became an instrument in creating the political image of the family that effectively ruled Florence. On the other hand, the organisation's activities were strongly mystical, as is reflected in the excerpts from sermons by members of the Brotherhood that Hatfield cited,<sup>2</sup> and in the description of objects in the sacristy of the Chapel of the Magi in the Palazzo Medici, which included jasper balls linked by Darrell Davisson with the cult of Asclepius.<sup>3</sup> Kufic letters have been identified on the magi's attire in Gentile da Fabriano's altarpiece and Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes.<sup>4</sup> The magic of stones and the magic of words played a major role in fifteenth-century Florentine society's outlook, an outlook later formulated by Marsilio Ficino. The leader of the Florentine Neo-Platonists, he declared himself to be a "natural magician" like the ancient magi. He wrote: "Why then are you so dreadfully afraid of the name of Magus, a name pleasing to the Gospel, which signifies not an enchanter and a sorcerer, but a wise priest? For what does that Magus, the first adorer of Christ, profess? If you wish to hear: on the analogy of a farmer, he is a cultivator of the world. Nor does he on that account worship the world, just as a farmer does not worship the earth; but just as a farmer for the sake of human sustenance tempers his field to the air, so that wise man, that priest, for the sake of human welfare tempers the lower parts of the world to the upper parts; and just like hen's eggs, so he fittingly subjects earthly things to heaven that they may be fostered. God himself always brings this about and by doing, teaches and urges us to do it in order that the lowest things may be produced, moved, and ruled by the higher."<sup>5</sup> Although those words were written only in 1489, they can be seen as a summary of the long-standing Neo-Platonic tradition in Florence.

The client responsible for commissioning *The Adoration of the Magi* altarpiece for the Church of Santa Trinità was the celebrated humanist Palla Strozzi. A friend of Niccolò de' Niccoli, the philosopher and writer who read Latin and Greek and founded the first public library in Florence, Strozzi was undoubtedly familiar with Horapollo's treatise in Florence. In commissioning an altarpiece for the family chapel from one of the leading artists of the day, Gentile da Fabriano, Palla Strozzi surely could not have ignored

<sup>1</sup> Rab Hatfield, "The Compagnia de' Magi", *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33, 1970: 107–161.

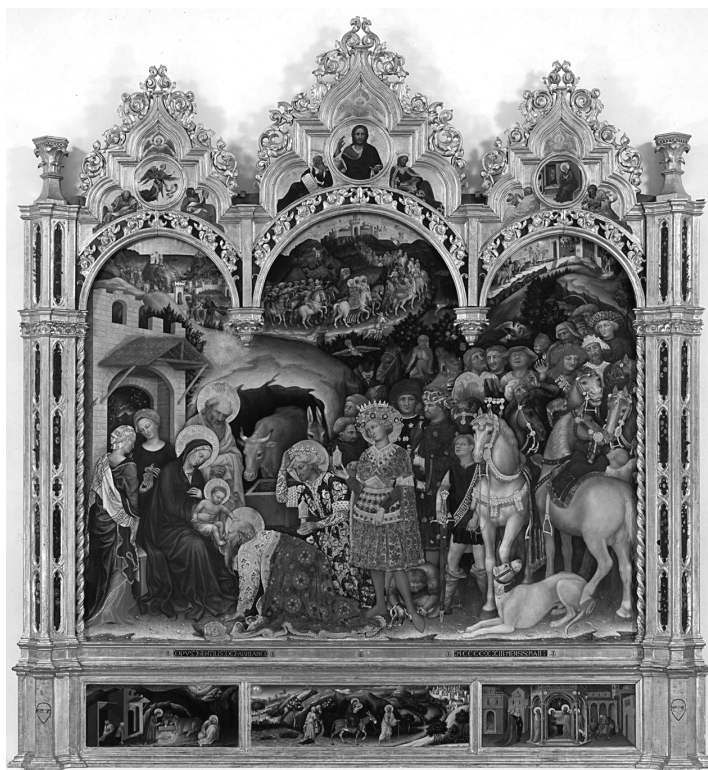
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 128–135.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell Davisson, "Magian *Ars Medica*, Liturgical Devices and Eastern Influences in the Medici Palace Chapel", *Studies in Iconography* 22, 2001: 135–146.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 122–123.

<sup>5</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life. A Critical Edition and Translation* with introduction and notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989, *Book Three: On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*: 396–99.





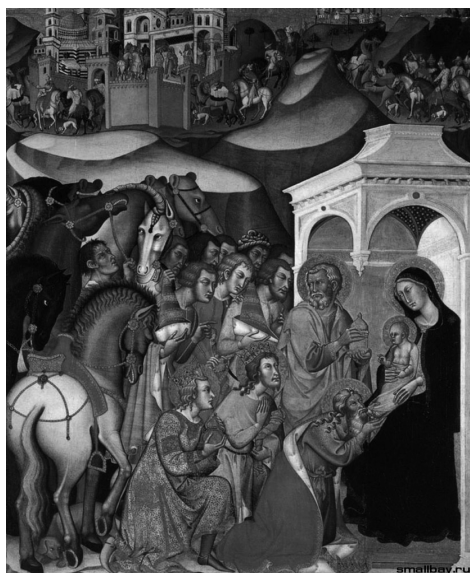
Gentile da Fabriano,  
The Adoration  
of the Magi. 1423  
Uffizi, Florence

the chance to introduce greater iconographical complexity with the aid of the *Hieroglyphica*? Gentile's composition is thought to have been influenced by the work of Bartolo di Fredi, which he could have seen during his time in Siena.<sup>1</sup> That same long cavalcade accompanying the oriental wise men moves towards the stable with the Holy Child, looping round the hills and passing through the fortified city. Most of those in the procession are mounted on horses, but there are dromedaries bearing luggage with monkeys on top and dogs running alongside.

Animals often accompanied the magi's procession in altarpieces and frescoes. There even came to be an established repertoire of beasts traditionally included in such scenes: horses, dromedaries and dogs, monkeys and leopards. Some were simply necessary for the journey, others indicated the oriental origins of the magi. We know that the Florentine festivities of the Procession of the Magi also included all kinds of animals, including exotic beasts. But we should not see their depiction in art simply as a reflection of the variety of the surrounding world. Simona Cohen warns us against treating the animals and birds in Renaissance art merely as part of the naturalistic tradition: "... there appears to be a tacit assumption among most scholars that Renaissance artists

<sup>1</sup> Charles Sterling, "Fighting Animals in the Adoration of the Magi", *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 61/10, December 1974: 350–359.





related to animal depictions as part of the new naturalistic perception of nature and rejected the symbolic and didactic function assigned to them for over a millennium by Christian tradition.”<sup>1</sup>

Charles Sterling found symbolic meaning in the frequent depiction of fighting or aggressive animals in depictions of the Adoration of the Magi. These, he suggested, were there to contrast with mankind, which has arrived at peace and harmony in order to adore the True King. According to a popular tradition, the magi themselves were at war with each other

until they were united by the light of the star that led to the Saviour.<sup>2</sup> Yet such symbolic content may have had different facets in different times and contexts.

Gentile da Fabriano’s altarpiece differs from that of Bartolo di Fredi in a number of ways that I would particularly like to emphasise. Firstly, it includes a number of birds at which some members of the cavalcade look, as if upon some mysterious sign. A falcon (hawk) is depicted in the air right along the central axis, and to right is a falcon fighting and killing another bird. Bestiaries repeated Isidore of Seville’s description of the hawk as “a bird armed with a spirit more than the hoof” and they compared the bird with an old man, using the wind to loosen old feathers and make them drop out.<sup>3</sup> But a genuine panegyric to the bird is found in Horapollo’s *Hieroglyphica*. The first living being described in the treatise, it is presented as the absolute ruler of the earth and the sky: “When they wanted to denote god or height or lows, or excellence or blood or victory... they painted a falcon.”<sup>4</sup> In Gentile da Fabriano’s work a single bird of prey occupies central place and the close attention paid to another, allowing us to suggest that the depiction is symbolic and indeed connected to the coming of Christ.

A second important difference affects the depiction of the dog. While a dog features in the altarpiece of Bartolo di Fredi, it becomes far more prominent

Bartolo di Fredi,  
The Adoration  
of the Magi. 1385–1388.  
Pinacoteca Nazionale,  
Siena

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, “Introduction”, in: Op. cit.: XXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> Sterling, Op. cit.: 356.

<sup>3</sup> *The Medieval Bestiary / Средневековый Бестиарий*, essay and commentaries by Xenia Muratova, tr. Inna Kitrosskaya (parallel Russian and English text), Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984: 148–149.

<sup>4</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, Op. cit., I, no. 6; Sbordon, Op. cit., I, no. 6: 12–14; Boas, Op. cit., I, no. 6: 45–46 – “When they wish to symbolize a god, or something sublime, or something lowly, or superiority [...] they draw a hawk.”



Gentile da Fabriano.  
The Adoration  
of the Magi. Detail

in that of Gentile da Fabriano. Now the dog occupies almost the whole of the lower right corner of the composition, its pose echoing in surprising fashion that of the kneeling oldest magus. Between these two figures the space is filled with an everyday little scene of a servant removing the spurs of the youngest magus, which also serves to draw our attention towards the lower part of the composition. According to the bestiary, dogs were symbols of fidelity and vigilance, and we should not forget that the Dominican Order took its name from *Domini canes* – the Hounds of God. But the symbolism in the bestiary was moralising in tone, each animal being interpreted metaphorically from the viewpoint of Christian dogma. As we have already said, the new humanist approach looked to wider horizons, to “objective” evidence of the kind offered by the *Hieroglyphica*. In this treatise we find several

interpretations of the depiction of dogs, one of them being as priestly interpreter (Boas: “sacred scribe”; van de Walle, Vergote: “hiérogrammate”) and prophet, which is very much in keeping with the image of the magus as an ancient wise man, holder of secret knowledge.<sup>1</sup> From that small, naturalistic detail in the painting by Bartolo di Fredi – a dog curled up by the horse’s hooves, looking up at the scene of adoration – the dog had been transformed into a highly visible character taking an active part in the scene, a naturalistic symbol which could echo the magi’s role. We see Gentile da Fabriano’s picture as packed with symbolism, a reading very much in keeping with Neo-Platonic teachings on how Divine Wisdom permeates the material world. Giehlow summarised Marsilio Ficino’s understanding of the way in which the Ancients expressed their thoughts (set out in his introduction to his translation of Plotinus), which Ficino’s contemporaries wished to imitate: “In this way, according to Marsilio, the Egyptian priests had come to formulate their most profound ideas, not with letters, but with representations of plants, trees and animals. In so doing, they would have wanted to create something that corresponded to divine thought, because the gods know that reality is not a changing

<sup>1</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 39; Sbordon, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 39: 89–90; Boas, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 39: 63. In Boas’ text, based on later humanist translations, our attention is drawn by II, no. 22: “A wolf or dog turning back means escape.” In Gentile da Fabriano’s picture we see just such a dog turning to look backwards, but if we allow that those responsible for compiling the picture’s programme had this part of the *Hieroglyphica* in mind we still cannot be sure of how they interpreted the Greek term ἀποστροφή (aversion; means of salvation; flight). In the Russian translation by Aleksanyan, *Op. cit.*, it is translated as “turn”. Sbordon points out that Horapollo probably had too straightforward an understanding of a concept that was more abstract in the Egyptian view of the world; Sbordon, *Op. cit.*: 149.

image, but a Form, essential and immutable, the essence of things themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

The second work looked at here is the tondo by Domenico Veneziano, thought to have been produced as a modello in the hope of winning a large commission from Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>2</sup> The colourful succession of the magi's procession cuts across the middle of Veneziano's work like a gem-studded girdle. Beyond this string of figures we no longer see a stylised band of space but a true “window on the world”: a boundless sky, mountains, a broad valley with animals grazing, ploughed fields on the lower slopes of the hills, and in the distance a gulf and a fortress by the waters. This landscape is universal in nature. In contrast, the lower, smaller space is but a piece of meadow, its separation from the zone where the “sublime event” unfolds emphasised by the narrow path along which the magi and their suite are arranged. As in Gentile da Fabriano's picture, the eldest magus has almost prostrated himself to kiss the foot of the Holy Child. As in Gentile da Fabriano's picture, we find a dog on the same plane as the main characters. This placing of the animals seems like a repetition or echo of the pose of the leading magus. We might therefore suggest that their depiction was prompted by the dog's symbolic meaning set out in the *Hieroglyphica*, as priestly interpreter and prophet. And again, as in the scene by Gentile da Fabriano, the tondo by Domenico Veneziano shows a bird of prey, which appears four times. The quotation from the *Hieroglyphica* cited above stressed that the falcon indicated not only “god” and “excellence” but was also associated with the categories “high” and “low”. The treatise explains these associations through the falcon's skill in flight, its ability to ascend almost vertically and drop down as directly. In Veneziano's composition it is this ability to soar up and sink down that is emphasised, and we might read his falcons as unifying the heavenly and earthly spheres. They probably also symbolise Christ, assuming the burden of physical form in order to open up the path to the Heavenly Kingdom for mankind. At the same time a link between the earthly and heavenly worlds is made by the magi, prophesying the workings of Providence through the interpretation of a natural phenomenon.

Further, the *Hieroglyphica* tells us, the falcon can indicate the human soul.<sup>3</sup> A hunting falcon with a red cap sits on the arm of one servant in the procession – the fourth depiction of the bird in the scene – perhaps to symbolise the human soul before its eyes have been fully opened. Almost above this



Domenico Veneziano,  
The Adoration  
of the Magi. c. 1440.  
Staatliche Museen,  
Berlin

<sup>1</sup> Giehlow, *Op. cit.*: 50. Citing: Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*, Basileae, 1576: 1768.

<sup>2</sup> André Chastel, *Chronique de la peinture italienne à la Renaissance 1280–1580*, Fribourg: Office du livre, 1983: 74.

<sup>3</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 7; Sbordone, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 7: 14–17; Boas, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 7: 46–47.

fourth falcon is a telling depiction of a magpie flying towards the cypress, a tree traditionally seen as a symbol of the Virgin Mary and Christ and of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Magpies were thought to be able to cure blindness and they were treated in medieval bestiaries as an image of the Saviour, bringing true light to mankind, blinded by the devil.<sup>2</sup> This altarpiece for the Medici family thus seamlessly interweaves traditional symbols and new knowledge. And if our supposition is correct, it was the depiction of the falcon that turned the subject into a reflection of Neo-Platonic philosophy, according to which the human soul occupies a middle place between the spiritual sphere and the material world.

Domenico Veneziano's composition dates from the year following the Council of Florence, but the idea behind it probably arose slightly earlier. Cosimo liked to identify himself with the magi, men endowed with higher knowledge, who brought Christ gifts. In Veneziano's composition the costume of the servant hold the oldest magus' crown has a very interesting detail, first noted by André Chastel: running along the black border around the lower edge of his red jacket is a pattern of repeated gold tendrils and seven gold *palle* – the spheres that adorn the Medici arms.<sup>3</sup> Events in 1439 provide further justification for us to identify Florence's rulers with the magi. The Medici wanted to give allegorical form to the role the family played in bringing together the two branches of Christianity. An allusion to this is found, for instance, in Fra Angelico's fresco in cell 39 in the Monastery of San Marco, used by Cosimo and his wife for private prayer.<sup>4</sup> That version of the Adoration has no animals, which may simply be the result of the monastery's strict rules,

Benozzo Gozzoli,  
The Adoration  
of the Magi.  
1459–1460. Procession  
of the Young Magus.  
East wall, Chapel  
of the Magi, Palazzo  
Medici–Riccardi



<sup>1</sup> Lucia Impelluso, *La natura e i suoi simboli*, Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2003: 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 321.

<sup>3</sup> Chastel, *Chronique de la peinture...*, Op. cit.: 74.

<sup>4</sup> Cyril Gebron, "Fra Angelico, les Medici, les Mages et le concile de Florence. Une histoire de temps entrecroisée", *Artibus et Historiae* 33/66, 2012: 35–41.





stating that the images should instruct and not entertain. In the magi's suite, however, among the representatives of a wide variety of nationalities,<sup>1</sup> we find a character holding an armillary sphere. Situated at the very centre of the composition, he is thought to bear Cosimo's likeness. The astronomical instrument in his hands might indicate both the nature of Cosimo's activities as astronomer and forecaster, and the astrological omen which foretold that he – or rather the city of Florence – was fated to bring the Churches together as one.<sup>2</sup>

But probably the most famous monument glorifying the Medici family as “the new magi” is the ensemble of wall paintings by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Palazzo Medici. In 1960 Ernst Gombrich spoke out against the dominant theory that linked the iconographical programme with the twentieth anniversary of the Florentine Union,<sup>3</sup> but thirty years later Roger J. Crum put forward powerful counter-arguments to convincingly assert that the Florence agreement was still a strong political tool in the arsenal of the Medici family in 1459 and that it largely shaped the imagery used in their palace chapel.<sup>4</sup>

Benozzo Gozzoli  
The Adoration  
of the Magi  
1459–1460. Procession  
of the Old Magus.  
West wall, Chapel  
of the Magi, Palazzo  
Medici–Riccardi

<sup>1</sup> We know that Cosimo invited representatives of the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian and Indies churches to take part in the Council.

<sup>2</sup> Gebron, Op. cit.: 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Gombrich, “The Early Medici as Patrons of Art”, E. F. Jacob, ed., *Italian Renaissance Studies. A Tribute to the Late Cecilia M. Ady*, London: Faber & Faber, 1960: 300–301.

<sup>4</sup> Roger J. Crum, “Roberto Martelli, The Council of Florence and the Medici Palace Chapel”, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 59/43, 1996: 403–417.

So complex was the chapel programme, working on so many levels, that even the paving of the floor is thought to contain Neo-Platonic allusions and references to Holy Writ.<sup>1</sup>

As with the previous examples, we can pick out symbolism borrowed from the *Hieroglyphica* in Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco, though we shall not undertake here to explain the significance of each and every animal depicted with reference to the treatise.

It is important to recall that the frescoes were created between July 1459 and January 1460, at the very time when the Italian princes, at the behest of Pope Pius II, were planning a crusade against the Turks. A congress to settle the details of the crusade was held in Mantua in June 1459, after which the pope and Francesco Sforza (one of the crusade's most ardent supporters) visited Florence and were received in the Palazzo Medici, where work was already well under way on the scenes devoted to the magi. Fully aware of the potential of such a crusade, the Medici surely had in mind domestic politics when creating this important cycle of frescoes, seeking to stress their own importance and their loyalty both to pan-Italian and to Christian interests.<sup>2</sup>

Allusions to the proposed crusade are contained within the hunting theme – here so colourfully expressed, in contrast to other works on the subject – which was traditionally used as a prototype for war in contemporary painting.<sup>3</sup> In the procession of the young magus, immediately above the figure of Caspar himself – thought to be an allegorical depiction of Lorenzo de' Medici – is a hunting scene: a rider, spear in hand, chases a beast variously described as a deer, a gazelle or a stag. But stags, deer and gazelles were far more elegantly and gracefully depicted by Late Gothic and Quattrocento artists. Benozzo Gozzoli's cloven-hoofed beast is stocky, with large ears and a tail that makes it more like an antelope. In the *Hieroglyphica* the antelope (oryx) was seen as an unclean beast with "some sort of contention with the goddess" (Boas),<sup>4</sup> as being "base and hateful" (Boas; van de Walle, Vergote: "vicious and

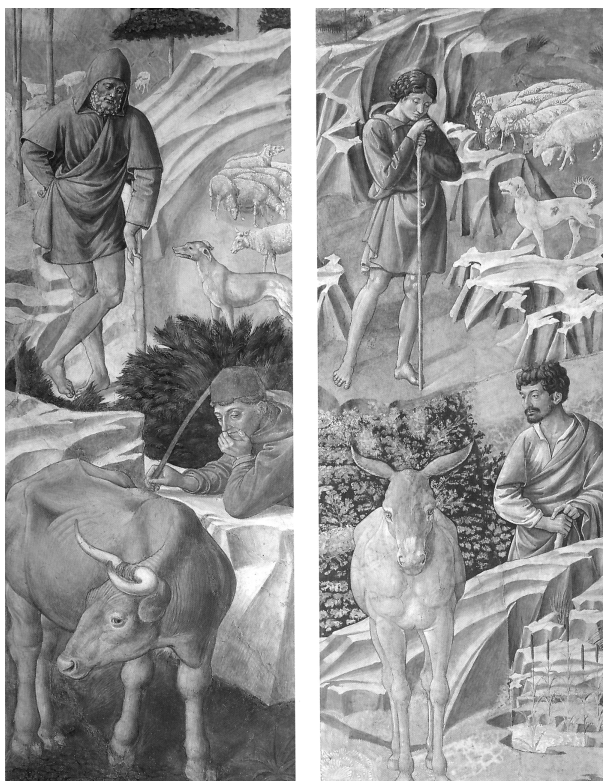
<sup>1</sup> Maria Teresa Bartoli, "A Neoplatonic Pavement", in: Acidini Luchinat, ed., *Op. cit.*: 26–27. This theory as to the inclusion of Neo-Platonic allusions is too complicated to summarise here. With regard to the Bible, scholars have drawn attention to the repetition of the number fourteen in patterned scrolls framing a large square, which has been read as referring to the Gospel according to Matthew, where the magi's journey is described. The Gospel opens with the genealogy of Christ, in which the generations before the Incarnation are divided into three groups of fourteen each (from Abraham to David – fourteen generations; from David to the removal to Babylon – fourteen generations; from the move to Babylon to the birth of Christ – fourteen generations).

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Grote, "A Hitherto Unpublished Letter on Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27, 1964: 321–322.

<sup>3</sup> Anne-Marie Lecoq, "L'iconographie de la Salle de Bal à Fontainebleau: une hypothèse de lecture", in: Hervé Oursel, Julia Fritsch, eds, *Henri II et les arts. Actes du colloque international. Ecole du Louvre et Musée national de la Renaissance-Ecouen, 25, 26 et 27 septembre 1997*, Paris: Ecole du Louvre, 2003: 387.

<sup>4</sup> The goddess of the moon.





malicious”).<sup>1</sup> In this case, therefore, the depiction of the hunting scene above the head of the young magus may indicate the battle against hostile theomachist forces, i.e. the Muslim threat to Europe.

On the west wall of the chapel, showing the oldest magus and his suite, we find a very specific range of beasts:<sup>2</sup> leopards, a monkey atop a mule, an eagle attacking a hare and waterbirds. The inclusion of leopards and monkeys in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi was more or less traditional, but why do they appear only in this fresco? If medieval bestiaries characterise the leopard (panther) as meek and handsome, a beast whose breath is fragrant, the animals depicted by Benozzo Gozzoli are somewhat aggressive and out of keeping with such a description. Interestingly, the number of leopards – four – accords with the number of fingers raised by one member of the suite. If the depiction of exotic beasts of prey was intended solely to indicate the oriental origins of the wise men, or had some relation to the hunting theme, surely the artist would have shown them on all three walls? But he chose not to.

**Benozzo Gozzoli**  
**Shepherds.** 1459–1460  
 Right north wall  
 section, Chapel  
 of the Magi, Palazzo  
 Medici–Riccardi

<sup>1</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 49; Sbordone, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 49: 102–107; Boas, *Op. cit.*, I, no. 49: 65–66.

<sup>2</sup> The fresco on the south wall showing the middle magus, Balthasar, is very damaged and many details of the painting – particularly those relating to the animal world – date from much later. Acidini Luchinat, “The Procession of the Magi”, in: Acidini Luchinat, ed., *Op. cit.*: 119.

In utter contradiction to traditional interpretations, the *Hieroglyphica* tells us that the leopard stands for one who hides his own faults, as it hides its own scent during the hunt.<sup>1</sup> No less of a warning symbol is the bird of prey seated on the ground with a dead hare in its claws. Cristina Acidini Luchinat interpreted this as a falcon, linking it with the heraldic symbol of Piero Medici (a falcon clasping a ring).<sup>2</sup> Here, however, the winged creature seems more like a mighty eagle, and in the *Hieroglyphica* this bird signifies "A king living in retirement and giving no pity to those in fault" (Boas).<sup>3</sup> This symbol may relate to the oldest magus, who is indeed shown somewhat separately from the rest of the suite (Melchior is cut off from the main body of figures by a small stream).

Although outwardly not at all like Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople, this figure of Melchior is usually seen as intended to represent him. In which case, the eagle might also be seen as alluding to his qualities. Joseph had died in Florence just eight days after he signed his approval of the Filoque at a closed sitting of the Byzantine delegation. When he died a letter was found in his rooms, supposedly in his own hand, in which he stated that the truth of Catholic dogma and the supremacy of the pope had been revealed to him. This document was later recognised to be false but not everyone accepted that fact. So the Catholic representatives had no quibble with the patriarch himself, seeing him rather as a righteous man surrounded by cunning advisers, who were perhaps those alluded to in the fresco by the leopards. Moreover, four was the number of metropolitans in the Byzantine delegation who refused to sign the Union.<sup>4</sup>

Too specific a reading of such meanings may seem out of place with regard to so impressive and indeed festive a cycle, one that is also intended to convey mystical meaning. But the frescoes must surely have been meant to be read on several levels. After the fall of Constantinople, it was possible to formulate criticism of the Byzantine delegation in this veiled manner. It is no secret that many in Italy saw the fall of Byzantium as retribution for its rejection of the Union. Moreover, we should note that the frescoes were executed under the control of Roberto di Niccolo Martelli, the very adviser to Cosimo de' Medici who had initiated the transfer of the Council of Ferrara to Florence. He was fully aware of all the nuances of the events of 1439 and it is thought that he too appears in the frescoes, as the man leading Cosimo the Elder's horse in the scene with the young magus.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, Op. cit., II, no. 90; Sbordon, Op. cit., II, no. 90: 196–197; Boas, Op. cit., II, no. 90: 91.

<sup>2</sup> Acidini Luchinat, "The Procession of the Magi", Op. cit.: 179.

<sup>3</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, Op. cit., II, no. 56; Sbordon, Op. cit., II, no. 56: 170; Boas, Op. cit., II, no. 56: 82.

<sup>4</sup> We would here draw attention to the fact that no satisfactory explanation has yet been found for the figure to right in the fresco holding up four fingers.

<sup>5</sup> Roger J. Crum, Op. cit.: 417.



By no means all the representatives of the avian and animal worlds had symbolic meaning, of course.<sup>1</sup> We are left with the impression that the significance of the falcon in the chapel frescoes is secondary, of lesser importance than in earlier depictions of the subject.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a different bird, the duck, is given more prominence: in the fresco with the eldest magus and in the altar chapel in the scene of *Angels adoring the Christ Child*.

In the fresco with Melchior the duck appears in the stream, set against the reflection of the page holding a monstrance, which should also probably be seen as intended to reinforce its symbolic resonance. If the head of another waterbird, a goose, appears a little below the duck in the same fresco, in the scene of *Angels adoring...* the duck swims alone in the centre of a small pond, the other members of the feathered world arranged around its edges. Never before had painters attached such importance to this apparently very ordinary bird. It is hard to identify the precise meaning of this fragment on the west side of the altar wall, but we can be reasonably confident in asserting

Benozzo Gozzoli,  
Angels adoring  
the Christ Child  
1459–1460. West wall  
near the altar, Chapel  
of the Magi, Palazzo  
Medici–Riccardi

<sup>1</sup> I would like to say a few words about the depiction of monkeys. They certainly did have symbolic meaning, a meaning that was identical both in the bestiary and in the *Hieroglyphica*. In the latter this meaning was extremely precisely formulated: the monkey is used “to depict one whose inheritance passes to a hated child”. In the painting by Gentile da Fabriano and the fresco with the eldest magus by Benozzo Gozzoli, the depictions of monkeys are particularly noticeable. In the first instance, the beast might be a reference to Herod, in the second, to the fact that when Byzantine Emperor John VIII Paeologus died in 1448 he was succeeded by his brother, who had from the very beginning been an enemy of the Union and who had supported several of the metropolitans who opposed it. Such an interpretation nonetheless seems too stretched, too tenuous, and we must recognise that the monkeys may simply have been a traditional element in the theatricalised playing out of the procession of the magi.

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have noted that the image of the falcon was probably borrowed from Domenico Veneziano’s tondo: Acidini Luchinat, “The Procession of the Magi”, *Op. cit.*: 179.

that the duck was not merely introduced to fill the space of the lower left corner (where there are no angels) and to add decorative variety.<sup>1</sup> In the first book of the *Hieroglyphica* is a paragraph dealing with a waterbird, the goose, as a symbol of “son” and “self-sacrifice”.<sup>2</sup> Translations of this section differ, however,<sup>3</sup> and we shall therefore refrain from citing particular analogies.

For all its naturalistic colour and apparently clear and open readings, the fresco cycle in the Medici Chapel was surely a coded work. Most unexpected, for instance, is the depiction of shepherds on the narrow sections of the north wall, who appear totally unaware of the birth of the Saviour and simply look around them at the peaceful valley.<sup>4</sup> Certainly they take no part in glorifying the Nativity, in absolute contradiction to established tradition. Perhaps only the most enlightened, those as wise as the magi themselves, were intended to understand the true meaning of the scene.

If we accept the suggestion proposed here as to the application of the *Hieroglyphica*, we are forced to reappraise the works described, to see them not only as a continuation of the traditions of International Gothic, with its desire to reflect the multiplicity of the natural world. If those who composed the programmes of these works did indeed take the *Hieroglyphica* as an iconographical source, we find ourselves faced with a somewhat paradoxical historical and cultural situation. The new “hieroglyphical compendium” compiled in the late fourth or fifth century CE first appeared because the caste of priests had almost entirely forgotten the ancient “hieroglyphical system”, but it continued to be needed to create sacred inscriptions. The Quattrocento humanists, mistaken as to the date of its creation and the nature of the content, imbued the treatise with mystic significance. Thus a falsification was perceived as sacred knowledge and turned by the humanists into a new “crypto-language” that became a model and a starting point for the creation of emblematic treatises in the Renaissance.

<sup>1</sup> Acidini Luchinat, “The Choirs of Angels”, in: Acidini Luchinat, ed., Op. cit.: 270.

<sup>2</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, Op. cit., I, no. 53; Sbordon, Op. cit., I, no. 53: 111–112; Boas, Op. cit., I, no. 53: 66–67. Our text here is based on the French translation; Boas’ English rendition is: “If they wish to represent a son, they draw a vulpanser [*Chenopolex*]. For this bird is very philoprogenitive. If it should ever be pursued in order to be taken with its young, the father and mother give themselves voluntarily to the dogs, so that their young may be saved. For this reason it has seemed fitting to the Egyptians to revere this animal.”

<sup>3</sup> Van de Walle, Vergote, Op. cit., “goose”; Boas, Op. cit., “vulpanser (*Chenopolex*)”; Aleksanyan, Op. cit., “sheldrake”.

<sup>4</sup> Acidini Luchinat, “The Procession of the Magi”, Op. cit.: 253.

Vasily Uspensky

**GIOVANNI BATTISTA TIEPOLO'S *SCHERZI DI FANTASIA*:  
REJECTING KNOWLEDGE<sup>1</sup>**

Snakes and owls, decaying skulls and statues come to life, ancient altars and crumbling tombs, thick volumes and burning torches, rods of Asclepius and ancient writings, and amidst it all enigmatic oriental elders – magi perhaps, or rabbis – accompanied by a numinous suite. No other work in all the oeuvre of Tiepolo, an artist with a love of everything enigmatic, exotic and enticing, is so intriguing as his series of 24 etchings known as the *Scherzi di Fantasia* (literally “jokes of the imagination”). Some scholars have seen them as reflecting Venetian witchcraft or theological debates, as a coded message to the select few, almost as propaganda for paganism<sup>2</sup>, although no clear, detailed and consistent interpretation has been offered. Others have thought that the artist merely gave his imagination free play, choosing his subjects at whim according to their colourful nature. Yet the *Scherzi*, unlike the probably somewhat earlier series known as the *Vari Capricci*, are not a selection of unconnected sketches, but a full-scale series of 24 large sheets (there are but ten *Capricci*) united by a common theme, by common motifs, style and manner of execution, all of which seems to suggest they convey a message.

Rather than seeking to analyse and interpret each motif in detail, I wish here to look at one motif found throughout the *Scherzi* that seems to me to provide the key to understanding the whole series: the inscription. Text is the cornerstone of all knowledge, including, and even especially, esoteric knowledge, and its interpretation is of particular importance.

In all eleven instances<sup>3</sup> the “text” depicted is an array of symbols that remain, despite all attempts by modern scholars to seek their meaning<sup>4</sup>, illegible. One example is particularly telling. Carved into the altar at the very

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> On the interpretation of the *Scherzi* see: Aldo Rizzi, *The Etchings of the Tiepolos*, London: Phaidon, 1971: 11–14.

<sup>3</sup> ff. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Rizzi, *Op. cit.*: 42. Rizzi read the date “1737” in the inscription.





Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Six People watching a Snake. *Scherzi di Fantasia* plate 12. Etching. 1740s. The State Hermitage Museum

centre of the composition on plate 5, *Seated Magician, Boy and Four Figures*<sup>1</sup>, is a quasi-text that ends with the clearly readable (although not immediately obvious) signature of the artist. This detail is notable in that the same sheet bears another signature, much larger, by the lower edge, as on the other prints in the series. By putting his signature beneath it, Tiepolo draws attention to the unreadable inscription, once again demonstrating the importance of the motif and its conscious intention.

Placing his signature under lines of gibberish, Tiepolo on the one hand kindles the viewer's curiosity, seeming to prompt us to try and interpret it, to enter into the game. At the same time, he clearly mocks the idea of secret knowledge by turning it into nonsense. The whole series challenges the viewer to seek out hidden meaning, and yet does not provide the answer. The heroes of these prints too are always in search of something they will never find. It was surely no

coincidence that after the artist's death the series became known as "Jokes" (*Scherzi*)? That amongst the extremely serious long-bearded elders we also see the burlesque Pulcinella? Is not the series thus a mockery of those with a love of secret knowledge?

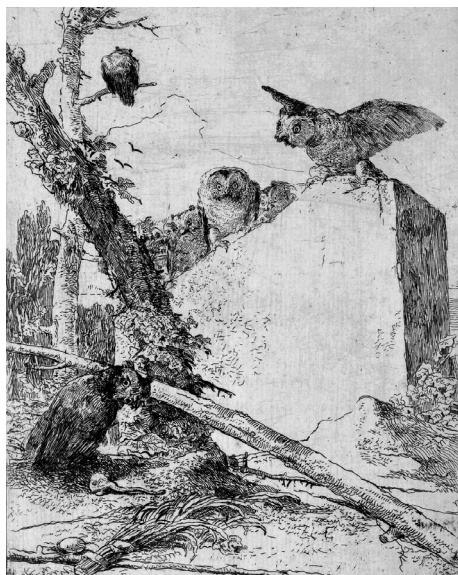
We find another, even more eloquent, example of this use of text on the title page of the *Scherzi*. During Tiepolo's lifetime the large block of masonry remained empty and the title appeared only after the artist's death in 1775, when the *Scherzi* were reissued, along with other prints, by his son Domenico. Indeed, the author's death is specifically recorded on that title page: *Scherzi di Fantasia no. 24 del celebre Sig. Gio. Batta Tiepolo Veneto Pitore morto in Madrid al Servizio di S.M.C.*

That lack of an original title, and the supposed incomplete state of plate 20 (*The Philosopher*), has led some to conclude that the series was unfinished. Yet there is a significant number of surviving copies of the title page that lack text (in the Hermitage, the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, in museums in Dresden and elsewhere) and we know that it was this version of the title page that was in the collections of Tiepolo's closest friends and colleagues – Anton Maria Zanetti, Pierre-Jean Mariette and Consul Joseph Smith<sup>2</sup>, all of them connoisseurs and admirers of prints, those at whom the artist's creations were largely aimed – which surely provides evidence that the series, not originally intended for widespread distribution, was consciously printed with an empty title page.

<sup>1</sup> Titles according to Rizzi's catalogue.

<sup>2</sup> See: Linda Borean, "Stampe e disegni di Giambattista Tiepolo nel collezionismo europeo tra Settecento e Ottocento", *Giambattista Tiepolo tra scherzo e capriccio. Disegni e incisioni di spiritoso e saporitissimo gusto*, Milan: Electa, 2010: 20–25.





To use the terminology of Yuri Lotman, we might describe such a gesture as representing a “significant zero”<sup>1</sup>. Any inscription would inevitably be too specific, narrowing potential interpretations of the series. Its lack, by contrast, enhances the playful ambiguity, the enigmatic nature of the *Scherzi*, forcing the viewer to wonder why the title has disappeared, offering the opportunity to invent our own title in its place, even, literally, to write one in. In other words, the title page also hints at the futility, at the impossibility of resolving, the characters’ search.

It was only in prints that Tiepolo could permit himself the freedom of rejecting a clear subject, since his easel paintings and monumental wall paintings were specific commissions in which he had to meet the wishes of clients who were only rarely sufficiently enlightened to permit an artist full self-expression.

Many of the motifs and images in the *Scherzi* feature in Tiepolo’s paintings, notably in his most famous creation, the ceiling of the Bishop’s Residence in Würzburg. Amidst the hundreds of figures and objects that fill this magnificent fresco we also find a depiction of a mysterious inscription, though given a very different treatment. At the base of the obelisk in the allegory of Asia sits a grey-haired elder holding a torch, before him a vast stone block with 43 mysterious symbols on the outer side. The stress placed on the scene by the artist seems to provide a key: attention is drawn to it by the unusual height of the obelisk and by the way the light falls through the windows, seeming to illuminate this part of the fresco particularly brightly. And it is beneath this mysterious inscription, as in the *Scherzi*, that we find Tiepolo’s signature, the only one in 600 square metres of fresco.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *Seated Magician, Boy and Four Figures. Scherzi di Fantasia* plate 5. Etching. 1740s

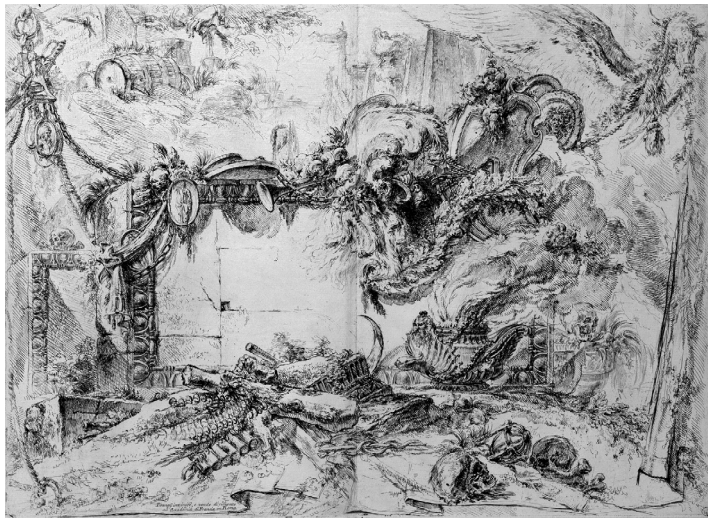
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Title page to the *Scherzi di Fantasia*. Etching. 1740s. The State Hermitage Museum

<sup>1</sup> Yuri M. Lotman, *Об искусстве* [On Art], St Petersburg: Iskusstvo, 1998: 506.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Ceiling of the staircase in the Bishop's Residence in Würzburg. *Asia*. Fresco. 1752–53. Detail



Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Masonry Block*. Sheet from the *Grotteschi*. 1747–49. Etching, engraving, drypoint. The State Hermitage Museum



Of all the many possible interpretations, that which seems most credible is a reading of the letters as a twist on the ancient Armenian alphabet, in which case the elder is its inventor, Meshrop Mashtots, credited with taking enlightenment to Asia. The overturned statue of multi-breasted Diana of Ephesus thus symbolises the defeat of paganism. Behind the inscription's apparent mystery lies a clear meaning: this is an ode to reason and learning. In the *Scherzi* a similar idea is expressed through what Lotman called a “negative device”<sup>1</sup>.

In neither case does Tiepolo engage in direct didacticism, concentrating rather on the game played with the viewer, such game-playing being central to his art and indeed to Rococo art in general.

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes translated as “minus-device”.

That this game was understood and accepted by contemporaries seems clear when we look at a work directly influenced by the *Scherzi*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi's series of *Grotteschi*, four prints showing fantastical piles of ruins, skulls, figures, shells, smoking censers and mysterious symbols, that might represent an allegory or a still life or a rebus. Like the *Scherzi* they cannot be clearly interpreted and continue to intrigue scholars<sup>1</sup>. One sheet bears that motif of the enigmatic inscription, a fragmentary phrase composed of almost illegible Italian words jumbled up with words that do not exist at all<sup>2</sup>. It appears on a stele, nearby which there is an indistinct vision as if of hands pouring wine. Below are a smoking censer and something like an altar, and in this context the inscription – as in the work of Tiepolo – seems like some magical incantation. Depicted strictly frontally, its central surface is empty, and the effect is that of a title page deliberately left blank. Both of the motifs we saw in Tiepolo's work, the empty title page and the enigmatic inscription, are here united on a single sheet and, as in the *Scherzi*, they fascinate and intrigue, providing food for the viewer's imagination and emphasizing the playful nature of the image.

In turn the didactic, positivist note of Tiepolo's "jokes" found direct continuation in another far more serious and far less playful series, Francisco Goya's *Los Caprichos*, where Tiepolo's magi and elders have been transformed into witches, goblins and monks who clearly refer to recognisable topical prototypes. One of the central themes of the *Caprichos* is the mocking of superstition and obscurantism, which, as we have sought to demonstrate, is very much in keeping with the *Scherzi*. But in Goya's work Tiepolo's gentle irony becomes caustic, painful denunciation, and the *Scherzi di fantasia* – those jokes of the imagination – become monsters produced by the sleep of reason.



Francisco Goya  
*Lo que puede un sastre!*  
 (What a tailor can do!).  
*Los Caprichos* plate  
 52. Etching, aquatint.  
 1799. Rijksmuseum,  
 Amsterdam

<sup>1</sup> On the *Grotteschi* see further: Arkady Ippolitov, Militsa Korshunova, Vasily Uspensky, *Дворцы, руины и темницы. Джованни Баттиста Пиранези и итальянские архитектурные фантазии XVIII века* [Palaces, Ruins and Prisons. Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Italian Eighteenth-century Architectural Fantasies], exh. cat., Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg: Hermitage Museum, 2011: 25–28, 54–57, 140–56.

<sup>2</sup> "otto qatrin foglie a i che stens [or s'tens] allegramente."



Nikolai Molok

## AUTOMATA: FROM MAGIC TO SCIENCE AND BACK AGAIN<sup>1</sup>

Curious method of restoring to life, in two minutes, a fly that has been drowned even twenty-four hours.

This wonderful experiment, like many others, is produced by a very simple cause. Take a fly, put it in a glass or cup full of water; cover it so as to deprive the fly of air; when you perceive it to be quite motionless, you may take it out and put it on a place exposed to the sun, and cover it with salt: in two minutes it will revive and fly away.

Giuseppe Pinetti,  
*Physical Amusements and Diverting Experiments*, 1784<sup>2</sup>.

Two of the greatest anti-heroes of the modern age – the monster created by the doctor Victor Frankenstein and the first vampire, Lord Ruthven – were born on the same day in June 1816. Lord Byron and a group of friends were gathered at the Villa Diodati beside Lake Geneva. The weather was bad,<sup>3</sup> so to entertain themselves the company read *Fantasmagoriana*, a collection of tales about spirits and ghosts, and this it was that gave rise to the idea of writing their own “horror stories”. One of those stories was to be *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Shelley, published in 1818; the other was John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819). In both books the main heroes were literally raised from the dead. But if the resurrection (or, to use Bram Stoker’s term, “un-death”) of Lord Ruthven – as of all the vampires who followed after – was brought about by supernatural means (magic), Frankenstein’s monster was the creation of a scholar, doctor, philosopher and engineer.

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Pinetti, *Physical Amusements and Diverting Experiments*, London, 1784: 11.

<sup>3</sup> In April 1815 there was an eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, which led to climate change across the world, including in Europe. The weather in Switzerland was particularly cold over the summer of 1816, when snow fell regularly.

Through Professor Waldman (Frankenstein's teacher), Mary Shelley sang the praises of learned men "whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible" but who "have indeed performed miracles": "They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows" (*Frankenstein*, Chapter II).

Frankenstein saw himself not so much as a scientist, however, as a demiurge endowed with divine power: "After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter... I found [an] astonishing power placed within my hands..." (*Frankenstein*, Chapter III).

Created in Frankenstein's "factory for genetic engineering",<sup>1</sup> the monster was not merely human-like but a cyborg, a man-machine. And as with a machine he had no name: known simply as "Frankenstein's monster", he belonged to his creator and master, like "a Ford worker".<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand the image of Frankenstein's monster reflects the Romantics' interest in horror, in "techno-Gothic"<sup>3</sup> and the psychology of the human spirit. On the other, however, it marks an unusual culmination to those experiments in returning the dead to life and in creating an artificial human to which the eighteenth century had devoted so much effort.

## PHANTASMAGORIA

It is not difficult to trace the eighteenth-century roots of Frankenstein's monster.

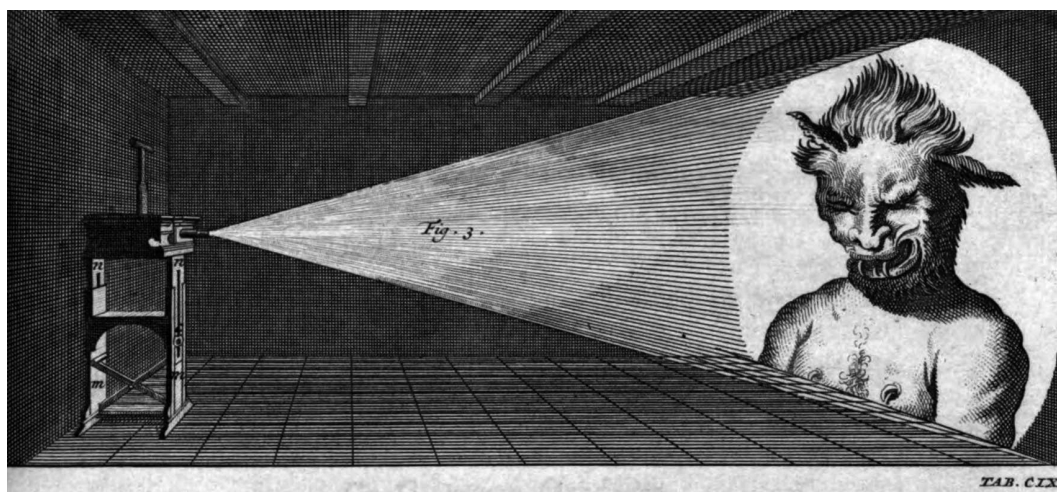
Our first hint comes in the very title of the book read by those gathered at the Villa Diodati, *Fantasmagoriana*.<sup>4</sup> Its title refers to one of the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> To use Stafford's phrase: Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism. Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*, Cambridge, MA–London: The MIT Press, 1994: 66.

<sup>2</sup> On Frankenstein's monster and vampires as the product of modernity and as metaphorical expressions of fear in the face of bourgeois civilisation see the post-Fordian interpretation of Shelley and Stoker's novels put forward by Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear", *New Left Review* 136, 1982: 67–85. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century (1886) that any monster created by a scientist was given a name: Mr Hyde. It was a decade later, in 1897, that Count Dracula replaced Lord Ruthven in the pantheon of anti-heroes.

<sup>3</sup> The term used by Purinton: Marjean D. Purinton, "Science Fiction and Techno-Gothic Drama: Romantic Playwrights Joanna Baillie and Jane Scott", *Romanticism on the Net* 21, 2001. Available online: <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2001/v/n21/005968ar.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Fantasmagoriana, ou Recueil d'histoires d'apparitions des spectres, revenans, fantômes, etc.*, Paris: F. Schoell, 1812. This was a French translation by Jean-Baptiste Benoît Eyriès of the German *Gespersterbuch* [Book of Ghosts] compiled by Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun, the first volume of which had appeared in 1811.



**Laterna Magica**  
Etching from: Willem  
Jacob Gravesande,  
*Physices elementa  
mathematica*. T. 1.  
Leiden, 1725

century's most popular spectacles, the phantasmagoria (fantasmagoria; a series of dream-like images). In the phantasmagoria pictures were "brought to life" with the aid of a magic lantern (*laterna magica*, or *lucerna magica* in the words of Athanasius Kircher).

The magic lantern (also sometimes called "the lantern of fear") was frightening for two reasons. Firstly, spectators could not understand the principles underlying its workings, so they thought the effect was created using (black) magic. Secondly, the choice of images was chosen for frightening effect: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries magic lanterns were used as an instrument of Jesuit doctrine, for propagandising faith (*propagatio fidei*), and so the figures they "brought to life" were devils, such scenes being intended to inspire viewers to live a life of righteousness. This function as a magical instrument to instil fear was described in a definition of "magic lantern" published in the late seventeenth century: "a little optical machine that makes one see, on a white wall in the darkness, various spectres and monsters so awful that those who do not know the secret think that it is done by magic."<sup>1</sup>

Yet the inventors and researchers of the magic lantern – Christiaan Huygens, Thomas Rasmussen Walgensten, Athanasius Kircher, Gaspar Schott and others – saw it not in the context of black magic but of "optical magic" or, more broadly, "mathematical magic".<sup>2</sup> For them the lantern was as much a "philosophical instrument" as the microscope or the telescope.

<sup>1</sup> "une petite machine d'Optique, qui fait voir dans l'obscurité sur une muraille blanche plusieurs spectres & monstres si affreux, que celui qui n'en sçait pas le secret, croit que cela le fait par magie." Antoine Furetière, *Essais d'un dictionnaire universel*, [Paris], 1684: "Lanterne magique" [s.p.]

<sup>2</sup> On Kircher and "optical magic" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see: Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, Chapter 3: "Prestiges. Illusions in Magic and Art": 78–122. See also: Anthony Grafton, *Magic and Technology in Early Modern Europe*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Libraries, 2005.



Later Enlightenment encyclopaedias retained the word magic only in the name, magic lantern. For Chambers the “Magic Lanthorn” was “an optic machine, by means whereof little painted images are represented on an opposite wall of a dark room, magnified to any bigness at pleasure”.<sup>1</sup> For Diderot and d’Alembert it was “a machine... which has the property of making appear large upon a white wall figures of small size painted in transparent colours on pieces of thin glass.”<sup>2</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century, then, the magic lantern was no longer frightening. It had become a scientific toy to be added to the repertoire of physical and mathematical recreations<sup>3</sup> and a “curiosity” to be found in everyday life as one “le arti per via” (street entertainments): magic lanterns simply replaced the Savoyard’s marmot.

But the phantasmagoria spectacles returned the magic lantern to the world of horror: once again the principles behind them were unclear, since unlike Savoyards who displayed their “curiosity” to the public the lanterns were not made visible and the spectator saw only the projection created. As before, the pictures “brought to life” showed the devil.

Not surprisingly, therefore, we can see how the phantasmagoria existed in the context of the Freemasons, with their interest in mysteries, semi-scientific experimentation and light effects. In the 1760s Johann Georg Schröpfer, an occultist and illusionist, turned his coffee-shop in Leipzig into a masonic lodge, with a room for séances where he organised light shows accompanied

<sup>1</sup> Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, 2 vols, London: Knapton, Darby etc, 1728, II: 481 – “Magic: Magic Lanthorn”.

<sup>2</sup> “Lanterne magique: machine... laquelle a la propriété de faire paroître en grand sur une muraille blanche des figures peintes en petit sur des morceaux de verre minces, & avec des couleurs bien transparentes.” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, IX, Paris: Briasson, David etc, 1765: 276.

<sup>3</sup> The French physicist and inventor Edme Gilles Guyot included several experiments with a magic lantern, lenses and mirrors in his *Nouvelles créations physiques et mathématiques*, the first edition of which was published 1769–1770. Those experiments clearly anticipated the ways in which the “phantasmagoria” was to “summon up spirits”. of concave mirrors, for instance, he wrote: “Using these mirrors one can make people see all sorts of objects, painted or in relief, such as an absent person of whom one has a portrait; figures of ghosts that can frighten...” (“On peut, au moyen de ces miroirs, leur faire voir indifféremment toutes sortes d’objets peints ou en relief, tels qu’une personne absente dont on auroit le portrait; des figures de spectres capables de les effrayer...”). A separate chapter (“XLIVe récréation”) in the section “Illusions d’optique” was devoted to making a phantom appear on a pedestal in the middle of a table. Guyot also wrote about projecting images onto smoke: “the spectators not seeing the thing which produces it, they will not know how to explain the sudden apparition of the spectre, whose head seems to appear from this smoke first, and who will disappear in the same way, pulling on the cord” (“les spectateurs ne voyant pas la cause qui le produit, ne sçauront à quoi attribuer l’apparition subite de ce spectre, dont la tête paroîtra sortir la premiere de cette fumée, & qui disparoîtra de la même maniere en tirant le cordon”). Edme Gilles Guyot, *Nouvelles créations physiques et mathématiques*, III, Paris: Gueffier, 1770, pp. 158, 186–188.



Projection of Ghostly Image onto Smoke  
 Etching from: Johann Samuel Halle, *Magie, oder, Die Zauberkräfte der natur*. Berlin, 1784

by sound effects, smoke and smells and electrical charges. That room was adorned with skulls and allegorical depictions of Death. Schröpfer himself summoned up the spirits.

It was as “Schröpfer’s ghost appearances” (*Schröpferische Geister Erscheinungen*) that Paul Philidor’s shows were first presented in 1790 in Berlin and Vienna. The German physicist perfected the technique, introducing the Argand lamp – brighter than candles or oil lamps – and setting his magic lantern on wheels, allowing him to enlarge or reduce the image and thus create the illusion of movement. Thanks to this it became possible to show his “living pictures” on large screens and in bigger spaces to a larger audience.

Such phantasmagorias, during which “spirits appeared”, soon came to be widespread, particularly in Germany, and became an independent genre within not only masonic but popular culture, or, as Étienne-Gaspard Robertson put it, “a new kind of exhibition”.<sup>1</sup> In 1790 the mason and scholar Karl von Eckartshausen, author of the treatise *Aufschlüsse über Magie* (Explanations concerning Magic), put forward the idea of a “pocket magic lantern with a built-in cooling system to prevent the supposed necromancer’s clothes from going up flames”. This could be used to frighten “an unsuspecting companion on an evening stroll”.<sup>2</sup> In 1796 a law was introduced in Prussia that imposed a prison sentence of between six months and two years for “fraud by means of ostensible or false magic”.<sup>3</sup>

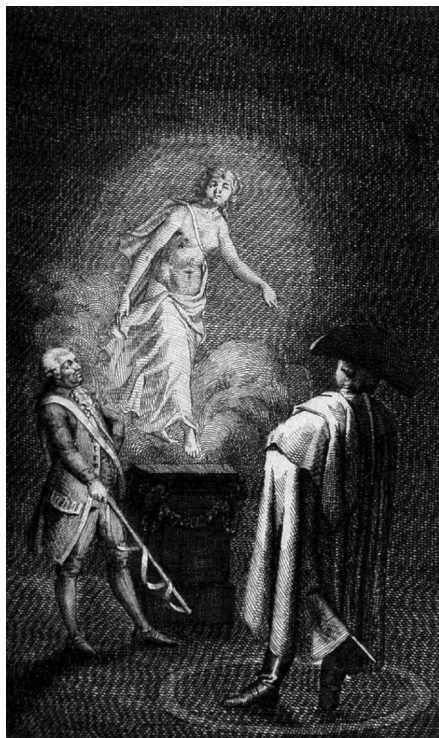
<sup>1</sup> “ce genre si nouveau d’exhibition.” Étienne-Gaspard Robertson (Robert), *Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques et anecdotiques*, 2 vols, Paris: Chez l’auteur, 1831–33, I: 206.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in: Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, New York: Zone Books, 2013: 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: 33.

In 1792–1793 Philidor’s show was presented in Paris, now under the title “phantasmagoria”, and it was there that it was seen by the Belgian physicist and future aeronaut (remember Shelley’s “they ascend into the heavens”) Étienne-Gaspard Robertson. Taking up Philidor’s phantasmagoria technique and his repertoire (like Philidor, for instance, Robertson ended his spectacles with an image of a devil or skull), in 1798 he set up his own show in Paris, which was to go on to become one of the most famous in all history. It continued in the French capital for six years and then he took the show on the road, taking it through Europe and even reaching Moscow and St Petersburg.<sup>1</sup> To avoid accusations of plagiarism (and of course to capture the patriotic spirit of the age!) he changed the Latinised version of the name to the French form, *fantasmagorie*. It was thus that the term featured in Mercier’s dictionary of neologisms in 1801: “Optical trick which makes one see all the multiple fine battles between shadow and light, which at the same time reveals old priestly deceptions. These phantoms, created at will, moving, these false apparitions, amuse the vulgar and prompt the philosopher to dream.”<sup>2</sup>

Robertson’s phantasmagoria was perfect in this sense.<sup>3</sup> He had everything carefully worked out, from the very entrance. His séances took place in an abandoned Capuchin monastery, which he had made look more “Gothic”, clearly to recall the Capuchin monastery in Matthew Lewis’ novel *The Monk* (then extremely popular not only in England but in France, where a translation had been published in 1797). Spectators had to pass through the cemetery before entering a corridor with Egyptian hieroglyphics and “sepulchral” illumination “seeming to announce one’s entry into the mysteries of Isis”, then they looked on as various physical experiments were conducted, including experiments in hydraulics and galvanism (sic!), they talked with an “invisible woman” (the voice came from a glass sphere suspended from the



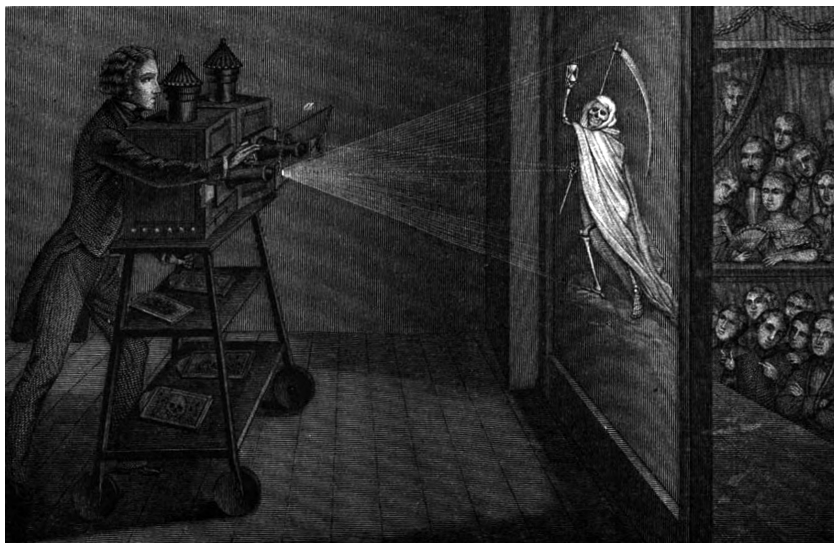
Ghostly Apparition

Etching from: Karl von Eckartshausen, *Aufschlüsse zur Magie* München, 1790

<sup>1</sup> He devoted the second volume of his memoirs to his time in Russia; Robertson, *Op. cit.*, II. See: Tatiana Smoliarova, “Взлет как взгляд, или Бельгиец в русском небе” [Flight as Gaze, or A Belgian in the Russian Sky], *Новое литературное обозрение* [New Literary Review] 76, 2005. Available online: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2005/76/smo11.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Jeu d’optique qui fait voir tous les combats multipliés et fins de l’ombre et de la lumière, et qui révèle en même temps d’anciennes fourberies de prêtres. Ces fantômes créés à volonté, et mouvans, ces fausses apparences amusent le vulgaire, et font rêver le philosophe.” Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Néologie ou Vocabulaire de mots nouveaux*. I, Paris: Moussard, 1801: 259.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson himself provided a full description of his phantasmagoria, where it was housed and how it was arranged, with a full list of his “phantasmagorical repertoire”: Robertson, *Op. cit.*, I: 272 ff.



### Phantoscope on Wheels.

Illustration from:  
Adolphe Ganot, *Cours  
de physique*. Paris, 1859

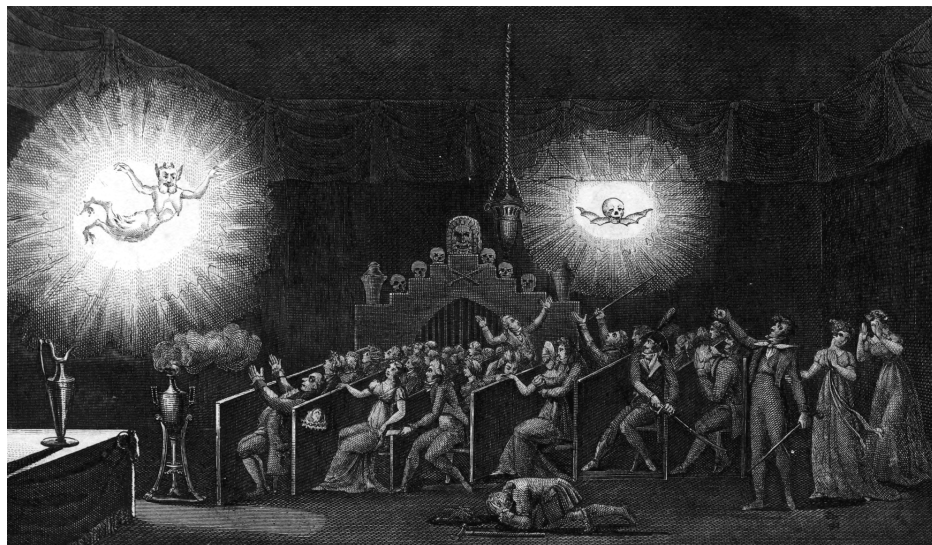
ceiling), and only at the end of this path – which was something like a ritual of initiation – did they find themselves in the room where they would see the phantasmagoria itself. Amidst pitch darkness (the walls were all draped with black fabric), rays of light flashed out suddenly, their source unseen by the spectator. The rays of the fantascope, as Robertson called his modified magic lantern, pierced through clouds of smoke and projected the image onto a cambric curtain, but that too was unseen by the viewers and so it seemed to them that what they saw had emerged from the darkness. The fantascope could be moved and thus the image moved too, and often Robertson used several lamps at once, so that the images were multiplied. His show incorporated sound (thunderclaps) and musical effects (bells ringing, Franklin's glass harmonica).

Before the start of the spectacle, Robertson spoke to his audience: "The purpose of the phantasmagoria is to familiarise you with extraordinary objects: I have offered you ghosts, now I shall summon up shades you know."<sup>1</sup> And indeed, in the wake of the Three Graces turning into skeletons, Macbeth's witches, the head of the Gorgon Medusa rolling its eyes and scenes of the temptation of St Anthony or the Bloody Nun (again Lewis' *The Monk*), spectators could see French revolutionaries who had been executed, the biggest hit being Robespierre, who arose from his tomb only to be turned to dust...

Complete darkness, atmospheric music, smoke, light projections of which the source was invisible to the spectator, all came together to create a situation in which the viewer's own perceptions could be controlled. The phantasmagoria was so lifelike that viewers leaped back in horror, thinking they were

<sup>1</sup> "Le but de la fantasmagorie est de vous familiariser avec des objets extraordinaires; je vous ai offert des spectres, je vais actuellement faire apparaître des ombres connues." Robertson, *Op. cit.*, I: 282.





seeing real ghosts. This becomes clear not only from contemporary prints (not least the frontispiece to Robertson's memoirs) – although they were of course in part intended as advertisements – but from the reminiscences of educated eyewitnesses. David Brewster, no less, the physicist who invented the kaleidoscope, attended Philipsthal's show in London in 1802 and described what he saw: "The spectators were not only surprised but agitated, and many of them were of opinion that they could have touched the figures."<sup>1</sup> And of course the ghosts born of the phantasmagoria were to become the object of desire: in Schiller's novella *Der Geisterseher: Aus den Papieren des Grafen von O\*\** (The Ghost-Seer: From the Papers of Count of O\*\*; 1787–1789) the main hero, Prince Alexander, sees the phantasmagoria (having been given an electric shock during a séance, a technique employed by Philipidor in his show and later used by Dr Frankenstein) and falls in love with an "image", a picture that turns into a ghost and is then transformed into a beautiful unknown woman.

Robertson's most scandalous demonstration took place on 28 March 1798, a famous "spiritualist séance" during which the "sorcerer" summoned up the spirits of individuals named by people present.<sup>2</sup> One of the guests asked to speak to a woman he had loved and showed Robertson a portrait miniature of her; then, when she appeared in the light of the fantoscope, another man declared, "Heavens! I think I see my wife!"<sup>3</sup> A Swiss patriot wanted to "meet" William Tell, the Abbot Delille (a poet) asked for Virgil, while the author of a number of plays requested Voltaire. Lastly, at the very end, a pardoned

Robertson's  
Fantasmagorie  
in the Cour des  
Capucines in 1797  
Frontispiece from:  
Etienne-Gaspard  
Robertson, *Mémoires  
récréatifs, scientifiques  
et anecdotiques  
du physicien-aéronaute*.  
Tome I. Paris, 1831

<sup>1</sup> David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic, addressed to Sir Walter Scott*, first published 1832, 5th edn, London: John Murray, 1842: 82.

<sup>2</sup> Recorded in Robertson's memoirs: Robertson, *Op. cit.*, I: 215–221.

<sup>3</sup> "Ciel! je crois que c'est ma femme!" *Ibid.*: 217.

royalist asked that he bring back Louis XVI, but Robertson, fearing reprisals, cleverly refused.

Despite his caution, the secret police decided that Robertson might indeed have the power to resurrect (!) Louis XVI and temporarily closed the show.

## GALVANISM

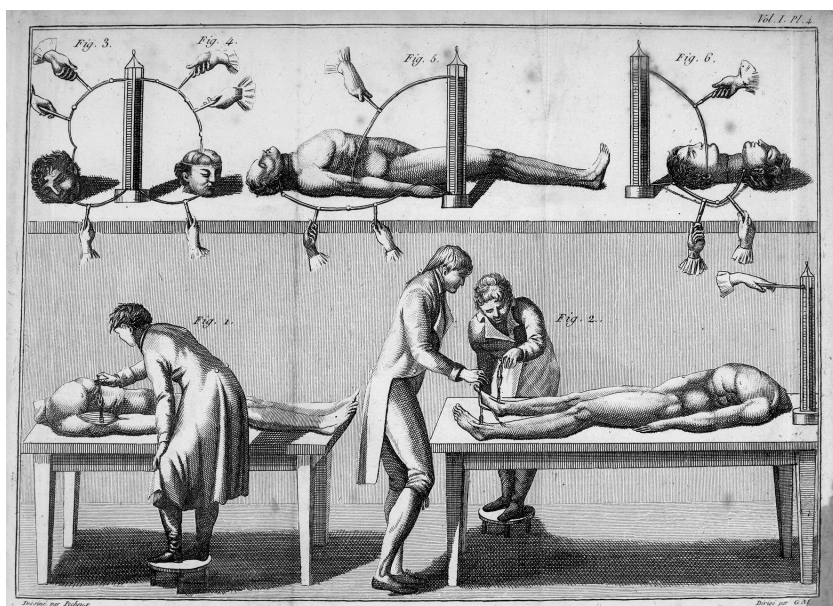
Perhaps those fears on the part of the secret police were not without foundation, for in the eighteenth century, experiments were not limited to summoning up spirits, but also aimed to return the dead to life.

Doctors and physicists studied the human nervous system through which, according to Descartes, the soul (or brain) runs “the human machine”. And if the individual can be controlled, then he or she can be controlled from without. The nerves can be directed. But if Franz Mesmer’s magnetism was soon declared to be false science and charlatanism, the use of electricity led to more convincing (in the scientific sense), if no less amazing, results.

Luigi Galvani used a battery made of copper, zinc and acid to pass an electric current through a dead frog, which made the legs move. In 1791 he published the results of his experiments in *De viribus electricitatis*, a treatise on the effect of electricity on the muscles. The following year Alessandro Volta gave his first talk on “animal electricity” (*Memoria sull’elettricità animale*), in which he also spoke of ways of stimulating the muscles using electricity.

Galvani’s nephew, Giovanni Aldini, conducted experiments not only on animals but on people (by special dispensation of Napoleon). He was allowed to use corpses, attaching electrodes to different parts of the body,

Galvanism. Etching  
from: Giovanni Aldini,  
*Essai théorique  
et expérimental sur  
le galvanisme*. T. 1.  
Paris, 1804





his experiments proving that one could move the muscles by acting on the nerves. In Bologna in 1802 he applied galvanic shocks to the severed heads of two criminals, which resulted in terrible facial grimaces.<sup>1</sup> Aldini himself described how he stood beside the scaffold, “beneath the axe of the law”, to get bodies straight from the executioner, before the blood had all seeped out of them.<sup>2</sup> Before it had been thought, when doctors used corpses, that the cells were already dead. Aldini declared them to still contain vital force.

On 18 January 1803 Aldini put on what was probably his most famous galvanic “spectacle” in London: he decided to give life to the murdered George Foster, whose corpse he bought straight from the hanging at Newgate. When he connected wires to Foster’s face in his anatomical theatre, “the jaws of the deceased criminal began to quiver, and the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened... some... thought that the wretched man was on the eve of being restored to life,” recorded the *Newgate Calendar*.<sup>3</sup>

Although it was originally a purely scientific practice, galvanism appealed very much to the eighteenth-century taste for the macabre and the awful, and so, just like phantasmagoria, it soon became “a new kind of exhibition”. Galvanic shows partly usurped the place of “the theatre of terror”, as Michel Foucault described public executions:<sup>4</sup> during open lectures and demonstrations by Aldini, Robertson or André-Jacques Garnerin (a balloonist and the first parachutist) people were just as amazed and sometimes they were literally frightened to death.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni [Jean] Aldini, *Essai théorique et expérimental sur le galvanisme*, Paris: Fournier fils, 1804, I: 69 ff. What they must have looked like can be concluded from later photographs taken during electrophysiological experiments by Duchenne, although he was studying muscle spasms and emotional expression in the living. Guillaume Benjamin Duchenne, *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine, ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions*, Paris: Veuve Jules Renouard, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> Aldini, Op. cit.: 122.

<sup>3</sup> *The Newgate Calendar*, 18 January 1803. Available online: <http://www.exclassics.com/newgate/ng464.htm>. See also: Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic. Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650–1900*, London: Reaktion, 2001: 217–219; Tim Marshall, *Murdering to Dissect: Grave-Robbing, Frankenstein and the Anatomy Literature*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, English translation *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Pantheon, 1977, re-issued New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Foucault cites public complaints after the guillotine was introduced: “The first time the guillotine was used the *Chronique de Paris* reported that people complained that they could not see anything and chanted, “Give us back our gallows’ ”; 1995: 58. See also: Mikhail Yampolsky, “Жест палача, оратора, актера” [The Executioner’s, Orator’s, Actor’s Gesture], *Ежегодник Лаборатории постклассических исследований* [Annual of the Laboratory of Post-Classical Research], Moscow, 1994: 21–70.

<sup>5</sup> As the *Newgate Calendar* recorded (Op. cit.), Mr Pass, the beadle of the Surgeon’s Company, who had been present during Aldini’s experiment on Foster’s corpse, “was so alarmed that he died of fright soon after his return home”.

One of Garnerin's shows devoted to electricity, aerostatics, gases and phantasmagoria, held on 28 December 1814 – two years before that trip to Lake Geneva – was attended by Mary Shelley.<sup>1</sup> And in the foreword to the third addition of *Frankenstein* in 1831, she described the birth of the novel: "During one of these [conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley], various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin...<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth."

Indeed, unlike Galvani, Aldini or Garnerin, Dr Frankenstein not only brought dead matter to life but he literally assembled his monster from parts: "I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame... The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials" (*Frankenstein*, Chapter III). Those fragments, whether living or dead matter, each self-referential, unconnected among themselves, were assembled into a single whole using the "shock technique"<sup>3</sup> and were brought to life with electricity (also a shock).

## MOVING ANATOMY

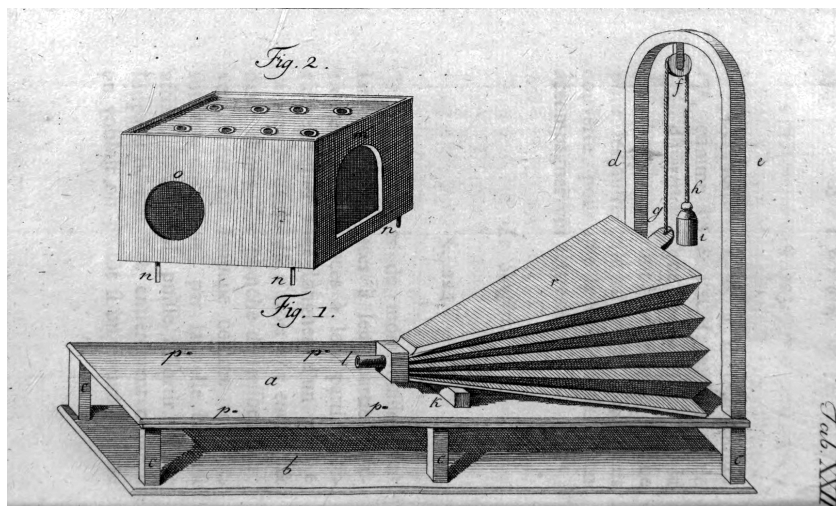
Frankenstein's method of assembling his monster from different parts also echoes another sphere of eighteenth-century science, anatomical models, which were so often equipped with mechanical features.

Along with galvanism, such anatomical automata reflected the period's widespread interest in how the human body worked: are the movements of the human (or animal) organism essentially purely mechanical? "It can be no mistake," wrote La Mettrie in his *Homme Machine* (Man a Machine) of 1748,

<sup>1</sup> Recorded in her journal. Garnerin's show in London was entitled *Theatre of Grand Philosophical Recreations*. Fascinatingly, the advertisement for Garnerin's next show on 19 January 1815 added to the standard range of "recreations" an experiment to resurrect Joanna Southcott, a well-known prophetess who had died three weeks previously.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Erasmus Darwin, author of the treatise *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* (1794), which deals among other subjects with pathology and anatomy, and creator of the "speaking machine", also conducted galvanic experiments.

<sup>3</sup> The term used by Manfredo Tafuri in *Progetto e utopia*, Rome: Laterza, 1973; English edn *Architecture and Utopia. Design and Capitalist Development*. tr. Barbara Luigia La Penta, Cambridge, MA–London, 1976 (there "technique of shock"). *La sfera e il labirinto*, Turin: Einaudi, 1980; English edn *The Sphere and the Labyrinth. Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (1980), tr. Pellegrino d'Acierno and Robert Connolly, Cambridge, MA–London, 1987: 98, 143. Tafuri applied the term to Piranesi, Picasso, Marinetti and Schwitters. Piranesi used "bricolage" or a "shock technique" not only to reconstruct Ancient vases but to assemble the façades, plans and interiors of his imaginary structures, notably the *Prisons*.



“ ‘if I suppose the body of a man to be a clock, tho’ a stupendous one...’<sup>1</sup> All the wires and chains and springs and other bits and pieces used to set anatomical automata in motion were like the organs of the human body, the muscles and vessels and so on. Anatomical automata were intended to illustrate, study and simulate how the organism worked.

From this point of view, therefore, the life-sized duck of Jacques de Vaucanson (1730s), becomes particularly interesting. It could quack and move, drink water, peck at grain, digest it and defecate. Holes in its copper body allowed the viewer to see all the “physiological” processes in action.<sup>2</sup> Vaucanson’s plans included the creation of an automaton that would show the circulation of the blood and breathing. He proposed that his automata – which he called *anatomie mouvante* (moving anatomy) – be used as an aid to medical training (“Inspection of the machine will give a better understanding of the imitation of nature than a longer description, which would be too like an anatomical explanation”<sup>3</sup>). In order to make them more life-like and to make their workings clearer, Vaucanson intended to use rubber, then a very new material.

#### Speaking Machine

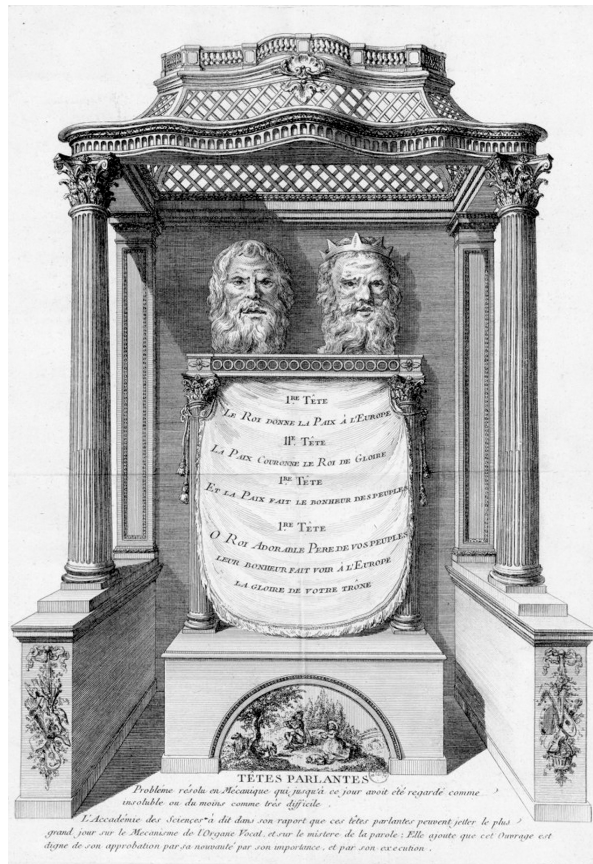
Etching from:

Wolfgang von Kempelen,  
*Le Mécanisme de la parole,*  
*suivi de la description*  
*d’une machine parlante.*  
Vienne, 1791

<sup>1</sup> “Je ne me trompe point; le corps humain est une horloge, mais immense...” Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L’homme machine*, Leyden: Elie Luzac, fils, 1748: 92; English edn *Man a Machine*, Dublin: W. Brien, 1749: 62.

<sup>2</sup> Although Vaucanson’s duck was something of a fraud: it could not, of course, digest grain and the “product” of the physiological processes was placed beforehand inside a special hidden section of the body. See further: Jessica Riskin, “The Defecating Duck, or The Ambiguous Origins of Artificial Life”, *Critical Inquiry* 29/4, 2003: 599–633. In recent times Vaucanson’s dream was realised by the Belgian artist Wim Delvoye in *Cloaca* (2000), which shows the different stages of digestion.

<sup>3</sup> “L’inspection de la machine fera mieux connoître l’imitation de la nature qu’un plus long détail, qui ressembleroit trop à une explication anatomique.” Jacques Vaucanson, *Le mécanisme du flûteur automate, persenté à Messieurs de l’Académie Royale des Sciences*, Paris: Jacques Guerin, 1738: 20.



"Speaking Heads"  
("têtes parlantes")  
by Abbé Mical. 1784.  
Etching

"Moving anatomies" aroused the interest of mechanics, but also of doctors, notably the surgeons François Quesnay and Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, who proposed the use of mechanical equipment and liquids to demonstrate the functioning of the human body – breathing, circulation, digestion and the nervous system. In similar manner the Jacquet-Droz watchmakers used all kinds of materials, not least leather, cork and papier-mâché, in their automata and artificial limbs.<sup>1</sup> While Madame du Coudray made her own midwifery "machines" (although mere mannequins in truth, they were known as *La Machine de Madame Du Coudray*) from textiles and leather, sewing into them various wooden details, sponges and real pelvic bones.

Erasmus Darwin covered his own wooden "speaking figure" in leather to make it more lifelike and if it spoke only a few words ("mother",

<sup>1</sup> In the wake of the success of their androids (see below), the Jacquet-Droz family started making artificial limbs, bringing about a veritable revolution in orthopaedics. Unlike the metal constructions first invented in the sixteenth century by the Paris surgeon Ambroise Paré, their limbs were not only lifelike but relatively light, and they could be moved with the aid of strings.

“father”) it looked very real.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Wolfgang von Kempelen, author of four “speaking machines” (1778–1791) had no interest in making them lifelike, concentrating solely on the mechanisms of human speech. His *Sprachmaschine* could say the words “Mutter” and “Vater” in a childish voice, as well as simple phrase along the lines of “you are my friend”, “I love you with all my heart” and “let us go to Paris”. According to Goethe, von Kempelen’s machine “though not very eloquent, produces various childish words and intonations quite nicely.”<sup>2</sup>

In this sphere, the most successful were the *têtes parlantes* or “speaking heads” of the Abbé Mical, presented to the Academy of Sciences in Paris in 1783. Made of copper, papier-mâché, parchment, leather and cork, they not only spoke but could engage in dialogue while actively gesticulating.

“First head: ‘The king brings peace to Europe’.

Second head: ‘The peace crowns the king in glory’.

First head: ‘And peace brings happiness to the people. Oh adored king, father of your peoples, their happiness shows Europe the glory of your throne’.”

This praise of Louis XVI through the mouths of automata was an early example of the use of “mathematical magic” for propaganda purposes.

In the novella *Die Automate* of 1814 by E. T. A. Hoffmann, a speaking head – which Hoffmann calls the Talking Turk, a clear reference to von Kempelen’s chess-player, on which see below – plays the role of oracle: “... the questioner asked in a whisper, leaning to the figure’s right ear, and in reply the figure started to roll its eyes, turned its head to the questioner – one could even feel its breath (sic!), emerging from the figure’s mouth – and truly from deep within the figure came the quiet answer.”

When thinking of particularly lifelike “moving anatomies”, particular interest is aroused by the wax figures used not only as teaching aids in medical schools but as curiosities for the educated public (as in the La Specola Cabinet of Physics and Natural History in Florence, which had anatomical models as well as botanical and mineral collections). Like the wooden anatomies that preceded them, wax anatomies were assembled from different parts and could be opened up (as if moving), allowing the viewer to see their insides. Real parts of the human body, such as bones and blood vessels (which were filled with tar) and such like, were often used in the making of wax anatomies in order to assert the authenticity of the figure. Yet it was the wax itself that was their main advantage: with wax, it was possible to capture the tint and texture of human skin; it could

<sup>1</sup> Darwin himself provided a description of this machine: Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society*, London: J. Johnson, 1803. Additional Notes: 119–120.

<sup>2</sup> “Kempelens Sprachmaschine, welche... zwar nicht sehr beredt ist, doch aber verschiedene kindische Worte und Töne ganz artig hervorbringt.” Letter from Johann Wolfgang Goethe to Carl August, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, 12 June 1797. Available online: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Goethe,+Johann+Wolfgang/Briefe/1797>.





André-Pierre Pinson,  
"Woman with a Tear"  
("Femme à la Larme")  
1784. Wax, glass.  
H. 62 cm. Musée  
de l'Homme, Paris

be painted and the colours retained their intensity.<sup>1</sup>

Such intense colours give the wax models unexpected vitality, a seemingly inappropriate effect that was further reinforced by the figures' theatrical poses and gestures (as with Clemente Susini's *Venerina* of 1780–1782 or André-Pierre Pinson's *Seated Woman* of the 1790s). We seem to see not anatomical models but living actresses, frozen in a pose.

Pinson's *Woman with a Tear* (1784) is a life-size anatomical model which can be opened and taken apart; even the brain can be removed. But why does her face show (express, even!) suffering? And why is she weeping? This is no mere anatomical teaching aid. For Pinson, who had several times applied – always unsuccessfully – to take part in the Salon in Paris (the Academy did not consider wax figures as "high" art), the tear must have played a quite specific role: serving as a reference to scenes of Lamentation, or perhaps the tears of Pro-

serpine in Bernini's famous sculpture, it legitimised the wax anatomy as a kind of sculpture. Metaphorically of course, she weeps because she is "alive"!<sup>2</sup>

And since that wax figure is "alive", she can – like Schiller's phantasmagorical ghost, become the object of passion: in a novella by Champfleury, Diard, curator of a collection of such figures, falls in love with one of them, Julie, and himself starts to turn into a wax figure.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Painted wax anatomies appeared at around the same time as tinted illustrations in anatomical treatises, which are thought to have been introduced by the anatomist and artist Jacques Fabien Gautier d'Agoty. In his essay on painting, Francesco Algarotti provided advice on anatomical atlases in which, like maps, different parts (muscles) were shown in different colours, allowing artists to study anatomy without getting confused. Francesco Algarotti, *Essai sur la peinture*, Paris: Merlin, 1769: 21.

<sup>2</sup> French writer and film critic Louis Seguin devoted a book to Pinson's sculpture, entitled "Why is she crying". He answers this question in the spirit of Spengler (*The Decline of the West*) or Sedlmayr (*The Lost Centre*): "La larme de la Femme d'André-Pinson ne "signe" pas seulement la défaite spirituelle du christianisme et de sa sagesse économique. Elle annonce, en s'écoulant, la mort de Dieu." Louis Seguin, *Pourquoi pleure-t-elle?*, Villeurbanne: URDLA, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Champfleury, "L'homme aux figures de cire", published in the anthology *Les excentriques*, Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1852: 349–373. Diard's clothes hung off him as if off a wax figure, his eyes were glassy (wax figures, including *Woman with a Teardrop*, had eyes of glass or porcelain), and his skin took on a waxy yellowish tinge. At the end of the story Diard's wife relates how she found her husband in bed with Julie, after which Diard disappeared together with his wax beloved.



Anatomical figures, simulation of the human voice, of physiological processes and the internal organs, the mechanisms of automata and their lifelike quality all set down the direct route towards the idea of the artificial human, the cyborg. Which is just what was assembled by Dr Victor Frankenstein.

## ANDROID

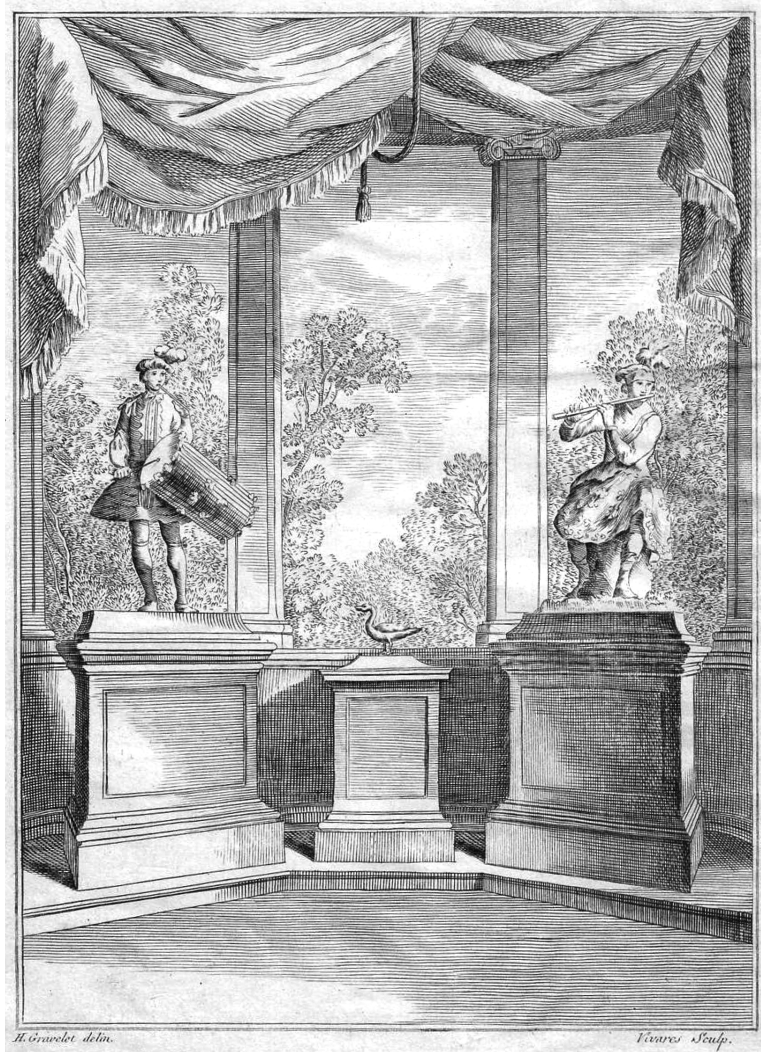
The fourth and most important source for Frankenstein's monster was the android, or the life-like automaton.

Androids first appeared<sup>1</sup> in the context of that same doctrine of "spreading faith" as had magic lanterns. The first depictions of both an android and a magic lantern appeared in one and the same manuscript, a codex by the Venetian engineer and "magus" (as he described himself) Giovanni Fontana.<sup>2</sup> Although largely devoted to military equipment, such as siege machines, Fontana's codex also includes illustrations of several other useful inventions. If Fontana's "magic lantern" was intended to project an image of the devil onto a wall, his "android" was like the devil himself (so perhaps it should more correctly be called a "deviloid").

The first surviving androids, however, date from the sixteenth century. These small figures of monks, about 40 cm high, are made of wood and metal

<sup>1</sup> Here I mean the appearance of androids in real artistic and cultural practice, although the first – legendary – androids were known in Antiquity, when they were thought historically to have been invented by the philosopher and mathematician Archytas of Tarentum (fifth–fourth century BCE), who made a wooden dove that could fly (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, X: 12, 8); by the mathematician and mechanic Ctesibius (third century BCE), who not only built hydraulic machines (fountain automata) but made "singing thrushes, acrobats, figures that sang and moved, and such entertainments that please the senses of sight and hearing" (Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, IX: VIII, 4; X: VII, 4); and Hero of Alexandria (first century CE), inventor of automata, notably machines that sold ("sacred") water and a marionette theatre known not only from references in Classical literature but from his own treatises on hydraulics, pneumatics, mechanics and optics, which were translated into Latin from the sixteenth century onwards and thus became widely known in learned society of the early modern age. There were also famous inventors of automata in the medieval period: the mathematician and astronomer Gerbert of Aurillac (Pope Sylvester II, tenth–eleventh century), who made a "speaking head" of which he asked advice; the theologian and scholar Albertus Magnus (thirteenth century), author of another "speaking head" or, according to a different version, of an "iron man" which served as his gate keeper but was destroyed by his pupil Thomas Aquinas, since its perpetual "chattering" prevented him from working; the philosopher and physicist Roger Bacon (thirteenth century), who made a brazen "speaking head", on whose advice he wished to build a brazen wall around England to protect it from attack by sea; and the astrologer Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller, fifteenth century), who let fly a wooden eagle and an iron fly. And automata had a mythological inventor in Daedalus, of whom more below.

<sup>2</sup> "Bellicorum instrumentorum liber cum figuris", 1420. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS BSB Cod. icon. 242 Venice.



The Tambourine  
Player, the Duck,  
and the Flute Player  
Frontispiece from:  
Jacques de Vaucanson,  
*Le mécanisme  
du flûteur automate*  
Paris, 1738

and contain a clock mechanism; the monks could walk, move their eyes and their lips as if in prayer, turn their heads and kiss the cross. It was perhaps such “little automatory engines, that is to say, moving of themselves” that Gargantua made during rainy weather.<sup>1</sup> (Rather like Byron and his friends writing horror stories in bad weather...)

But by the eighteenth century androids, like magic lanterns, had lost their magical force and moved into the sphere of science and the arts, becoming part of the world of entertainment (“teaching through entertainment”), a “scientific toy”. According to Chamber’s *Cyclopedia*, the “Androide” was

<sup>1</sup> “petits engins automates, c’est-à-dire soi mouvants eulx-mesmes.” François Rabelais, *Gargantua and his Son Pantagruel*, Book 1, Chapter XXIV.

“an automaton, in figure of a man, which by virtue of certain springs, &c., duly contrived, walks, speaks, &c.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the eighteenth century at least ten androids were made, many of them truly almost of a size with a human being.<sup>2</sup> The most famous were the figures playing the flute and the tambourine by Jacques de Vaucanson (1730s), the writing and drawing boys and girl musician by Pierre and Henri Jacquet-Droz (1774), “Marie Antoinette” by the cabinetmaker David Roentgen and the clockmaker Peter Kintzing (1785) and a trumpeter by the mechanic Johann Friedrich Kaufmann (1810). Lastly, of course, but by no means least, there was mechanic Wolfgang von Kempelen’s quasi-android chess-playing “Turk” (1769), the most famous automaton of the eighteenth century. In fact it was infamous, thanks to the revelation of its scandalous deception: it became clear that the “Turk” was a fake, with a real human being, a professional chess-player, hiding beneath the table.<sup>3</sup> Characteristically, von Kempelen was accused not only of being a charlatan but of magnetism and of being in touch with the devil.<sup>4</sup>

Although androids were also “a new kind of exhibition”, they enjoyed less popularity than phantasmagorias, galvanic demonstrations or, particularly, balloon displays. (The figure of “Marie Antoinette”, for instance, was not shown to the wider public at all, being displayed only at court and then to the members of the Academy of Sciences, to which the queen gave it.) Even so, the educated public was well aware of their existence. Nearly all the androids then existing (as well as fictional ones, such as the “digestive machine”) were described in Jean Paul’s novella “Identities of the Man Served by Machines” (1789), about a collector of automata.<sup>5</sup> And the characters of Hoffmann’s

<sup>1</sup> Chambers, *Op. cit.*, I: 87. This definition was to be repeated almost verbatim in the encyclopaedia of Diderot and d’Alembert: “automate ayant figure humaine & qui, par le moyen de certains ressorts, &c. bien disposés, agit & fait d’autres fonctions extérieurement semblables à celles de l’homme.” *Encyclopédie...*, *Op. Cit.*, I, 1751: 448–451.

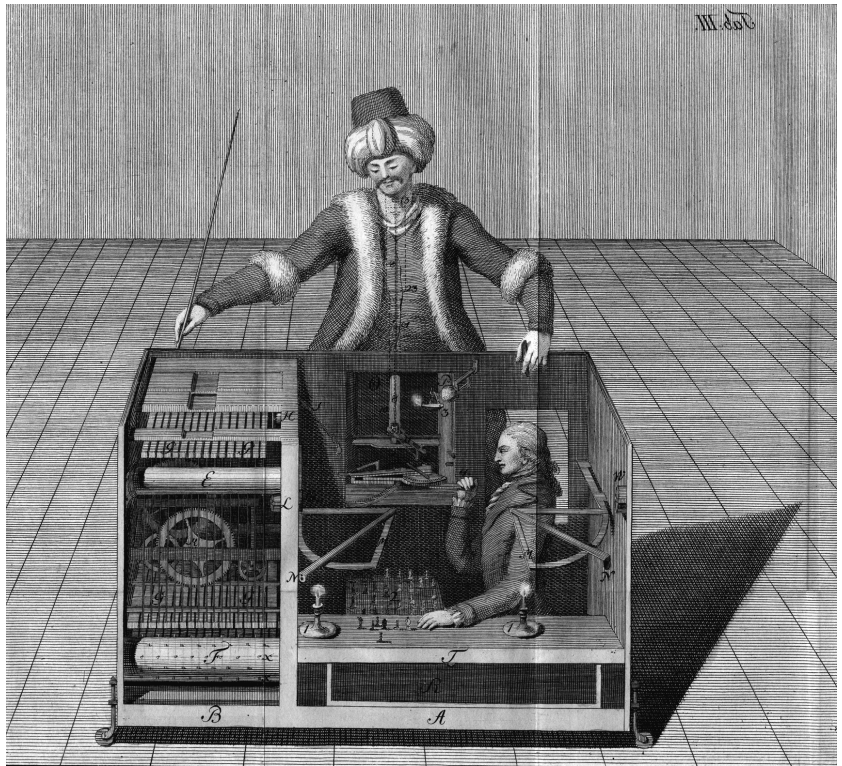
<sup>2</sup> Vaucanson’s *Flute Player* was 165 cm tall, Johann Friedrich Kaufmann’s *Trumpet Player* 170 cm and Jacquet-Droz’s *Harpsichord Player* 137 cm.

<sup>3</sup> The revelation was the subject of numerous treatises and pamphlets, from Baron von Racknitz’s *Ueber den Schachspieler des Herrn von Kempelen* (1789) to the investigative tale by Edgar Allen Poe, *Maelzel’s Chess Player* (1836). For the full story of the discovery of the fraud, see: Mark Sussman, “Performing the Intelligent Machine: Deception and Enchantment in the Life of the Automaton Chess Player”, in: John Bell, ed., *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, Cambridge, MA–London: The MIT Press, 2001: 71–86.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Doppet’s novella about a courier who regularly spirits the valuables of escaped royalists across the border but gets into trouble when asked to transport an automaton in the form of a life-size girl: the border-guards first think she is a royalist, then the wife of the devil, and then decide that the courier is the devil himself. Amédée Doppet, *Le Commissionnaire de la ligue d’Outre-Rhin, ou Le messenger nocturne*, Paris: Buisson, 1792.

<sup>5</sup> J. P. F. Hasus (Jean Paul), “Personalien vom Bedienten- und Maschinenmann”, *Auswahl aus des Teufels Papieren*, [Gera,] 1789.





**The Chess Player**  
("The Turk")

by Wolfgang von  
Kempelen. Etching  
from: Joseph Friedrich  
zu Racknitz, *Ueber den  
Schachspieler des Herrn  
von Kempelen und  
dessen Nachbildung*.  
Leipzig und Dresden,  
1789

*Die Automate* of 1814 saw nearly all the known eighteenth-century androids in the house of Professor X.

The most public showings were those of the automata of Jacquet-Droz. During the first demonstration at La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1774, eyewitnesses recalled, despite the rain the street leading to the clockmaker's house was full of carriages and carts. Open from six in the morning until seven or eight in the evening,<sup>1</sup> the exhibition included three androids and a Grotto filled with moving shepherds and shepherdesses playing music and dancing, with statues, fountains and even animals: a dog that barked, a cow with a suckling calf, goats clambering up a hill, and so on. It was shown in Paris in 1775 under the title *Spectacle mécanique* and went on to travel to London and then across Europe right into the 1780s.

Of all the Jacquet-Droz androids, which "amazed all Paris" and "left the city's artists in despair",<sup>2</sup> the most famous was to be *The Harpsichord Player*, a girl of ten or twelve years old that could move her shoulders, arms, hands,

<sup>1</sup> See: Adelheid Voskuhl, *Androids in the Enlightenment. Mechanics, Artisans, and Cultures of the Self*, Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013: 64 ff.

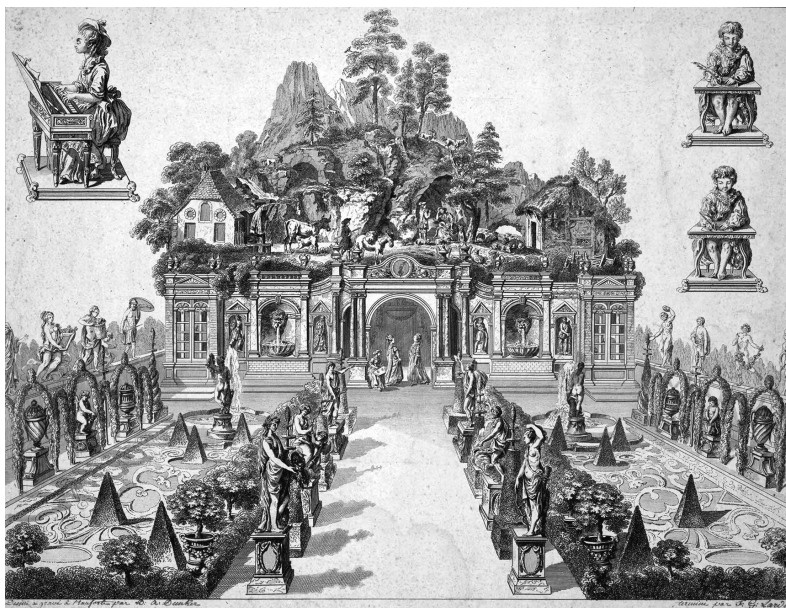
<sup>2</sup> Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France depuis MDCCCLXII jusqu'à nos jours, ou, Journal d'un observateur*, VII: London, John Adamson, 1780: 273.



fingers, head and eyes and play several melodies, and to finish her performance (the clockwork mechanism could be wound to last an hour and a half!) she made an elegant curtsy. Viewers were amazed not only by the fact that the machine could play the harpsichord but by the way the girl swayed in time to the music and rolled her eyes, how her breast heaved as if she were breathing: “She is apparently agitated with an anxiety and diffidence, not always felt in real life”, wrote later one impressed observer, who saw *Lady at her Piano-forte* by Jaquet-Droz’s pupil Henri Maillardet, inspired by *The Harpsichord Player*.<sup>1</sup> During her performance, Jaquet-Droz’s figure threw languishing looks first at her hands, then at the harpsichord,

Pierre Jaquet-Droz,  
The Harpsichord  
Player. 1774. H. 137 cm.  
Musée d’art  
et d’histoire,  
Neuchâtel

<sup>1</sup> *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, I, London: Henry Colburn and Co., 1821: 531. This was the start of the road towards the “female machine”, to James Graham’s electromagnetic “celestial bed” in the Temple of Health (1780s), to the mechanical pornography of the Marquis de Sade (the Prince of Francavilla’s automaton is “a unique mechanism” that is set in motion using levers and springs; *Juliette*, 1797), and at last to the agalmatophilia so popular in nineteenth-century literature. In the novel *L’Ève future* by Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam (1886), the inventor Thomas Edison makes for his friend, depressed by his fiancée’s indifference, an android figure of an ideal lover. See: Olga Vaynshteyn, “Руки андроида” [The Android’s Arms], *Теория моды* [Fashion Theory] 27, 2013. Available online: [https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/teoriya\\_mody/27\\_tm\\_1\\_2013/article/10351/?phrase\\_id=2220](https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/teoriya_mody/27_tm_1_2013/article/10351/?phrase_id=2220)



Balthasar Anton  
Dunker, "Spectacle  
mécanique"  
by Jaquet-Droz. 1775  
Etching

and then at the spectators, her behaviour utterly in accord with current stereotypes of feminine virtue.

In other words, people were amazed by androids not only because they could simulate the movements of the human body, but because they expressed feelings and affects and simulated accepted contemporary gender and social practice.<sup>1</sup>

But if androids simulated the behaviour of "members of society", then they might in future actually become "members of society". Engineers certainly had such futurological intentions: within the new political and economic discourse, they saw androids as the ideal work force ("Ford workers"). In the wake of the success of his androids, Vaucanson started to design automated looms for the silk factory at Lyon, which were intended to take the place of weavers (his project was not successful, however, since the weavers revolted), and Jeremy Bentham proposed the use of automata in the royal shipyards.

In parallel, androids – like wax figures – became the idealised objects of passion. In another story by Jean Paul, "A Simple but Well-intentioned Biography of a Pleasant New Woman Made of Pure Wood that I Invented and Whom I Married" (1789), we read of how a woman is gradually brought to life, in a gender satire on woman's dumbness (i.e. lack of rights) and, in contrast, the garrulity (i.e. power) of von Kempelen's *Sprachmaschine*.<sup>2</sup> In Hoffmann's

<sup>1</sup> On androids in the context of "cultural scenarios" in the eighteenth century see: Voskuhl, Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. F. Hasus (Jean Paul), "Einfältige aber gutgemeinte Biographie einer neuen angenehmen Frau von bloßem Holz, die ich längst erfunden und geheirathet", *Auswahl aus des Teufels Papieren*, [Gera,] 1789.





David Roentgen and Peter Kinzing, The Dulcimer Player ("Marie Antoinette"). C. 1782-1784. H. 53 cm  
Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris



"Miracle Writing Machine". Etching from: Friedrich von Knauss, *Selbstschreibende Wundermaschinen, auch mehr andere Kunst- und Meisterstücke*. Wien, 1780



Friedrich Kaufmann, The Trumpet Player, 1810  
H. 170 cm. Deutsches Museum, Munich

*Der Sandmann* (1816) events take a tragic turn. Olympia, “daughter” of Professor Spalanzani, is so lifelike that Nathanael falls in love with her. But he goes mad when he sees her dismantled body. Spalanzani is then forced to flee in order to avoid criminal investigation “for fraudulently introducing a machine into polite society”.<sup>1</sup>

Like other scientific inventions in the eighteenth century, androids symbolised the victory of Reason over the forces of Nature; they were symbols of (proto)industrial modernity. At the same time, their very existence in the cultural context and the way they were perceived as “scientific toys” – whether stunning or frightening – brought androids back into the sphere of magic<sup>2</sup> and mythology. Did not the *philosophes* compare Jacques de Vaucanson – inventor of the first androids, the *machiniste*, as Diderot called him in *La rêve d’Alember* (1769) – with Prometheus: Voltaire called him “the rival of Prometheus” in his sixth “Discours en vers sur l’homme” of 1737; La Mettrie used the term “the new Prometheus” in *L’homme machine* of 1748.

Prometheus is mentioned on the pages of François-Félix Nogaret’s *Mirror of Real Events* (1790), in which a self-taught engineer who has created a flute-playing automaton (although he himself had never heard music) is endowed with a miraculous – magical – gift of which “Olympus might have been jealous, as the gods once were of Prometheus”.<sup>3</sup> This inventor

<sup>1</sup> “Spalanzani mußte, wie gesagt, fort, um der Kriminaluntersuchung wegen [des] der menschlichen Gesellschaft betrügllicherweise eingeschobenen Automats zu entgehen.”

<sup>2</sup> Not to forget that in the eighteenth century the very concept of “magic” had been devalued. Magic, said Chambers dryly, was “a science that teaches to perform wonderful and surprizing effects”; Chambers, *Op. cit.*, II: 481). While the encyclopaedia of Diderot and d’Alembert gave a longer definition: Magic is a “science or occult art which teaches one to do things that seem beyond human power” (“science ou art occulte qui apprend à faire des choses qui paroissent au-dessus du pouvoir humain”), while a magician is “a sorcerer who truly does – or seems to do – supernatural actions” (“un enchanteur, qui fait réellement ou qui paroît faire des actions surnaturelles”) or a “soothsayer” (“un devin”). Yet, write the authors, magic was widespread in a barbaric and ill-informed age, where philosophy and experimental physics were unknown. *Encyclopédie...*, *Op. cit.*, IX: 852, 850. Thus in the eighteenth century “magic” had become “science”. Perhaps cards represented the only territory to remain in the sphere of “magic”: according to a later dictionary of scientific amusements, the *magicienne* (i.e. the female form of the word) was a fortune teller; *Dictionnaire encyclopedique des amusemens des sciences mathématiques et physiques*, Paris: Panckoucke, 1792: 656.

<sup>3</sup> “défier un artiste dont l’Olympe pourrait être jaloux, comme on assure qu’il le fut autrefois de Prométhée.” François-Félix Nogaret, *Le Miroir des événemens actuels, ou La belle au plus offrant*, Paris: Au Palais-royal, 1790: 46. The hero of the novella, seventeen-year-old Aglaonice, announces a competition: she will marry whoever invents a machine of great genius. Six engineers take part in the competition, their inventions very much in the spirit of the times: one produced a telescope, another a balloon, but the victors were those two who made automata. The first automaton was a life-size bronze flute player that could play 22 melodies (Vaucanson’s *Flute Player*, made of wood, played just twelve melodies!). When she heard his playing Aglaonice fainted and agreed to marry

was called *Wak-wik-vauk-on-son-frankenstein*, or simply *Frankenstein*, and that name says it all: it refers to Vaucanson and to Johann Conrad Delille in Frankenstein's castle, the alchemical creator of the elixir of life. And the syllable *wik* may have led Mary Shelley to choose the name Victor for her hero, the "modern Prometheus".<sup>1</sup>

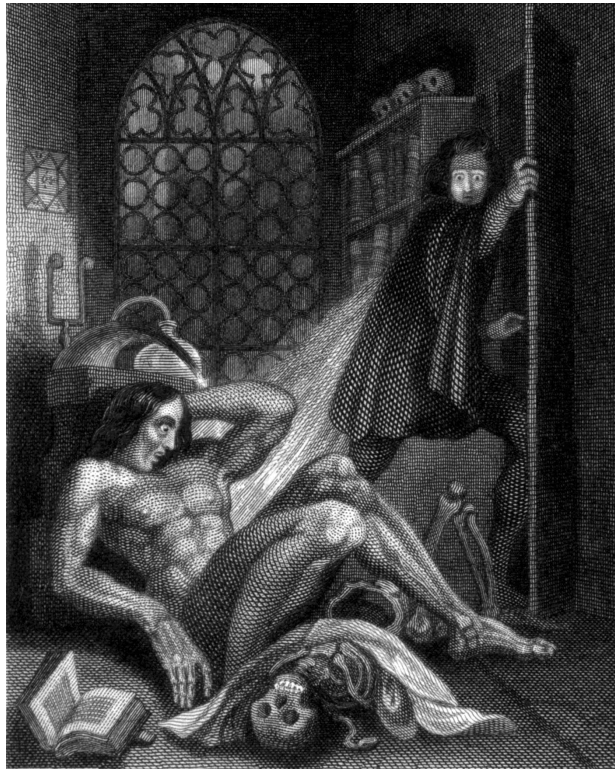
## THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

That same accusation that was made to Professor Spalanzani could be made to Dr Victor Frankenstein, that he "fraudulently introduced a machine into polite society". The being he had created escaped from his control, started to live an independent life and became a monster. Frankenstein had no desire to create a monster, dreaming rather of finding a way to "banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (Frankenstein, Chapter I). That is, he dreamed of creating an ideal human. But the human became a monster.<sup>2</sup> Firstly because he was not like a man outwardly: extremely tall, he ran "with more than mortal speed" (Chapter VII) and was "gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions" (Walton's Diary), and he was of an ugliness repeatedly emphasised through the book. Secondly, his behaviour – unlike that of androids – did not meet social norms, did not fit into "cultural scenarios": he became an avenger, a wretch, a murderer; he is often called a "demon" or a "devil". Hence the monster could never become a "member of society" and was doomed to loneliness.

the author, but then a sixth claimant to her hand appeared and his automaton was a girl that could walk and curtsy. During the demonstration a little Cupid emerged from beneath her skirts and fired an arrow that hit Aglaonice's heart (the arrow was tipped with a rosebud). Then the girl spoke and presented Aglaonice with a cornucopia filled with fruit and adorned with precious stones and gilding. Enchanted, Aglaonice chose the inventor of this automaton and gave her sister in marriage to the maker of the flute player. To judge by a print after a drawing by Edme Bouchardon of 1740, girl-automata of this kind were called *catin* in French – the word meant strumpet, and presumably implied that she "walked her own path".

<sup>1</sup> We do not know if Shelley read Nogaret's tale. It is certainly not impossible, since he was a popular author and *Le Miroir* went through several editions. But no mention is made of Nogaret in *Frankenstein*. In any case, Shelley–Frankenstein's monster is the very opposite of Nogaret–Frankenstein's automaton, just as the genre of the Gothic novel was the antipode of the social allegory of which Nogaret's novella was representative. On Nogaret's short story and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, see: Julia V. Douthwaite, with Daniel Richter, "The Frankenstein of the French Revolution: Nogaret's Automaton Tale of 1790", *European Romantic Review* 20/3, 2009: 381–411; Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France*, Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 2012: 59–97.

<sup>2</sup> On the human and monstrous in Frankenstein's monster see: Jane Maienschein, Kate Maccord, "Changing Conceptions of Human Nature", in: David H. Guston et al, *Frankenstein... Annotated for Scientists, Engineers, and Creators of All Kinds*, Cambridge, MA–London: The MIT Press, 2017: 215–221.



Theodor von Holst,  
Frankenstein's  
Monster. Frontispiece  
from: Mary Shelley,  
*Frankenstein; Or, The  
Modern Prometheus*.  
London, 1831

When he met his creator the monster related the tale of how he started out on his independent, lonely life, and how he first discovered fire: "I... was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects! I examined the materials of the fire, and to my joy found it to be composed of wood. I quickly, collected some branches... When night came again, I found, with pleasure, that the fire gave light as well as heat; and that the discovery of this element was useful to me in my food" (Chapter III).

The monster's tale unexpectedly echoes a fragment in the second book of Vitruvius, in which he speaks of "the origins of mankind" and of a forest fire that first frightened people but then, "when everything had calmed down, they came closer and noticed that the warmth from the flames was most pleasant, and they started to throw logs into the flames, thus maintaining it, inviting others to come and showing them its usefulness" (*Ten Books on Architecture*, II: I, 1). Through the invention of fire, according to Vitruvius, prehistoric people started to come together (the origins of society), to lay the bases of speech (the origins of language) and then started to build the first huts (the origins of architecture). Fire thus has a dual nature (which was immediately noticed by Frankenstein's monster): it is not only a destructive



force but facilitates renewal and transformation of the world, allowing to return to primordial simplicity and to natural humankind.<sup>1</sup>

If we look at Frankenstein's creation not as an ideal but as an Original man, turned into a monster solely through his creator's technical errors when assembling his cyborg, the doctor does indeed look like a "modern Prometheus", creating a man and giving him fire, and his errors are Zeus' punishments in Pandora's box.

It is no coincidence, of course, that Mary Shelley looked to the Promethean symbol and that the Age of Enlightenment repeatedly compared Jacques de Vaucanson with Prometheus. In the eighteenth century there was a reactivation – and a re-interpretation – of the image of Prometheus. As has been demonstrated by, among others, Alexey Losev<sup>2</sup> and Hans-Georg Gadamer, in the early modern age Prometheus was seen as the ideal artist, the anthropoplast sculptor moulding a human. In the words of Gadamer: "In Prometheus, the creator of man, humanity now recognises its own power to create images in the realm of art. It is the myth of genius, the all-powerful productivity of art..."<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of art's productive forces and its ability to transform the world (which Roland Barthes saw as the essence of all sorcery or magic<sup>4</sup>), it was a different Ancient hero who most appealed to eighteenth-century engineers: Daedalus, mythological inventor of automata, author of "living" wooden statues which were so perfect that it seemed "the image made by him was a being endowed with life" (Diodorus, Library of History, IV: 76, 2) and of Pasiphaë's cow, so lifelike that when she hid in it "the bull came and coupled with it, as if it were a real cow" (Apollodorus, Library, III: 1, 4).

Daedaleus (aka Vaucanson, aka Aldini, aka Robertson, aka Frankenstein) is the artist-demiurge, whose art combines Platonic concepts of craft (*techne*) and poetry (*poiesis*). As a demiurge, Daedalus had a mastery of the magic reserved for the gods: when people saw Daedalus and Icarus flying, the "astonished might observe them on the wing, and worship them as gods" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII: 217–220). Like the gods he was able to change the world

<sup>1</sup> On Vitruvius' text in the context of architectural history, see: Olga V. Medvedkova, "In the Beginning, There was Fire: Vitruvius and the Origin of the City", in: Marco Folini, Monica Preti, eds, *Wounded Cities: The Representation of Urban Disasters in European Art (14th–20th Centuries)*, Leiden: Brill, 2015: 75–99.

<sup>2</sup> See: Alexey F. Losev, "Историческая конкретность символа. Мировой образ Прометея" [Historical Specificity of the Symbol. The International Image of Prometheus], Chapter VII of *Проблема символа и реалистическое искусство* [The Question of Symbol and Realist Art], Moscow, 1976. Available online: [http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek\\_Buks/Culture/Los\\_PrSimv/07.php](http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/Culture/Los_PrSimv/07.php).

<sup>3</sup> "In dem Menschenbildner Prometheus erkennt sich nun die Menschheit in ihrer eigenen bildnerischen Macht im Reiche der Kunst. Es ist der Mythos des Genies, der allmächtigen Produktivität des Künstlertums..." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Prometheus und die Tragödie der Kultur" (1946), in: *Festschrift: Rudolf Bultmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart–Cologne: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1949: 74–83.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, "Plastic" (1956), in: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers, New York: Noonday Press, 1972: 97–99.

order (the Labyrinth itself being a metaphor for such an altered world order), perform magical actions (such as flying) and create miraculous objects (such as his living statues). He was invested not only with deftness of hand but could “turn his mind to arts unknown” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII: 189).<sup>1</sup>

Which brings us back to Mary Shelley’s description of those scientists who “have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers.”

<sup>1</sup> On Daedalus as demiurge see further: Nikolai Molok, “Летающий архитектор. Дедал и Амфион в XVIII веке” [The Flying Architect. Daedalus and Amphion in the Eighteenth Century], *Искусствознание* [Art Studies Journal] 2, 2017: 42–83.



Andrew Simsky

**THE ESOTERIC CHRISTIANITY AND ARTISTIC LANGUAGE  
OF ALEXANDER IVANOV<sup>1</sup>**

Alexander Ivanov (1806–1858) was a Russian academic artist who spent the larger part of his career in Rome working on a large-scale canvas entitled “The appearance of the Messiah”. Before embarking on this endeavor, however, he first had to complete a smaller painting, a representation of “*Noli me tangere*” (1835), which was received with great acclaim in Saint Petersburg. During the last decade of his life he started a major project entirely of his own, namely a large set of sketches for murals which covered all the important episodes of the Gospel, together with theologically linked Old Testament stories. These sketches, which evinced a novel artistic language, are collectively referred to as the Biblical Studies. In this paper, I shall put forward an account of Ivanov’s spiritual journey, which led him to the creation of this vibrant epic, filled with light and magic.

\* \* \*

Ivanov stands out as one of the greatest Russian painters. His artistic biography has received sustained and wide attention from Russian art historians. In spite of this attention, however, in-depth analysis of his religious views, which clearly bear a great deal of importance for an artist so fully devoted to Biblical subjects, remains lacking. Most authors characterize his religiosity in a simplified manner, for example, in terms of his faith’s strength or weakness. His religious motivation has typically been either taken for granted or understated depending on the author’s own sympathies.

V.M. Zummer was the first researcher to address the question of Ivanov’s religiosity from a scientific standpoint. In particular, Zummer reconstructed Ivanov’s peculiar eschatological views tinted with millenarism. Ivanov was anticipating Parousia in the advent of a Christ-like Russian Czar assisted by a utopian community of artists, which would inspire the Monarch through historical paintings on uplifting Evangelical subjects<sup>2</sup>. Zummer also

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Zummer V.M. The eschatology of A. Ivanov. Notes of the research chair of European culture, Kharkhov: Kharkhov State University, 1929. P. 387–410.

highlighted how the content and the structure of Ivanov's Biblical Studies closely followed the analysis of David Strauss, a German theologian, whose book, "The life of Jesus critically examined", our artist had intensively studied. In spite of his success in elucidating the organizing principle at work in the Biblical Studies, Zummer found himself faced with a rather challenging question: what was the source of the Studies' inspiration? Given that Strauss' criticism endeavored to unmask the Gospel as a myth, "how was the skeptical lifeless word of Strauss' book able to engender the vibrant shimmering fabric of Ivanov's compositions?"<sup>1</sup>

One possible solution to this problem would be to postulate a measure of independence of Ivanov's faith from Strauss' 'demythologization'. While Ivanov may have borrowed Strauss' structure, he kept the latter's critical theology at bay<sup>2</sup>. Such line of thought would nevertheless compel us to ascribe to Ivanov a compartmentalized mentality, a kind of 'personality split', that was far from being typical for people of his time. Moreover, Ivanov's sincere fascination with Strauss' ideas is evident. In this research, I shall attempt to unravel these apparent contradictions by exploring Ivanov's work in the broader context of contemporary Russian religious thought. I will argue that Strauss' theology not only could be naturally integrated into Ivanov's spiritual world, but that it stimulated his artistic inspiration.

Ivanov's underlying motivation in the Biblical Studies comes across as particularly enigmatic in light of the generally accepted view of the crisis of faith that he underwent shortly following the revolutionary year of 1848<sup>3</sup>. There are indications that, during this period, the artist's traditional faith crumbled and gave way to a more 'progressive' worldview. It is quite difficult to comprehend how this 'crisis of faith' (typically understood in terms of his faith's weakening) could provoke such an effusion of spontaneous burgeoning creativity in Biblical illustrations. At the same time it is also easy to wonder as to the origins of the unique artistic language of Biblical studies, for the latter stands in marked contrast against the academicism that defined the artist's earlier work. To borrow Mashkovtsev's apt turn of phrase, how was Ivanov able to transform from an "academic Salieri into a sparkling Mozart" inspired by a "winged genius of composition?"<sup>4</sup>

My contention, further developed in what follows, is that Ivanov's spiritual journey can only be properly understood in relation to the broader movement

<sup>1</sup> Zummer V.M. On the faith and the temple of Alexander Ivanov. Kiyev: Khristianskaia mysl, 1918. P. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Mashkovtsev N. Artistic journey of Alexander Ivanov // Apollon, 1916, No 6–7. P. 39; Kopirovsky A.M. The system of monumental murals of Alexander Ivanov (Biblical studies) – theology within religious studies // Vestnik RHGA, 2014, vol. 15, No 2. P. 65–73.

<sup>3</sup> Soviet art historians even talked about 'refreshing' influence of revolutionary spirit working in Ivanov. In reality, the artist bore the memory of the revolution of 1848 with horror and denounced its principles as "an end and devastation of any artistry" (Turgenev I.S. The trip to Albano and Frascati // Vek, 1861, No 15. P. 75).

<sup>4</sup> Mashkovtsev N. Op. cit. P. 16.

of a-dogmatic ‘interior Christianity’ that formed the atmosphere of Russian religiosity in the beginning of the XIX century. It was Ivanov’s evolution within this historical context that gave shape to his inspiration in the Biblical Studies. I shall also argue that the ‘crisis of faith’ provoked by the critical work of Strauss involved a renewal, rather than a loss, of Ivanov’s faith<sup>1</sup>. And I hope to show that in the novel iconicity of the Biblical studies we find an expression of this renewed faith.

#### INTERIOR CHRISTIANITY IN EARLY XIX CENTURY RUSSIA

Russian religious thought of the early XIX century was deeply influenced by Protestantism. Theology was studied in Latin, while seminary students worked with Lutheran textbooks. Of all theological disciplines, study of the Bible came to the fore, while relatively little attention was devoted to patristics or liturgics. Even the national ecclesiology bore a protestant stamp: the Church was defined as an assembly of believers with the Russian Emperor at its head. Similarly, a politicized ecumenism in the spirit of the Holy Alliance held sway as an official ideology: all the three main branches of Christendom were recognized as equal in holiness.

The style of individual religiosity in Russian high society gravitated in the direction of pietism. Future priests commonly received a copy of “The True Christianity” by Johan Arndt as a graduation gift. Arndt called for a solitary “imitation of Christ” à la Thomas à Kempis (the latter figured among Ivanov’s favorite reading material). Arndt also reproached the church authorities for their obsession with dogmatism and external cult forms while neglecting the true spiritual life at work “in the temple of one’s heart”. This, of course, is just one example of a much broader trend. Orthodoxy was commonly viewed in terms of a ritualism that was useful for little more than guiding those of the uneducated lower class into the heavenly realms via external forms and symbols. Meanwhile, the elite could directly march toward the same goal by a purely interior spiritual way of religious life. The esoteric and invisible “interior church”<sup>2</sup> was viewed as a higher step of spiritual growth compared to an ordinary, exoteric church. During the period of Double-Ministry<sup>3</sup> such “religion of the heart” almost came to form an official policy: its criticism from a standpoint of confessional Orthodoxy could even be treated as political dissent<sup>4</sup>. The creed that formed the basis of this broad movement, uniting an entire spectrum of heretics and conservatives

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Benois wrote: “The Christological research of a German scholar has shaken his previous scholastic faith... and now in place of an old timid religiosity another kind of faith has awakened in him: philosophically enlightened and truly Christian” (*Benois A.N. History of Russian fine arts in XIX century*. Moscow: Respublika, 1999. P. 171).

<sup>2</sup> *Lopukhin I.V. Some characteristics of the interior church*. Mesa, AR: Scriptoria, 2009 (orig. 1798).

<sup>3</sup> *Shubin D.H. A history of Russian Christianity*. Algora Pub., 2005, vol. 3. P. 95–98.

<sup>4</sup> *Florovsky G. The routes of Russian theology*. Moscow: Institut russkoi tsivilizatsii, 2009. P. 177.

was the well-known evangelical dictum “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

Each aspect of Ivanov’s spiritual life can readily be recognized in this type of religiosity: his unconditional devotion to the Bible, his solitary life, his belief in having a divinely appointed destiny, his utopianism as well as his tendency to deliver didactic sermons. Pietistic traits can also be found in the character of the writer Nikolai Gogol, his bosom friend and spiritual guide<sup>1</sup>. Both felt certain to have been chosen for a special mission, namely to spread the teaching and morality of the Gospel by means of their respective arts. This high and almost prophetic calling required full dedication and self-denial, including celibacy.

Ivanov’s sense of a high calling grew even stronger following the Emperor’s visit in 1845: “As a lightning flashes from one end of the heavens to the other, so will be the coming of the Czar in the spirit of Truth. This I have experienced during his visit to my studio”<sup>2</sup>. Ivanov believed that the prophecy concerning Christ’s second coming would be brought about through an advent of a Christ-like Russian Czar who would lead both Russia and Europe to the dawning of a Christian Golden Age. As an artist he felt himself called to the evangelical mission of enlightening both society at large and the Monarch on the way to this utopian destination<sup>3</sup>.

Ivanov’s attitude toward the Church can also be understood in the light of his interior Christianity. Though his membership in the Orthodox Church was beyond discussion, in his letters and notes he makes almost no mention of church services nor sacraments and writes about the clergy with an air of superiority. Some passages of his writing make clear that he viewed Orthodox rituals as a symbolic form encapsulating (but also obscuring) the true spiritual essence of Christianity. He writes, for example, that “we, not having yet reached Christ’s thought, ... think that our continuous transgressions can be atoned by the observance of rituals that symbolically glorify Him”<sup>4</sup>. As an alternative to this ritualism, which amounts to little more than “an empty form devoid of interior force”<sup>5</sup>, he aspired to enlighten the people by creating an equivalent of the Gospel by means of the fine arts.

His commitment to the solitary spiritual life reminds not only of reclusive monks, but also reveals quite a different spirit of elitist messianism: “Before one is ripe and sure of one’s accomplishment, one should not come out to the people, who from the weakness of their own nature are ready to burden the chosen one...”<sup>6</sup> An elitist esoteric Christianity of the few was closely tied with the romantic ideal of the solitary hero. A phantom of the *Übermensch*

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 331–344.

<sup>2</sup> *Zummer V.M.* On the faith and the temple of Alexander Ivanov. P. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Zummer V.M.* The eschatology of A. Ivanov. P. 400.

<sup>4</sup> *Sobko N.* Ivanov. The Dictionary of Russian artists, Saint Petersburg, 1895. P. 263–264.

<sup>5</sup> *Zummer V.M.* On the faith and the temple of Alexander Ivanov. P. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Sobko N.* Op. cit. P. 69.



already wandering about in the air of European intellectual life could sometimes pay a visit to the lonely studio of the hermit-artist.

This, in sum, was the spiritual landscape where Ivanov's spiritual journey took shape and where he worked out his ideas with regard to the link between faith and art. In what follows, I would like to subdivide his spiritual evolution into three steps, the temporal boundaries of which I would rather leave vaguely defined. The first step roughly corresponds to his work on "*Noli me tangere*"; the second, to the main period of his work on the "The Appearance of the Messiah"; and the third, to the period of his growing disappointment in his *magnum opus* and of the new inspiration he found in the Biblical Studies.

### Step 1. The search of 'warm faith'

Ivanov first came to formulate his understanding of the relationship between art and Christian faith in his encounter with Italian Quattrocento art, where "artists expressed their feelings with warm faith."<sup>1</sup> 'Warm faith', as understood here, is sincere, organic, heartfelt. It is not a mystical experience, but rather a lived organic union of reason, emotion and action, involving the human being as a whole. Warm faith is a-dogmatic and, in accordance with the ecumenical spirit of the time, helped to inspire both Catholic as well as Orthodox artists.

Alexander Ivanov  
The appearance  
of the Messiah,  
1833–1857  
Oil on canvas  
The State Tretyakov  
Gallery, Moscow

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to his sponsors of 1837 (Ibid. P. 45).

In Ivanov's conception of 'warm faith' one easily discerns the influence of H. Ch. Overbeck, who "does not believe that, without complete dedication to religion and the highest degree of piety of an artist himself, it would be possible to succeed in such subjects."<sup>1</sup> One can also recognize the influence of Shellingian philosophy by way of Ivanov's friend Nikolai Rozhalin, who succeeded in convincing the young artist that the true source of art lies in one's heart and soul<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the romantic call for free creativity proved in the end to cause a certain degree of anxiety for Ivanov – one might even say a special kind of slavery. When approaching religious subjects, he felt himself compelled to evoke 'warm faith', without which he had no right even to begin working. Hence, 'warm faith' ended up taking on the role of a kind of instrument similar to paints and brushes (without which the work would be impossible to carry out). It became an inalienable attachment to artistry as Ivanov's only fully organic and encompassing passion.

In the concept of 'warm faith' one can also feel a sense of alarm. When 'warm faith' passes from a simple and childlike reality that naturally shapes one's spiritual life to something external, such as an artistic ideal, or a theological concept, it clearly falls short of the authenticity and spiritual fervency it is meant to denote. Indeed, it is quite likely that the evocation of 'warm faith' in accordance with pietistic forms of spirituality contributed to the development of the anxiety – and even paranoia – that marked the final decade of Ivanov's life<sup>3</sup>.

## Step 2. Rationalist theology: the Bible as a historical record

The search of 'warm faith' stimulated Ivanov to devote serious study to Biblical material. In "The Appearance of the Messiah", for instance, his work strives for a thoroughgoing artistic authenticity that is true to every detail in clothing and historical paraphernalia. Fascinated with Biblical archeology, he approached the Bible as a historian. The question, "How did this really happen?", which initially referred only to the subject matter of his work, inevitably would end up applying to the Biblical text as a whole, stimulating critical analysis and a questioning of its historicity.

The rationalist theological school, which was dominant at that time (for instance, in the work of Eichhorn and Paulus) viewed the Biblical narrative in terms of documentary evidence. The miracles were reasoned out as rare but natural events, and interpretation was both artificial and remote from the meaning of the text<sup>4</sup>. Even while the authenticity of the Bible was

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Bernstein B.A. On the formation of the aesthetic views of Alexander Ivanov // *Iskusstvo*, 1957, No 2. P. 39–43; Polikarpov V.P. Philosophical foundation of A. Ivanov's artistry // *Sovetskoe isskustvoznaniye* 74, 1975. P. 177–199.

<sup>3</sup> To offer an example, Ivanov came to believe that his fellow artists were trying to poison him, with the help of waiters at restaurants that he frequented, out of rivalry.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Eichhorn interpreted the tree of knowledge of good and evil as having been merely a poisonous plant (*Strauss D.F. The life of Jesus critically examined*. 4th edition, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902. P. 66).



preserved, its heart and soul (i.e. a dialogue with God) was lost. The divine, the miraculous and the poetic were methodically scrubbed from the Bible. It is this arid theology that influenced the marked realism and the air of 'dryness' felt in "The Appearance of the Messiah".

Around the midpoint of this period, Ivanov interrupted the work on his *magnum opus* and transitioned to a study for a mural altarpiece "The Resurrection". Some scholars viewed this as a distraction brought about under the influence of his slavophile friends.<sup>1</sup> This 'distraction' nevertheless foreshadowed some of the traits of the next step in his course<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, while working on this sketch, Ivanov gave fresh consideration to the link between art and faith. One finds him jotting down complex trains of thought that even remind one of Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite: "Man senses Divinity – infinite, omnipotent and incorporeal. But he cannot represent Him otherwise than by ascribing to Him man's own lofty qualities, thus forming ideals for himself."<sup>3</sup> Quite in accordance with his interior Christianity, his art began to address the very "spirit of Grace and Truth" lifting the viewer far above hopeless and tiresome theological disputes about God. His "Resurrection" evoked the core of the Heavenly Teaching leaving to Earth below "the disputes of the defenders of bodily resurrection with the proponents of the spiritual."<sup>4</sup> In this period, Ivanov came to discover that the visual arts were better able to capture the essence of spiritual reality than literature. This new turn of his thinking calls to mind the common esoteric idea regarding the primacy of visual symbolism over explicit teaching. It was this new understanding of religious art that allowed Ivanov to come up with a novel form of iconicity in the Biblical Studies.



Alexander Ivanov  
The Resurrection  
study; a sketch  
for a mural altarpiece  
for the cathedral  
of Christ the Savior  
in Moscow, 1845  
Gouache pencil  
on paper. The State  
Tretyakov Gallery,  
Moscow

### Step 3. Mythological theology and the inspiration of Biblical Studies

Ivanov repeatedly stated that the overriding purpose of "The Appearance of the Messiah" was to convey the message of the entire Gospel. Indeed, the appearance of Christ amidst the people and their response to His coming stand as the central meaning of the Gospel. But Ivanov's huge canvas did not live up to his expectations. In attempting to convey the grandeur of this single episode, the entirety of the divine drama was lost. While striving for realism in painting's details, Ivanov enhanced the import of this one episode, but his broader goal remained out of reach. This quandary made something very clear to Ivanov: to create a visual equivalent of the Gospel required that all the major episodes of the Gospel be represented, forming

<sup>1</sup> Bernstein B.A. Ivanov and slavophiles // *Iskusstvo*, 1959, No 3. P. 58–66.

<sup>2</sup> Zimmer pointed at stylistic links between the "Resurrection" and the Biblical studies (Zimmer V.M. The problems of the artistic style of A. Ivanov: the style of Biblical Studies // Transactions of the Azeri State University. Social sciences, vols. 2–3, Baku, 1925. P. 84–103).

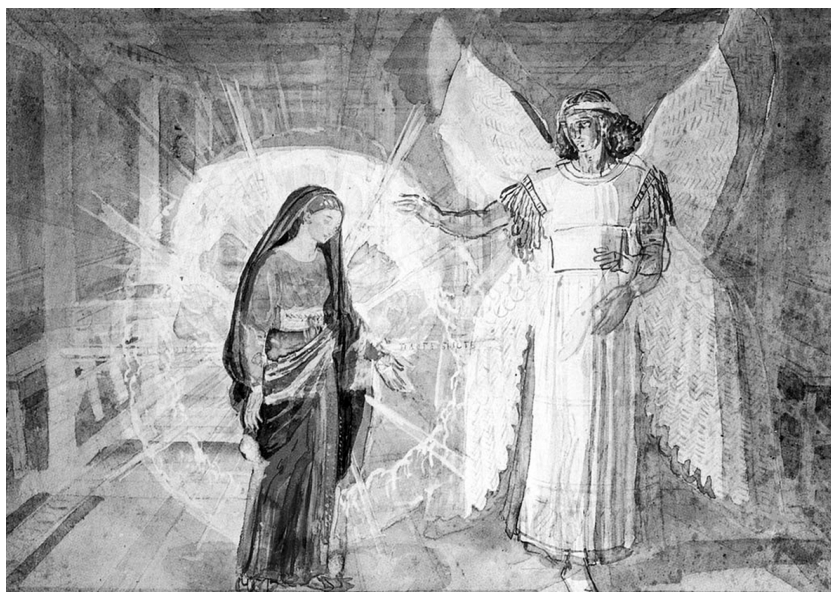
<sup>3</sup> From "Thoughts while reading the Bible" (Zimmer V.M. The eschatology of A. Ivanov. P. 397).

<sup>4</sup> Zimmer V.M. The problems of the artistic style of A. Ivanov. P. 89.

a new kind of iconostasis. The motivation behind the Biblical studies thus followed closely his earlier endeavors. What was innovative in the case of the Biblical studies was their atmosphere inspired by Ivanov's study of the book, "The life of Jesus critically examined". How was the skeptical and 'lifeless' message of Strauss, which clearly aimed to undermine both 'warm faith' and the veracity of the Bible, able to stimulate such an effusion of high-spirited creativity? Let us try to unravel this paradox.

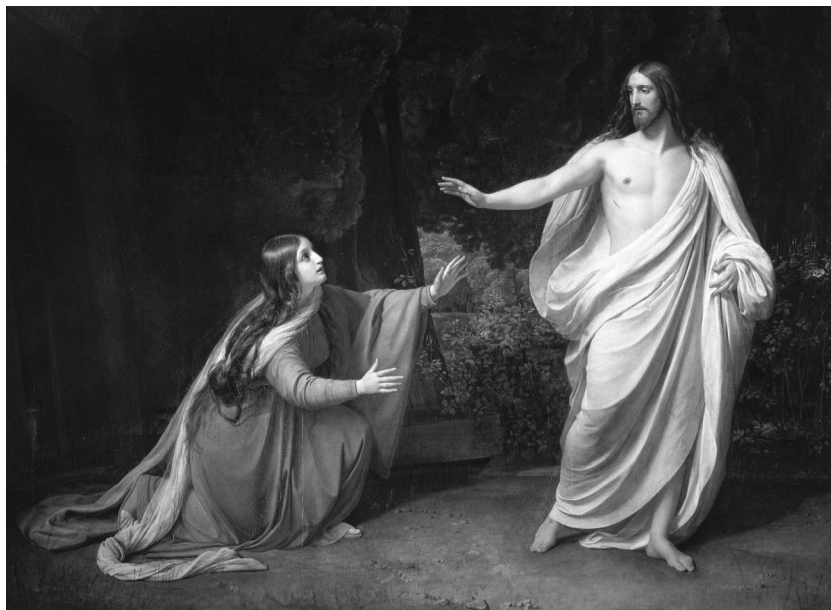
Strauss wrote his book for fellow theologians. His polemic was thus not directed against the naïve faith of ordinary people, but rather against the deistic approach of the rationalist school in theology, which had already stripped the Bible of most of its religious content. Strauss had wanted to put a stop to this perverse interpretation of the Bible and see it for what it was, namely, a corpus of ancient sacred texts containing the living tradition contemporary to its authors. His goal was thus not to suppress the faith but rather to enliven religious feelings by unveiling the original purpose of the text and by restoring a clearer perception of the Bible in its own light.<sup>1</sup> Strauss understood religion as a teaching of the Highest Truth in the form of a Myth.<sup>2</sup> Though the book in itself was dry and scholastic, his approach transformed the Bible into something of a sacred poem, opening the door onto the vivid and colorful reality of a myth that stood independently of a rational understanding of the world. This door would open for those ready to find a place for this reality in their hearts and imagination. The experience of interior Christianity, enhanced by a habit of artistic visual thinking was an ideal stepping stone on Ivanov's path into a new world of Biblical imagination.

Alexander Ivanov  
Biblical studies:  
the Annunciation  
1850s. Watercolor,  
pencil on paper.  
The State Tretyakov  
Gallery, Moscow



<sup>1</sup> Strauss D.F. Op. cit. P. 56, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 80.

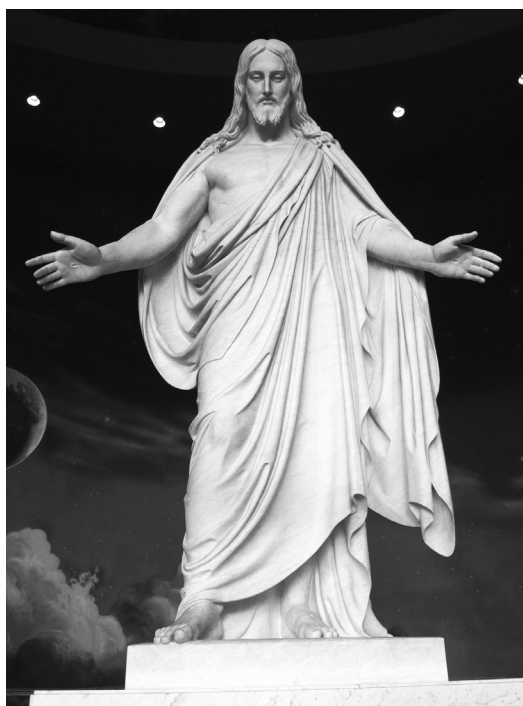


Ivanov's biographers all draw attention to his proclivity for daydreaming, utopian aspirations and living in a 'parallel reality'. Now these aspects of his character were strengthened by his religious feeling and worked together for the benefit of his art. His imagination was set free. Strauss helped Ivanov to see that, "in the beginning, there was a vision", and that the text of the Bible itself is little more than a second-hand verbal description of this vision. This fundamental, original vision has now become his model: his new iconography captured the imagery of the Biblical Myth in all its vibrant materiality, prior to its conversion into a verbal equivalent. Rather than illustrating the descriptions of miracles and visions found in the Bible, his work re-presented these events in all their original vitality and exuberance. "The myth as life and life as myth, interrelated by every element and interpenetrating every part and particle, merged into an indissoluble whole."<sup>1</sup>

Once coming to see the Bible as Myth, Ivanov, it seems, came to love it more than ever. Whereas before it had been for him only a historical record, it now metamorphosed into a veritable poem. Instead of it being a stock of knowledge, Ivanov came to see it as a treasure chest of rich religious imagery. If Strauss' logic had impressed the spatial structure of a temple onto the Bible's linear, narrative form, Ivanov covered the walls of this temple with his murals. Though a dream of 'warm faith' never materialized for Ivanov, it didn't simply evaporate either – rather, it transformed, under the influence of Strauss, into a free-flying faith-dream.

Alexander Ivanov  
Noli me tangere, 1835  
Oil on canvas  
The State Russian  
museum,  
St. Petersburg

<sup>1</sup> Stepanova S.S. Russian painting in the time of Karl Bryullov and Alexander Ivanov. Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2011. P. 226.



A copy of Bertel Thorvaldsen Christus stands in the Visitors' Center of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City. 1838

A Shellingian ideal of heartfelt artistic creativity thus finally found fulfillment, and Ivanov discovered a way to picture the True Faith, the faith of apostles and prophets.

\* \* \*

Studying Ivanov's art in the context of contemporary Russian religiosity helps not only to better understand the general outline of his artistic biography but also to bring to light some interesting points. Here, in closing, I would like to consider two examples.

#### THE COLD JESUS OF THORVALDSEN-IVANOV

An artist works, first and foremost, for his contemporaries. While the imagery of sacred art leaves behind for future generations the ungrateful task of dry iconological study, this same art can easily and naturally resonate in the minds of the faithful of its time. The figure of Jesus in Ivanov's *Noli me tangere* conforms to this general truth of religious aesthetics. The Jesus portrayed in this work was received with admiration by the Russian public at the time. According to the unanimous opinion of newspapers, *Noli me tangere* offered "the most satisfying representation of the One in whom we, Christians, believe – the God-Man."<sup>1</sup> For later art historians, since the end of the XIX cen-

<sup>1</sup> Novitsky A. Op. cit. P. 83.



tury, this enthusiasm looked out of place, and the Jesus of *Noli me tangere* seemed not only ordinary but cold. For some, he even seemed to resemble a stoic Roman tribune rejecting the love of a woman for the sake of his civic duty.<sup>1</sup>

Ivanov's primary source of inspiration, in this case, was the famed sculpture of Jesus by Thorvaldsen, commonly referred to as *Christus*. The story of *Christus* helps to understand the stark contrast between the two different kinds of impressions that Ivanov's rendering of Jesus made on people. Here, in short, is the story. By the end of the XIX century, *Christus* was recognized as "the most perfect of all known images of Jesus". It was not only widely copied but was even taken up as an official emblem of the Mormon Church (Latter Day Saints), which can still be seen in the Visitors' Center in Salt Lake City. In this copy, Jesus stands against the backdrop of the starry sky with an air of quiet force and 'cosmism'. We see here a confident Ruler of the World on His universal mission.

Thorvaldsen's masterpiece owes its popularity not only to its classicism but also to its romantic aspect. It shows an imposing figure of a solitary hero loaded with a superhuman burden. In the beginning of the XIX century, the romantic celebration of force, nobility of heart and heroic solitude was common both in Russia and in Western Europe. The advent of the *Übermensch* was dawning in the poems of Pushkin and Lermontov, as well



The right hand  
of St. John the Baptist  
pointing at Jesus  
in "The appearance  
of the Messiah"

<sup>1</sup> Alpatov, M.V. Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov. His life and works. Moscow: Isskusstvo, 1956, vol. 1. P. 164.

as in the novels of Hugo and Stendhal. This same trend found expression in Thorvaldsen's sculpture as well as in *Noli me tangere*, even though the figure of the *Übermensch* had not yet emerged in the literary world. The historical development of the Russian spirituality followed, however, another route. Jesus's portrayal in Russian art and culture came to be much more accessible and human in appearance: sincere, meek and gentle. The Jesus of Ivanov's *Noli me tangere* – a veritable 'cosmic' action-hero – was no longer a figure that resonated in Russian hearts.

#### THE POINTING RIGHT HAND OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Next allow me to move on to a second brief example. Ivanov's interior Christianity went hand in hand with his serious interest in traditional icon-painting, from which he strove to draw a spiritual message. In particular, he was interested in the representation of relics, not surprising given the importance these bear in the symbolic language of Christian icons. His rendering, in *Noli me tangere*, of the Jesus' burial cloth, the famed Shroud, is particularly impressive.

Now, I would argue that the pointing right hand of John the Baptist, situated in the center of "The Appearance of the Messiah" could itself be a reference to the relic of the right hand of John the Baptist, the palladium of the Russian Empire, which had been acquired during the reign of Emperor Paul. Indeed, the configuration of the hand with its two folded and, hence, invisible, fingers resembles the relic, in which two fingers are missing<sup>1</sup>. If you try to put your fingers into the configuration shown on the left side of figure, you will notice just how difficult this is, for it is not their natural position.

If my hypothesis is correct, the right hand of John the Baptist imbued Ivanov's *magnum opus* with an additional, purely Russian dimension. While the Biblical John was pointing to the approaching Messiah, his actual right hand, enshrined in the Palatine Imperial church in Saint Petersburg, was pointing to the Czar, who, in Ivanov's utopian dreams, was to become a new Messiah and lead the Russians on their predestined lofty calling. It is likely that "The Appearance of the Messiah" formed part of an argument in Ivanov's ongoing imaginary dialogue with the Monarch which started at their meeting in 1845. Did Ivanov already imagine himself playing an important role in this theocratic utopia? If the Monarch approved of his work, so Ivanov, with full rights of an artist-mentor, was pointing with the right hand of John the Baptist at the One whom the Czar was supposed to follow in order to lead his people on their great mission.

<sup>1</sup> A photo of this relic that was certainly known to Ivanov can be found in my paper "The work of Alexander Ivanov's soul" (URL: [https://lib.rmvoz.ru/bigzal/spiritual\\_Alexander\\_Ivanov](https://lib.rmvoz.ru/bigzal/spiritual_Alexander_Ivanov))



Linda Dalrymple Henderson

**RETHINKING MODERN ART, SCIENCE, AND OCCULTISM  
IN LIGHT OF THE ETHER OF SPACE: WASSILY KANDINSKY,  
UMBERTO BOCCIONI, AND KAZIMIR MALEVICH<sup>1</sup>**

For much of the 20th century, art historians and critics resisted acknowledging the role that occultism might have played in the development of modern artists' theories and styles. However, a growing body of scholarship in the history of science and history of religion as well as in art history makes that position untenable for many artists<sup>2</sup>. Rather than occultism being on the fringe of culture in the late 19th and early 20th century, the occult was often closely connected to the newest developments in science

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> The exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986) was the pioneering venture in the area of occultism and art, followed in Germany by *Okkultismus und Avant-garde: Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900–1915*, ed. Veit Loers (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 1995). More recently, the conferences sponsored by the British-based research network “Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism, and the Arts, c. 1875–1960” (2012–2015) have contributed substantially to furthering this scholarship, as has the work of Dutch scholar Wouter Hanegraaf in establishing “Western Esotericism” as a scholarly field of study. My essay herein, which was given as a keynote lecture at the October “Rejected Knowledge” conference in Moscow, is based on several texts recently published or in press; the footnotes here and in those texts provide a sampling of relevant new scholarship in history of science and history religion. Those essays are: Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Abstraction, the Ether, and the Fourth Dimension: Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Malevich in Context,” in *Kandinsky, Malevitch, Mondrian: Der Weisse Abgrund Unendlichkeit/The Infinite White Abyss*, ed. Marian Ackermann and Isabelle Malz, 37–55 (German), 233–44 (English) (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2014; Henderson, “The Forgotten Meta-Realities of Modernism: *Die Uebersinnliche Welt* and the International Cultures of Science and Occultism,” in *Glass Bead* (Paris), no. 0 (2016) < <http://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-forgotten-meta-realities-of-modernism/>>; Henderson, “Malevich, the Fourth Dimension, and the Ether 100 Years Later,” in *100 Years of Suprematism*, ed. Christina Lodder (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018); and Henderson, “Umberto Boccioni’s *Elasticity*, Italian Futurism, and the Ether of Space,” in *Ether and Modernity*, ed. Jaume Navarro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

in a period when the two fields were not seen as so clearly demarcated as later in the 20th century. This was not the science associated with Einstein and Relativity Theory, which gained prominence only as of 1919, when an eclipse expedition established one of the postulates of his theory<sup>1</sup>. Instead, this era was dominated by the paradigm of “ether physics” and a series of discoveries beginning in the 1890s, such as X-rays, the electron, and radio-activity, that suggested the existence of an invisible “meta-reality” beyond the reach of visual perception<sup>2</sup>.

What an exhilarating moment the early 20th century was for artists, whose practice for centuries had been focused on a reality defined by visible light. Turn-of-the-century science also offered occultists and artists alike compelling new evidence for rejecting materialism and positivism. As the late British historian and critic Charles Harrison asserted in 1993, “If we are adequately to assess artists’ intentions and actions in the light of historical conditions, it will be necessary to include among those conditions what it was possible to *imagine*”<sup>3</sup>. The invisible realities suggested by science *and* occultism were indeed a critical component of “what it was possible to imagine” for artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Umberto Boccioni, and Kazimir Malevich. An art history that ignores the broad cultural context of any period is a highly inadequate one. In addition, restoring the cultures of both early 20th-century occultism and science to art history points up the *international* currents of information circulating in this period. Books and occult journals, in particular, served as a kind of internet before the fact, transmitting ideas, including the latest science, to layperson and artists, regardless of national boundaries. If we sense resonances among the ideas of modern artists in a variety of locales, it was this substructure that assured that modernism would be a truly international phenomenon<sup>4</sup>.

Before turning to specific artists, it is important to clarify the popular scientific world view of the 1890s through the 1910s, a milieu that was eclipsed by Einstein’s rise to fame as of late 1919. That new conception of reality, with its focus on the invisible, emerged as a result of a series of widely popularized

<sup>1</sup> On the principles and delayed popularization of Relativity Theory (both the Special Theory of 1905 and the General Theory of 1915), see, e.g., Helge Kragh, *Quantum Generations: A History of Atomic Physics in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 90–104.

<sup>2</sup> I first made the argument for the ether’s relevance in L.D. Henderson, “Die modern Kunst und das Unsichtbare: Die verborgenen Wellen und Dimensionen des Okkultismus und der Wissenschaften,” in *Okkultismus und Avant-garde*, ed. Loers, 13–31; and Henderson, “Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space,” in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, ed. Linda Dalrymple Henderson and Bruce Clarke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 126–49. For contemporary German scholarship on the ether in twentieth-century culture, see, e.g., Albert Kümmel-Schnur and Jens Schröter, eds., *Aether: Ein Medium der Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Harrison, “Abstraction,” in Harrison, Francis Francina, and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 226.

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, see Henderson, “Forgotten Meta-Realities of Modernism.”

discoveries in physics in the 1890s<sup>1</sup>. X-rays, discovered by Roentgen in 1895, made solid matter transparent and raised fundamental questions about the adequacy of the eye as a sensing instrument. Further challenges to the solidity of matter followed with Becquerel's discovery of radioactivity in 1896, J.J. Thomson's identification of the electron in 1897, and, especially, the subsequent work of the Curies and Ernest Rutherford on radioactivity. Popular science writers regularly suggested that all matter might be radioactive, offering the image of objects endlessly emitting particles into the surrounding ether, a view widely promulgated by French author Gustave Le Bon in bestselling books such as *L'Evolution de la matière* of 1905<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the prominent physicist Sir Oliver Lodge argued that the ether itself might be the source of matter in his "electric theory of matter," grounded in the interaction of electrons and the ether. Both Kandinsky and Boccioni in their major treatises cite the electric theory of matter by name<sup>3</sup>.

The invisible space-filling ether is perhaps the major lacuna in historian's knowledge of early 20th-century science (and occultism). Yet, it was a central part of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century world view, and it is crucial to recover a sense of its importance in this era. A "luminiferous ether" had been a part of physics since the 1820s in conjunction with Fresnel's wave theory of light; what was novel about the ether in the later 19th century were the many new functions being attributed to it. Lodge's "electric theory of matter" updated Lord Kelvin's "vortex theory of the atom" as based on whirling vortices of ether. Beyond visible light, ether vibrations were now also understood as the vehicle for X-rays and the Hertzian waves of wireless telegraphy, which, as a cultural phenomenon, focused public attention on the ether<sup>4</sup>. The sense of possibility offered by the ether is clear in Sir William Crookes's declaration in his 1888 address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science that "ether vibrations have powers and attributes equal to any demand – even to the transmission of thought<sup>5</sup>".

<sup>1</sup> On these discoveries, see, e.g., L.D. Henderson, "Editor's Introduction: I. Writing Modern Art and Science – An Overview; II. Cubism, Futurism, and Ether Physics in the Early Twentieth Century." *Science in Context*, 17 (Winter 2004), 423–66. See also, e.g., Alex Keller, *The Infancy of Atomic Physics: Hercules in His Cradle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> See Gustave Le Bon, *L'Evolution de la matière* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1905).

<sup>3</sup> See Sir Oliver Lodge, "Electric Theory of Matter," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 109 (Aug. 1904), 383–89. See Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 142. See also Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futuriste (dinamismo plastico)* (Milan: "Poesia," 1914), 105; and Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture (Plastic Dynamism)*, trans. Richard Shane Agin and Maria Elena Versari (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 155.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of the ether, see, e.g., G.N. Cantor and M. J.S. Hodge, *Conceptions of Ether: A Study in the History of Ether Theories 1740–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and P.N. Harman, *Energy, Force, Matter: The Conceptual Development of Nineteenth-Century Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Sir William Crookes, "Address by Sir William Crookes, President," *Report of the Sixty-Eighth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1898)* (London: John Murray, 1899), 31.

Understood to fill all space with no gap in its “infinite continuity,” as James Clerk Maxwell had declared, the ether required two seemingly contradictory qualities<sup>1</sup>. In order to transmit vibrating electromagnetic waves, the ether required the rigidity of an elastic solid; at the same time, it must allow the free motion of bodies through it and be rarefied enough to flow through the interstices of even the densest matter. Writers on the ether – from scientists and popular science writers to occultists – regularly relied on metaphor to convey something of the nature of the mysterious substance and its behavior, including an elastic jelly or whirling fluid as well as smoke, the passage of water through a sieve, and even steam. Science writer Robert Kennedy Duncan, for example, talked in his 1905 book *The New Knowledge* of our bodies “soaking in [the ether] like a sponge lies soaking in water,” and concluded, “How much we ourselves are matter and how much ether is, in these days, a very moot question<sup>2</sup>”.

For occultists, including Theosophists as well as Anthroposophy’s founder Rudolf Steiner, the ether offered a powerful model both for vibratory thought transfer and for the interpenetration of spirit and matter on the model of the continuum formed by ether/matter interactions. Steiner was particularly attuned to contemporary science, and in 1904 he included in his journal *Lucifer Gnosis*, which Kandinsky owned, excerpts from Lord Balfour’s Presidential Address before the British Association of that year. There he had asserted, “It seems now that [the ether] may be the stuff out of which [the] universe is wholly built<sup>3</sup>”. Theosophists Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater likewise commented prominently on contemporary science, including the ether, in the original introduction to their 1905 book *Thought-Forms*: “Ether is now comfortably settled in the scientific kingdom, becoming almost more than a hypothesis. . . . Roentgen’s rays have rearranged some of the older ideas of matter, while radioactivity has revolutionized them, and is leading science beyond the borderland of the ether into the astral world<sup>4</sup>”. In fact, ether physics played a vital role in making aspects of Theosophical doctrine, such as the “ether body” or “etherial body,” understandable to an early 20th-century audience.

In this era the boundary between science and occultism generally acknowledged today was not at all clear cut. Lodge, Crookes, and French astronomer Camille Flammarion were all interested in various aspects occultism, from spiritualism to telepathy, subjects of investigation for the Society for

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, as quoted in Oliver Lodge, *The Ether of Space* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1909), 114.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kennedy Duncan, *The New Knowledge* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1905), 5.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Balfour, “Address by The Right Hon. A.J. Balfour,” *Report of the Seventy-Fourth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1904)* (London: John Murray, 1905), 7. For Steiner’s quoting from Lord Balfour, see Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Åbo, Åbo Akademi, 1970), 37.

<sup>4</sup> See Annie Besant and C[harles] W[ebster] Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905), 11.

Psychical Research of which they and many other prominent figures, such as psychologist William James, were members. Lodge's, Crookes's, and Flammarion's lectures and writings were widely noted on the international network of both Theosophical and spiritualist publications. Kandinsky, for example, owned copies (of 1908/1909) of the monthly Berlin spiritualist journal *Die Übersinnliche Welt*, which provided regular translations of articles from publications in England, France, and Italy<sup>1</sup>. Translations of popular scientific books occurred regularly as well – with texts such as Lodge's 1909 *The Ether of Space* translated into Russian in 1911 and Gustave Le Bon's *L'Evolution de la matière* in 1912<sup>2</sup>.

Turning first to Kandinsky, his involvement with the occult is perhaps the most fully documented of that of any modern artist. Sixten Ringbom's *The Sounding Cosmos* of 1970 set forth a convincing case for Kandinsky's engagement with a broad occult culture, including Theosophy and other sources. However, his first article on the subject, published in 1966, had focused more specifically on Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms*, and that oversimplification became a leitmotif in discussions of Kandinsky and the occult<sup>3</sup>. Rose-Carol Washton Long's writings during the 1970s and her 1980 book *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* countered Ringbom's emphasis on *Thought-Forms* by emphasizing the Anthroposophy of Steiner as a key stimulus for Kandinsky. She argued that Kandinsky, drawing on Steiner, used veiled or hidden imagery of the Apocalypse and Last Judgement to make a gradual transition to abstraction and sensitize his viewers for the coming "epoch of the Great Spiritual"<sup>4</sup>. This essay broadens such considerations of Kandinsky's art and theory by considering the prominence of the vibratory ether in the Theosophical and other occult sources he read as well as in contemporary science.

In one of the most effective close readings of Kandinsky's stylistic evolution to date, Reinhard Zimmermann has discussed the artist's "break-through to abstraction" during 1911 to 1913 in an analysis highly applicable to works such as the *Composition VI*. Acknowledging Kandinsky's and Gabriele Münter's well-established interest in "theosophical and occult notions" of an invisible "'second level' of reality that... is by nature ethereal and manifests itself above all in auras and thought forms," he writes perceptively.

<sup>1</sup> Ringbom in *The Sounding Cosmos* first noted the presence of the issues of the journal in Kandinsky's archive; see Henderson, "Forgotten Meta-Realities."

<sup>2</sup> See Sir Oliver Lodge, *Mirovoj ethir* (Odessa: Mathesis, 1911); and Gustave Le Bon, *Evolutsia materii* (St. Petersburg, 1912).

<sup>3</sup> See Sixten Ringbom, "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual': Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 29 (1966), 386–418; see also Ringbom, *Sounding Cosmos*.

<sup>4</sup> See Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980). For the "epoch of the great spiritual," see e.g., Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 219.



Wassily Kandinsky,  
*Composition VI*, 1913.  
Hermitage Museum,  
St. Petersburg

The various colour zones have the appearance of free-floating mists or coloured billows of steam; sometimes they look like swathes of clouds. ...In this composition [*Painting with Red Spots I*] matter seems to have shifted into a different physical condition; it is as though it has liquefied, dematerialized. ...[T]he colour planes... are organized independently of the lineature; ...An ethereal colour substance seems to fill the pictorial space... [The] objects have been dematerialized; they have lost their physical presence. For Zimmermann, the result is an “indefinable, ethereal space”... “in keeping with the artist’s occult, theosophical concept of bodies and space<sup>1</sup>”.

While Zimmermann is completely correct in evoking an “ethereal” realm he associates with Theosophy, Kandinsky would have derived support for such a view of matter and space from a much broader range of sources than simply the “thought-forms” and auras of Besant and Leadbeater. For Kandinsky and other early 20th-century artists, the ether was much more than simply a metaphorical concept (“ethereal” as an adjective) or one identified solely with Theosophical “thought-forms.” He was, in fact, responding not only to Theosophical sources and Steiner’s ideas, themselves grounded in ether physics, but also to popular scientific writing and the work of other occultists or occult-oriented scientists interested in the ether, including the Parisians Hippolyte Baraduc and Albert de Rochas. Kandinsky’s belief that his paintings could cause a “vibration in the soul of the viewer,” as he said, found support in a variety of places – from Crookes’s widely cited declaration about the vibratory “transfer of thought” through the ether to figures like Baraduc, who was photographing patterns of vibrating ether he believed

<sup>1</sup> For this discussion, see Reinhard Zimmermann, “Early Imprints and Influences,” in *Kandinsky: The Path to Abstraction* (London: Tate Modern, 2006), 36, 39, 40, 42.



embodied thought, and Rochas's 1895 *L'Extériorisation de la sensibilité*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in their 1901 *Thought-Forms*, Besant and Leadbeater themselves cited Baraduc as their "scientific counterpart". *Thought-Forms* was just one manifestation of a much larger fascination with vibratory thought communication in this period, which included not only Crookes, but also other scientist advocates of telepathy such as the physicist Lodge and astronomer Flammarion.

If the ether was central to Kandinsky's conception of painting as a communication between the artist as a "sender" and the viewer as a "receiver," it is also a key to the dematerialized imagery of his mature abstractions, such as *Composition VI*.<sup>2</sup> In his first steps toward abstraction Kandinsky had utilized veiled or hidden imagery, but his ultimate goal was to communicate with viewers via pure color and form. Recovering the early 20th-century focus on the ether sheds critical new light on Kandinsky's understanding of the "matter" he was dematerializing.

In *On the Spiritual in Art* Kandinsky writes of "professional men of learning who test matter again and again, who tremble before no problem, and who finally cast doubt on the very *matter* which was yesterday the foundation of everything, so that the whole universe rocks. The electron theory – i.e. the theory of moving electricity, which is supposed completely to replace matter has found lately many keen proponents. ..." <sup>3</sup> Similarly, the artist's well-known reference to the "collapse" or "further division of the atom" in his 1913 "Reminiscences," which has sometimes been read negatively, was clearly a positive response to the turn-of-the century ferment in the wake of the discoveries of the electron and radioactivity and ideas of the ether as the possible source of matter <sup>4</sup>.

Theosophists like Leadbeater and Steiner regularly talked about degrees of rarefaction of matter as one progressed from the physical body to the "ether body" to the astral body <sup>5</sup>. Kandinsky would have found a similar

<sup>1</sup> For the vibration theme, see the numerous references in Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 87, 89, 129, 147, 157–58, 160, 169, 210–11, 241. On Baraduc and Rochas, see, e.g., Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism"; on these figures and Kandinsky, see Ringbom, *Sounding Cosmos*, 54–55, 122–23. For a fuller discussion of Kandinsky's French sources, including photographer Louis Darget, see Henderson "Bilder der Frequenz. Moderne Kunst, elektromagnetische Wellen und der Äther im frühen 20. Jahrhundert," in *Archiv für Mediengeschichte 11 (Takt und Frequenz)*, ed. Friedrich Balke, Bernhard Siegert, und Joseph Vogl (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 51–65, as well as the essays on Kandinsky by Andreas Fischer and Veit Loerrs in *Schirn Kunsthalle, Okkultismus und Avant-Garde*.

<sup>2</sup> See Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, in *Complete Writings*, ed. Lindsay and Vergo, 241.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures" (1913), in *Complete Writings*, ed. Lindsay and Vergo, 364.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., C.W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible* (New York: John Lane, 1903), 12; and Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man*, trans. E. D. S. (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1910), 32–33.

discussion in one of the books in his extensive library, Yogi Ramacharaka's *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* (1911 edition). "Yoga Ramacharaka," the pen name of William Ward Atkinson (founder of the American New Thought movement), explained etherial phenomena like the astral body or the thought projections central to his book by using the model of steam<sup>1</sup>. Just as ice, water, and steam are all the same chemical substance, they exist in radically different forms, according to the rates of vibration of their molecules; steam thus served as a counterpart to ether on a scale from condensation to dissolution. According to Yogi Ramacharaka, thought "is like a thin vapor. . . and is just as real as the air around us or the vapor of steam or the numerous gases with which we are acquainted<sup>2</sup>". And he connected this vaporous thought back to the ether: "When one 'thinks' he sets up vibrations of greater or lesser intensity in the surrounding ether, which radiate from him in all directions<sup>3</sup>".

Kandinsky himself utilized a comparison to steam in discussing his painting *Composition VI*, and ether as dematerialized matter might well be what he is depicting, in part, in his mature paintings. In 1913 he wrote of the center section of the painting, "Here the pink and the white. . . appear as if hovering in the air, as if surrounded by steam." Citing the effects of a Russian steam bath, he continues, "A man standing in the steam is neither close nor far away, he is just somewhere. The feeling of 'somewhere' about the principal center determines the inner sound of the whole picture<sup>4</sup>". Here Kandinsky's reference to steam, like the smoke and fog that served as metaphors for the elusive ether, carries additional resonances when his paintings are read in context. It is truly an indefinable, ether-like space the artist creates — "neither close nor far away."

With their visual and aural *Klang*, Kandinsky's dynamic, non-material forms create the effects of "dissonance" both he and his composer friend Arnold Schoenberg believed could lead to the "consonance of 'tomorrow'" — i.e., the harmonious, spiritual future in which he believed<sup>5</sup>. Kandinsky's art and theory were clearly nourished by the early 20th-century milieu of ether physics that resonated so closely with his readings in Theosophy and other occult sources. He was not operating on the fringe in this period; he was in the mainstream in engaging the popular scientific and occult cultures of his time.

The stereotype of the Italian Futurists is of artists completely dedicated to technology as the revolutionary force that could transform agrarian Italy

<sup>1</sup> See Yogi Ramacharaka [William Ward Atkinson], *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* ([Chicago]: Yogi Publication Society, 1903), 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," in *Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Lindsay and Vergo, 387; Kandinsky also discusses vibration in this section.

<sup>5</sup> Kandinsky letter to Arnold Schoenberg, January 18, 1911, in *Arnold Schoenberg/Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, Documents*, ed. Jelena Hahl-Koch, trans. John C. Crawford (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 21.

as well as poetry and art. In recent decades, however, Italian scholars, such as Germano Celant, Simone Cigliana, and Luciano Chessa, have brought to light the Futurists' deep involvement with spiritualism and Theosophy<sup>1</sup>. As in the case of Kandinsky, it is vital to recognize the close relationship of occultism and ether physics in this period and the international circulation of such ideas.

Boccioni made clear his interest in both science and occultism in the 1910 "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting": "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies since our sharpened and multiplied sensitiveness has already penetrated the obscure manifestations of the medium? Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to those of the X-rays?"<sup>2</sup> In a 1911 lecture he declared, "What needs to be painted is not the visible but what has heretofore been held to be invisible, that is, what the clairvoyant painter sees"<sup>3</sup>.

Boccioni clarified his scientific interests most fully in his 1914 treatise *Pittura scultura futuriste*, written by 1913. Citing phenomena such as Hertzian waves and the "electrons [that] revolve in the atom by tens of thousands," he writes: "Why be terrified of moving away from traditional representation? The electric theory of matter, according to which matter would be only energy, condensed electricity, and would exist only as *force*, is a hypothesis that increases the certainty of my intuition. ...The most recent scientific hypotheses, the endless possibilities offered by chemistry, physics, biology and all science's discoveries, the life of the infinitesimally small, the fundamental unity of the energy that gives us life, everything pushes us to create through our plastic sensibility analogies with these new and marvelous conceptions of nature"<sup>4</sup>.

Boccioni's monumental portrait of his mother of summer 1912, *Materia* [Matter], demonstrates his creative response to contemporary science and occultism, including the fascination with new invisible vibrating waves, suggested here by the rays streaming down upon the figure. On the model of radioactivity, in which he was deeply interested, his mother's mass seems to dissolve into its surroundings (or cohere from them), a process emphasized by the particulate light greenish-blue strokes on the surface of the canvas. Here Boccioni creates an image of continuous diffusion and cohesion

<sup>1</sup> See Germano Celant, "Futurism and the Occult," *Artforum*, 19 (Jan. 1981), 36–42; Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2002); and Luciano Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist: Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" (April 1910), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. Robert Brain, W.W. Flint, J.C. Higgitt, and Caroline Tisdall (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Boccioni, "Selected Notes for a Lecture on Futurist Painting" appended to "Lecture before the Circolo Artistico, Rome, May 29, 1911," in Ester Coen, *Umberto Boccioni* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 239.

<sup>4</sup> Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futuriste*, 327–29; Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture (Plastic Dynamism)*, trans. Richard Shane Agin and Maria Elena Versari (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 155–56 (with slight variation in translation by LDH).

Umberto Boccioni,  
*Matter*, 1912. Gianni  
Mattioli Collection,  
on long-term loan  
to the Peggy  
Guggenheim  
Collection, Venice



suggestive of the radioactive emissions observable in the contemporary parlor toy, the spinthariscopes. In *Materia* he realized the goal he had announced to Carlo Carrà in an April 1912 letter, “I’m not interested in anything but matter expressed according to myself<sup>1</sup>.”

Boccioni’s painting *Elasticity* of fall 1912 has a similar quality of fluidity, although here his focus seems now to be on the space-filling ether itself. Although this painting is usually discussed in terms of the muscular elasticity of the horse and rider, the term “elasticity” had a new prominence in this period as a basic characteristic of the ether<sup>2</sup>. Boccioni painted *Elasticity* at a time he had also begun to explore sculpture, and he would connect his well-known *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* of 1913 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) specifically to the “materialization of the fluid, of the etherial, the imponderable” in the concluding section of *Pittura scultura futurista*. “We want to model the atmosphere,” Boccioni declares, using his synonym for the ether<sup>3</sup>. And his frequently mentioned goal of the “solidification of Impressionism” responds specifically to new energy-oriented ideas about the ether in the early 20th century that moved beyond the diaphanous, light-filled ether of the Impressionists or even the impalpable ether that engaged Kandinsky<sup>4</sup>.

Boccioni may well have been first introduced to the new ideas about the ether in the context of Theosophy. His diary entries of 1908 show him grappling with issues of belief and rejecting “the monopoly of one church,” since humanity is, as he states, “on the eve of universal brotherhood,” one of the three stated “Objects of the Theosophical Society<sup>5</sup>”. In a December 1907 diary entry he had queried, “– how, where,

<sup>1</sup> Boccioni letter to Carlo Carrà [mid-April 1912]; quoted in Flavio Fergonzi, “On the Title of the Painting *Materia*,” in *Boccioni’s Materia: A Futurist Masterpiece of the Avant-garde in Milan and Paris*, ed. Laura Mattioli Rossi (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2004), 50. Boccioni was also an admirer of the philosopher Henri Bergson, whose philosophy of flux and continuity was itself grounded in ether physics; see e.g., Henderson, “Umberto Boccioni’s *Elasticity*.”

<sup>2</sup> On *Elasticity*, see, e.g., Marianne W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909–1915* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 153.

<sup>3</sup> Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futurista*, 325; see also Boccioni *Futurist Painting Sculpture*, trans. Agin and Versari, 155 (with slight variation in translation by LDH).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Boccioni, “Plastic Foundations of Futurist Sculpture and Painting,” in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Apollonio, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Boccioni, Diary entry, March 22, 1908, in Coen, *Umberto Boccioni*, 260. The three “Objects of the Theosophical Society,” including “To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of Race, Creed, Sect, Caste, or color,” were regularly printed in publications of the Theosophical Publishing Society.



when can I study all that chemistry and physics?," and the following passage from the 1907 Manuali Hoepli edition of Giuseppe Giordano's *Teosofica* suggests such a text as his stimulus: "By now, anybody who keeps up with the modern scientific movement is no longer unaware that recent decades have seen a rapid succession of the most marvelous and surprising discoveries in the field of Chemistry and Physics; and that, thanks to

a multitude of famous scientists... , the concept that we had twenty years ago of... various forms of energy, and of matter in general, has been entirely transformed<sup>1</sup>."

As noted earlier, the Theosophists Besant and Leadbeater, whose works were regularly translated into French and Italian, drew extensively on ether physics. Thus, Besant writes in her discussion of the "Etheric Double" in *Man and His Bodies* of 1896: "Modern physical science holds that all bodily changes, whether in the muscles, cells, or nerves, are accompanied by electric action, and the same is probably true of the chemical changes which are continually going on. . . . Whenever electric action occurs ether must be present, so that the presence of the current is proof of the presence of the ether, which interpenetrates all, surrounds all ...<sup>2</sup>" Here Besant touches on themes highly relevant for Boccioni's *Elasticity*: muscles, electricity, and ether. And the source for her erudition on electricity and ether was surely Lodge, whom she and Leadbeater would quote directly in their Appendix on "The Aether of Space" in their book *Occult Chemistry* of 1908<sup>3</sup>.

As suggested earlier, Lodge was a highly sympathetic figure for occultists, and his prolific writing brought his views of the centrality of the ether to a broad public. In 1894, at the invitation of French physiologist Charles Richet, Lodge had participated in seances with the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino, and from this experience he had concluded that "certain phenomena of this class may, under certain conditions, have a real and objective

Umberto Boccioni,  
*Elasticity*, 1912  
Pinacoteca Brera,  
Milan, Jucker  
Collection

<sup>1</sup> See Giuseppe Giordano, *Teosofia* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1907), 221. For Boccioni's diary entry, see Coen, *Boccioni*, 257.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Besant, *Man and His Bodies* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900), 27.

<sup>3</sup> See Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry: A Series of Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1908), Appendix: "The Aether of Space" (i-x). See also Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *L'Etere dello spazio* [A Translation of the Appendix of "Occult Chemistry" entitled "The Aether of Space"] (Genoa: Tip. A. Ciminago, 1908).



existence<sup>1</sup>.” Lodge was also in contact with well-known Italian psychical researcher and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who cited Lodge repeatedly in his publications. For example, in a section of his 1909 *Ricerche sui fenomeni ipnotici e spiritici* titled “Radio-Activity” he invokes Lodge’s idea that spirits might possess an “etherial body,” allowing them to build up a “material body capable of manifesting itself<sup>2</sup>”. Such a presence in occult literature, especially his openness to the theme of materialization from the ether, would have made the British physicist’s writings of particular interest to the Futurists.

From Boccioni’s specific citing of the “electric theory of matter,” it is clear that he had encountered Lodge’s ideas on electrons and the ether, which would have been accessible in a variety of sources. These included Besant and Leadbeater’s Appendix to *Occult Chemistry*, which was translated into Italian and published under their names<sup>3</sup>. Lodge’s ideas also figured regularly in *Ultra*, the leading Italian Theosophical journal.

In contrast to the seemingly diaphanous ether of the 19th century, Lodge’s writings on the ether around 1908 suggest a structural field of great density as well as great energy and huge velocities, themes at the heart of Futurism. As Lodge explains, “... [the ether] possesses that property of “rigidity,” or elastic resilience to “shear,” which is characteristic of what we would ordinarily call a solid; wherefore it would appear that it must be, throughout, in such a state of excessively fine-grained turbulent motion as would confer this property upon it. ...It is the gyrostatic kind of elasticity... whereby a perfect fluid can kinetically acquire some of the properties of a perfect solid<sup>4</sup>”.

How provocative Lodge’s further discussion of the ether would have been for Boccioni and the Futurists: “This is the theory then – this theory of elasticity as dependent on motion – which, in combination with the estimate of density, makes the internal energy of the ether so gigantic. For in every cubic millimeter of space we have... a mass equivalent to what, if it were matter, we should call a thousand tons, circulating internally... with a velocity

<sup>1</sup> Oliver J. Lodge, “Experience of Unusual Psychic Phenomena Occurring in the Presence of an Enraptured Person (Eusapia Paladino [sic]),” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 6 (Nov. 1894), 307–8. On this and other seances in which Lodge participated, see, e.g., Courtney Grean Raia, “Ether Theory to Ether Theology: Oliver Lodge and the Physics of Immortality,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 43 (Winter 2007), 19–43; Noakes, “Haunted Thoughts of the Careful Experimentalist: Psychical Research and the Troubles of Experimental Physics,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 48 (2014), 46–56; and Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 150–51.

<sup>2</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *After Death What? Spiritistic Phenomena and Their Interpretation* [*Ricerche sui fenomeni ipnotici e spiritici*], trans. William Sloane Kennedy (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1909), 187–88.

<sup>3</sup> See again 228, n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, *Modern Views of Electricity* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1907), 319. For a fuller version of the discussion of Lodge’s views on the ether noted here, see Henderson, “Umberto Boccioni’s *Elasticity*, Italian Futurism, and the Ether of Space.”



comparable to the velocity of light, and therefore containing. . . an amount of energy... equal to the energy of a million horse-power station working continuously for forty million years<sup>1</sup>”.

It is in this context that we can finally better understand both the form and subject matter of Boccioni's *Elasticity* and his subsequent works. Ether is the unifying component here, filling all space and, in Lodge's words, serving as “the substratum of what appeals to our senses as matter”<sup>2</sup>. This elastic ether is a robust, energy-laden entity. Futurist “force-lines,” the concept Boccioni had borrowed from the ether physics of Maxwell, have become “force-forms,” as he terms them, here expressed as folds and “shears” of the ether<sup>3</sup>.

At the conclusion of *Pittura scultura futuriste* Boccioni writes of the ether:

We ought to realize that if this infinite, this imponderable, this invisible is becoming increasingly an object of investigation and observation, it's because in the mind of the *moderns*, some marvelous sense is being awakened within the unknown depths of consciousness.

Our Futurist audacity has already forced open the gates of an unknown world. We are already creating something analogous to what the physiologist [Charles] Richet calls *heteroplastic* [eteroplastica] or *ideoplastic* [ideoplastica]. The biological mystery of mediumistic materialization is for us a *certainty*, a clarity in the intuition of physical transcendentalism and of plastic states of mind<sup>4</sup>.

Although Richet's term was “heteroplastic” [eteroplastica], Boccioni could well have coined the term *eterplastica* or “etherplastic” to signify his commitment to materializing the ether as he discovered it in both its occult and scientific contexts. And that idea applies equally well to paintings such as his 1913 *Dynamism of a Soccer Player* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) and to sculptures like *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. Whether using painterly chiaroscuro to create dynamic “force-forms” in painting or sculpting them in clay, Boccioni was seeking to model a new kind of sculptural atmosphere or ether. Recovering the ether clarifies in vital new ways Boccioni's grounding in the occult and scientific ideas of his day.

Italian Futurist art and manifestos, with their frequent scientific and occult references, were crucial stimuli for the development of Russian avant-garde painting, including the work of Malevich, such as *Painterly Realism of a Football [Soccer] Player: Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*<sup>5</sup>. Yet, as Malevich's title suggests, there was a difference in focus between Boccioni and Malevich in terms of their response to conceptions of invisible realities. For Boccioni,

<sup>1</sup> Lodge, *Ether of Space*, 103, 123.

<sup>2</sup> Lodge, *Modern Views of Electricity*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> For Boccioni's use of “force-form,” see his “Preface, First Exhibition of Futurist Sculpture” (Paris, June 1913), in *Modern Artists on Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 48.

<sup>4</sup> Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futuriste*, 328–29; Boccioni, *Futurist Painting Sculpture*, trans. Agin and Versari, 156 (with slight variation in translation by LDH).

<sup>5</sup> On the impact of Italian Futurism in Russia, see Charlotte Douglas, “The New Russian Art and Italian Futurism,” *Art Journal*, 34 (Spring 1975), 229–39.

the ether was a primary element of his theories and the idea of a fourth dimension only a passing concern<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, for Malevich and his colleagues, the fourth dimension, as they discovered it in the writings of P.D. Ouspensky, was central. Nonetheless, Ouspensky himself was a product of the occult/scientific milieu of the early 20th century and was well aware of the connections regularly drawn between the fourth dimension and the ether. With their interest in the fourth dimension, Malevich and his colleagues would certainly have been aware of such links as well.

A possible suprasensible dimension of space was a topic of much speculation in popular culture from the 1880s onward, and many modern artists responded to this aspect of the invisible realities that fascinated the early 20th century<sup>2</sup>. If space had four dimensions, our world would be merely a three-dimensional section of it, akin to a two-dimensional plane embedded in our space. This notion, also occluded by Einstein, who redefined the fourth dimension as time in the space-time continuum of Relativity Theory, has come back in culture in recent decades in the context of the emergence of computer graphics and of string theory in physics, which suggests the universe may have ten or eleven dimensions<sup>3</sup>.

In the wake of the discovery of the X-ray, no one could say a fourth dimension did not exist simply because it could not be seen. Like the ether, the fourth dimension suggested answers to all kinds of mysteries, and it was embraced by spiritualists and Theosophists alike. The original “hyperspace philosopher,” the Englishman Charles Howard Hinton, was grounded in idealist philosophy and created what he considered a practical system of exercises for developing one’s “space sense” to comprehend the fourth dimension<sup>4</sup>. Although Hinton was not a mystic or occultist, his writings were embraced and developed by those who followed – from the Theosophists Leadbeater, Claude Bragdon, and Ouspensky to Steiner<sup>5</sup>. The ether had also played

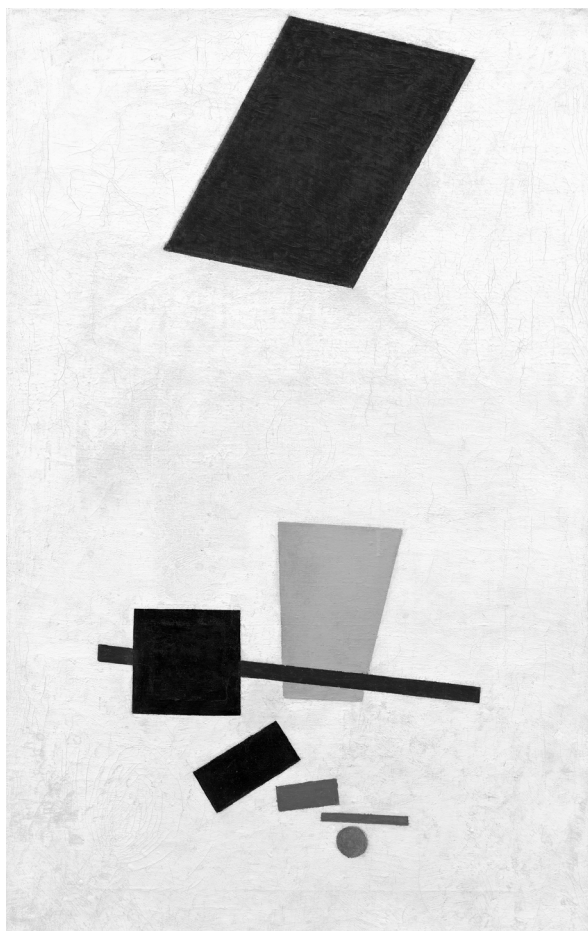
<sup>1</sup> For Boccioni and the fourth dimension, see, e.g., L.D. Henderson, “Italian Futurism and ‘The Fourth Dimension,’” *Art Journal*, 41 (Winter 1981), 317–23; and L.D. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; new ed., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), chap. 2.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*; for a sampling of artist’s responses (Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Malevich), see Henderson, “The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in 20th-Century Art and Culture,” *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology*, 17 (Winter 2009), 131–60.

<sup>3</sup> On the reemergence of the spatial fourth dimension in popular culture in the later twentieth century, see Henderson, “Reintroduction,” in *Fourth Dimension*, new ed. (2013).

<sup>4</sup> See Charles Howard Hinton, *A New Era of Thought* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1888); and Hinton, *The Fourth Dimension* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1904). Hinton’s ideas are summarized in Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, chap. 1.

<sup>5</sup> For Leadbeater’s discussion of Hinton, see 232, n. 2. For Steiner and Hinton, see *Rudolf Steiner: The Fourth Dimension – Sacred Geometry, Alchemy, and Mathematics*, trans. Catherine E. Creeger (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2001). On Bragdon, see, e.g., Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*; and Jonathan Massey, *Crystal and Arabesque: Claude Bragdon, Ornament, and Modern Architecture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).



Kazimir Malevich,  
Painterly Realism  
of a Football Player:  
Color Masses  
in the Fourth  
Dimension, 1915.  
Oil on canvas.  
The Art Institute  
of Chicago

a central role in Hinton's philosophy, as he speculated on its relationship to the fourth dimension, and this was to be important for Ouspensky and, very likely, for Malevich<sup>1</sup>.

Ouspensky was probably introduced to Hinton and the idea of the fourth dimension by the Theosophical writings of Leadbeater, who extensively recounted Hinton's ideas and connected the Theosophical concept of "astral vision" to the fourth dimension<sup>2</sup>. As noted earlier, the ether also figured prominently in connection to the Theosophical concept of the "etherial body." While Ouspensky drew on Theosophical literature, quoting from Leadbeater and others in his 1909 book on the fourth dimension, *Chetvertoe Izmerenie*, he ultimately left Theosophy to create a new system of logic

<sup>1</sup> The discussion that follows is based, in part, on Henderson, "Abstraction, the Ether, and the Fourth Dimension"; the argument is developed further in Henderson, "Malevich, the Fourth Dimension and the Ether of Space."

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., C.W. Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1899).

devoted solely to developing “cosmic consciousness” of the fourth dimension, the true reality<sup>1</sup>. He set forth that philosophy in his 1911 text *Tertium Organum: Kliuch k zagadkam mira* [Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World]<sup>2</sup>. The impact of Ouspensky on the Russian avant-garde, including Mikhail Matiushin, Alexei Kruchenykh, and Malevich, is well established. Against the larger backdrop of science and occultism, however, we can now recognize that Malevich’s response to Ouspensky occurred in a larger context.

A sampling of statements and works by members of the Russian avant-garde (along with books published in Russian translation, such as those by Le Bon, Lodge, and others), makes clear the awareness of ether physics and its focus on invisible forms and energies on the part of Malevich and his colleagues. “Our energy is the energy of Radium. . . . Our principal = the dazzling renewal of scientific discoveries,” asserted the Russian Futurist poet Vasily Kamensky in a manuscript of 1914<sup>3</sup>. Radioactivity was a particularly prominent topic in Russian popular science, because of its relevance to Mendeleev’s periodic table. Offering a seemingly endless source of energy, radioactive elements were also discussed in terms of alchemy, including by William Ramsey and Frederick Soddy, whose books were translated into Russian in 1910. When poet Benedikt Livshits later referred to avant-garde protagonist Nikolai Kulbin’s lectures of 1912 as “a salad of Bergson, Ramsey, and Picasso,” this was the Ramsay to whom he referred<sup>4</sup>.

Mikhail Larionov announced his enthusiasm for the new science the most vocally of any artist, declaring his interest in “Radioactive Rays. Ultraviolet rays. Reflectivity” in his 1913 Rayist manifesto<sup>5</sup>. Although he does not use the term ether, Larionov in his 1914 essay “Le Rayonisme Pictural” speaks of “plastic emanations” and “intangible forms” and asserts that “Rayism

<sup>1</sup> See Petr Demianovich Uspenskii, *Chetvertoe izmerenie: Opyt izsledovaniia oblasti neizmerimago* [The Fourth Dimension: An Experiment in the Examination of the Realm of the Immeasurable] (St. Petersburg: “Trud,” 1910 [1909]); for Leadbeater, see 78.

<sup>2</sup> See Petr Demianovich Uspenskii, *Tertium Organum: Kliuch k zagadkam mira* [Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World] (St. Petersburg: “Trud,” 1911). For the English translation, see P.D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought, a Key to the Enigmas of the World*, trans. from 2nd Russian ed. (1916) by Claude Bragdon and Nicholas Bessaraboff (2nd American ed., rev., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922). *Chetvertoe izmerenie* was never translated into English, but Ouspensky reproduced much of its content in the chapter titled “The Fourth Dimension,” in P.D. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in Its Application to Problems of Science, Religion, and Art* (London: Kegan Paula, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1931).

<sup>3</sup> Kamensky, unpublished manuscript, quoted in Anthony Parton, *Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 137.

<sup>4</sup> See Benedikt Livshits (1933), as quoted in Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Larionov, “Rayonist [Rayist] Painting,” in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism*, ed. John E. Bowlit, rev. ed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 98.

is the painting. . . of these *infinite* products with which the whole of space is filled<sup>1</sup>.

Malevich was likewise deeply interested in energies and invisible realities, and his writings and art reflect the new conceptions of matter and space. In his 1916 text "From Cubism to Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting" Malevich declared, "*Objects have vanished like smoke; to attain the new artistic culture, art advances toward creation as an end in itself and toward domination over the forms of nature*"<sup>2</sup>. Rather than superficial objects or surfaces, Suprematism would focus on "inherent forms": "Solid matter does not exist in nature. There is only energy," the painter asserted in 1921, echoing earlier ideas like the "electric theory of matter"<sup>3</sup>. Malevich's 1916 drawing *Composition 14t (Suprematism: Sensation of Electricity)* (Khardzhiev Collection, Amsterdam) makes his scientific interests clear.

When Malevich premiered Suprematist painting at the *0.10* exhibition in December 1915, he had announced his interest in the fourth dimension in the titles and subtitles of his paintings, such as *Movement of Painterly Masses in the Fourth Dimension* and *Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* or *Color Masses in the Second Dimension*. As I first argued in my 1983 book *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Malevich's Suprematist paintings with planes of one color only, such as *Eight Red Rectangles* (1915), strongly suggest the two-dimensional sections or traces created when three-dimensional objects pass through a plane<sup>4</sup>. This phenomenon had been discussed by both Hinton and Ouspensky and illustrated in Bragdon's 1913 *A Primer of Higher Space* and his 1912 *Man the Square*, a copy of which had reached Ouspensky in St. Petersburg via the international Theosophical network<sup>5</sup>. These "Color Masses in the Second Dimension" may have served Malevich as indirect signs of the fourth dimension by means of the analogy of a two-dimensional world, so prevalent in the literature on the fourth dimension, beginning with E.A. Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions by a Square* of 1884.

<sup>1</sup> Larionov, "Le Rayonisme Pictural," in *ibid.*, 100

<sup>2</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism to Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism," in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Bowlt, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Kazimir Malevich, "Futurism-Suprematism" (1921), in *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1938* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 178. For "inherent forms," see K. Malevich, "From Cubism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting" (1915), in Douglas, *Swans of Other Worlds*, 109; translated in this manner in Charlotte Douglas, "Malevich and Western European Art Theory," in *Malevich: Artist and Theoretician* (New York: Abbeville, 1991), 60.

<sup>4</sup> See Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, chap. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Bragdon's 1912 *Man the Square* contained the images in figure as two separate illustrations; in 1913 he combined them in Plate 30 of *A Primer of Higher Space (The Fourth Dimension)*. Both books were published by Bragdon's Manas Press in Rochester, NY. Bragdon's Manas published the first English translation of *Tertium Organum*, and Ouspensky noted having received *Man the Square* in St. Petersburg in his preface to that volume.





Installation view  
of “0,10. The Last  
Futurist Exhibition,”  
Petrograd, 1915

Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Football Player: Color Masses in/of the Fourth Dimension*, however, is more typical of his Suprematist works, which generally include multicolored overlapping planes that prevent a reading of the image as two dimensional. Here the artist evokes higher dimensions, drawing on the theme of time or motion as signs of higher dimensional existence. Hinton, for example, had illustrated the passage of a spiral through a plane to demonstrate the way in which a lower dimensional being would misinterpret that phenomenon as a dot moving in a circle. Yet that motion, as Hinton and Ouspensky realized, also stands as a sign of a phenomenon from a higher dimension.

According to Ouspensky, a “sensation of infinity” and vastness would characterize the first moments of the transition to the new “cosmic consciousness” of four-dimensionality, and Malevich referred specifically to the space of his Suprematist paintings as the “white, free chasm, infinity<sup>1</sup>”. Rejecting the blue of the earth's sky, he creates a cosmic white expanse in which variously colored elements float freely, without any specific left-right or up-down orientation, just as Hinton had argued that gaining independence from conventional orientation and the pull of gravity would be the initial step in educating one's “space sense” to perceive the fourth dimension<sup>2</sup>. Here Malevich seeks to convey the physiological *experience* of four-dimensional cosmic consciousness, relying on concepts long associated with the fourth

<sup>1</sup> See Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum* (1922 ed.), 258; and Malevich, “Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism” (1919), in *K.S. Malevich: Essays on Art 1915–1933*, ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1971), vol. 1, 122.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Hinton, *New Era of Thought*, Part I, Introd



dimension – spatial vastness and infinity, freedom from gravity and specific orientation, and implied motion. Yet Ouspensky's and Hinton's discussion of the ether may also have offered the painter an insight into how to embody the first experience of higher dimensional forms.

Malevich's interest in subliminal sensation and perception, including the effect of flickering, is documented in his 1912–13 painting *The Knife Grinder: Principle of Flickering* (Yale University Art Gallery). A similar kind of flicker or pulsing figured in Hinton's and Ouspensky's writings. Following Hinton, Ouspensky had argued that a two-dimensional being would perceive a multicolored three-dimensional form passing through its space as a succession of colors, possibly in motion, if the object's size changed. For Ouspensky, our conventional spatial perception, limited as it is to three dimensions, means that, like a two-dimensional being, "we see the world as through a narrow slit," misinterpreting spatial phenomena as temporal ones<sup>1</sup>.

A clue to the role the ether may have played for Malevich exists in chapter 4 of *Tertium Organum*, in which Ouspensky's comments about the "slit" occur.

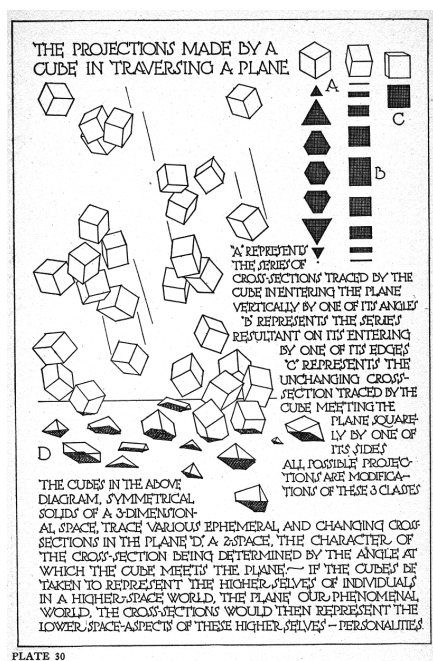
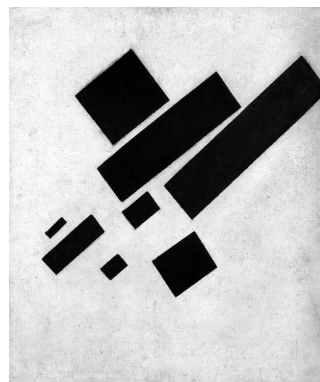


PLATE 30



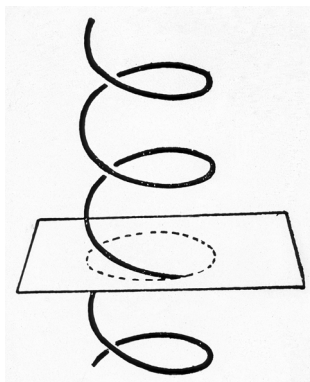
Kazimir Malevich.  
Eight Red Rectangles  
The Museum  
of Modern Art,  
New York

Hinton, in his 1888 book *A New Era of Thought*, had discussed the ether as a three-dimensional analog to a two-dimensional fluid film or surface of contact. Ouspensky reproduced that very discussion at the end of this chapter, after a highly suggestive description of what we see through our three-dimensional slit:

"Th[e] conception of the world which we deduce from our usual view of time makes the world appear like a continuously gushing out igneous fountain of fire-works, each spark of which flashes for a moment and disappears, *never* to appear any more. Flashes are going on continuously, following one after another, there are an infinite number of sparks, and everything

Claude Bragdon,  
A Primer  
of Higher Space  
(The Fourth  
Dimension)  
(Rochester, NY:  
The Manas Press,  
1913), plate 30

<sup>1</sup> Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum* (1922 ed.), 46. For Ouspensky's recounting of Hinton's discussion in *A New Era of Thought*, see Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe* (1934; New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 78–79; this chapter, titled "The Fourth Dimension," reproduces much of the content of his never-translated 1909 book *Chetvertoe Izmerenie*, as noted above. See also Hinton, *Fourth Dimension*, chap. 2.



Charles Howard  
Hinton, *Spiral passing  
through a plane,  
from The Fourth  
Dimension*, 1904

together produces the impression of a flame, *though it does not exist in reality*<sup>1</sup>.

For Ouspensky, this “fountain of fireworks” was an impermanent illusion of true, timeless four-dimensional reality. Yet, such sparks flashing – or flickering – could be viewed positively as the first signs or sections of higher dimensional forms. And the ether, as a three-dimensional “fluid film,” would be the context in which the flashes occurred, as four-dimensional forms penetrated it. According to Hinton, “[W]hen we study a higher solid, we must suppose that it passes through the aether, and that we only see that thin three-dimensional section of it which is just about to pass from one side to the other of the aether”—or, in Malevich’s case, the first planar face of a solid breaking through<sup>2</sup>. Malevich’s

“semaphores” of color, as he termed his planes, break through in just this way – like Ouspensky’s “fireworks” flickering forth before our eyes<sup>3</sup>.

In contrast to Kandinsky’s and Boccioni’s fluid approaches to the ether, which suggested continuous materialization and dematerialization, Malevich focused on clean slices or cuts of objects as they break through the ether. But he, too, would come to use chiaroscuro to suggest dissolution or “fading away” as he explored the liminal transition between existence and non-existence in drawings and paintings beginning in 1916. Examples of this technique include such drawings as *Suprematism: Two Intersecting Planes, Fading* of 1917 or *Suprematism: Interacting Elements, Fading* of 1917–18 (both, Khardzhiev Collection, Amsterdam) and paintings such as *Yellow Plane in Dissolution* of 1917–18 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York). Recovering the prevalence of the ether also provides an important new context for these works.

As Charlotte Douglas observed in her 1991 essay, “Malevich and Western European Art Theory,” “Abstract styles were the attempt to see deeply into the structure of the world, to bring together former dichotomies – matter and spirit, material and energy<sup>4</sup>.” We have missed for far too long the scientific ideas that were the backdrop for artists grappling with these issues, in particular, the ubiquitous ether of space. With the ether restored as the transitional term in this process, along with the willingness of scholars to recognize that the utopian vision shared by all of the artists was nourished by occult sources, we are far closer to understanding “what it is possible to imagine” in this period.

<sup>1</sup> Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum*, 40–41.

<sup>2</sup> Hinton, *New Era of Thought*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> For “semaphores,” see Malevich, “Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism,” in *Malevich: Essays on Art*, ed. Andersen, vol. I, 122.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, “Malevich and Western European Art Theory,” in *Malevich: Artist and Theoretician*, 60.

John E. Bowlt

## PAVEL FILONOV AND ATOMIC ENERGY<sup>1</sup>

To create means to be able to make,  
but you can make only if you know  
exactly what you want to do in every  
atom of the picture being made,  
and, in so doing, you must rely  
exclusively on your own analytical  
force and the exact sciences.<sup>2</sup>

The subject is the work of Pavel Nikolaevich Filonov (1883–1941), especially his interest in the concept of “flowering” (*rastsvet*) and, more broadly, in the natural sciences.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the essay, therefore, is on three constituents

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> P. Filonov: “Osnova prepodavaniia izobrazitel’nogo iskusstva po printsipu chistogo analiza kak shkola tvorchestva. Sistema ‘Mirovyi rastsvet’ ” (1923). RGALI, f. 2348, op. 1, ed. khr. 8, l. 2.

<sup>3</sup> On Filonov see N. Misler and J. Bowlt, eds.: *A Hero and His Fate*, Austin: Silvergirl, 1983; E. Kovtun et al., eds.: *Pavel Filonov: Zhivopis’. Grafika: Iz sobraniia Gos. Russkogo muzeia*. Catalog of exhibition at the State Russian Museum, 1988; J.-H. Martin et al.: *Pavel Filonov*. Catalog of exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1990; J. Harten and E. Petrova, eds.: *Pavel Filonov*. Catalog of exhibition at the Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, 1990; N. Misler and Dzh. Boulton: *Filonov. Analiticheskoe iskusstvo*, Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1990; N. Misler and J. Bowlt: *Die Physiologie der Malerei: Pawel Filonow in der 20er Jahren // The Physiology of Painting: Pavel Filonov in the 1920s*. Catalog of exhibition at the Galerie Gmurzynska. Cologne, 1992; Yu. Markin: *Pavel Filonov*, Moscow: Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo, 1995; L. Tkachenko: *Filonov*, St. Petersburg: Znak, 2000; G. Ershov: *Pavel Filonov*, Moscow; Belyi gorod, 2001; E. Kovtun, ed.: *P. Filonov. Dnevnik*, St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000; E. Petrova, ed.: *Filonov*, St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2001; *Pavel Nikolaevich Filonov*. Special issue of *Experiment*, Los Angeles, 2005 (No. 11); Dzh. Boulton, N. Misler, A. Sarab’ianov, eds.: *Filonov. Khudozhnik. Issledovatel’. Uchitel’*, Moscow: Agei Tomesh, 2006; E. Petrova, ed.: *Pavel Filonov. Ochevidets*



Pavel Filonov  
*Formula of the Cosmos*  
 1920–1928 Watercolor,  
 ink on paper The State  
 Russian museum,  
 St. Petersburg

of Filonov's "Neo-Naturalism" – botany, physiology and then, more tentatively and more briefly, atomic energy.

First of all, why look at Filonov and the natural sciences? Because, in his extensive writings, Filonov makes numerous references to the exact sciences and to scientists, and, after 1918, often applies the term "formula" to his pictures – such as *Formula of the Cosmos* (GRM). Of course, in his application of the term "formula" to his paintings Filonov was not alone. His colleague at Ginkhuk, Pavel Mansurov, for example, also referred to his pictures as "painterly formulae".<sup>1</sup>

*nezrimogo*. Catalog of exhibition at the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, 2006;

I. Galeev et al.: *Filonovtsy: Ot MAI do postavangarda*. Catalog of exhibition at Art-Divazh, Moscow, 2006; A. Laks, comp.: *Pavel Filonov. Sbornik statei*, St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2007; L. Pravoverova: *Pavel Filonov. Real'nost' i mify*, Moscow: Agraf, 2008; M. Sokolov: *Pavel Filonov*, Moscow: Art-Rodnik, 2008; L. Vostretsova, ed.: *Pavel Filonov; Pobeda nad vechnost'iu. Risunki i akvareli iz sobraniia Gos. Russkogo muzeia*. Catalog of exhibition at the Museum of Visual Art, Ekaterinburg, 2009. The greater part of Filonov's pictorial oeuvre is in the collection of the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg (here after: GRM).

<sup>1</sup> See E. Kovtun et al.: *Paul Mansouff et l'avant-garde russe à Petrograd*. Catalog of exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Nice, 1995.

## BOTANY

Let us begin with Filonov and botany by comparing his painterly practice to a natural phenomenon, for he strove to create the work of art as if it were a living thing. For Filonov, the canvas was a tract of fertile earth to be sown with a multitude of seeds from the artist's spirit: the artist was responsible for every atom of the pictorial surface and any complexity of form and colour stemming from the artist's intuition was to be incorporated into the picture. As a result, the tentacular lines, exotic colour combinations and lush facture of Filonov's paintings (especially of the later period after he had developed his analytical theory) are reminiscent of some vast and bizarre plantation. One explanation for the curious and extreme accumulation of natural forms in Filonov's paintings may be found in his own theoretical construction of reality: "[The artist] activates all the predicates of the object and of its orbit: its own reality, its own pulsation and that of its orbit, its bio-dynamics, intellect, emanations, interfusions, geneses and atoms – in short, life as a whole].<sup>1</sup>

On numerous occasions, Filonov described the artistic process in botanical terms, bidding the artist represent what he called the bio-dynamics of reality, as, for example, in his own *Formula of the Petrograd Proletariat* (1920–21). He also read the tracts of prominent scientists such as Charles Darwin and Dmitrii Mendeleev and, more specifically, Carl Linné – trying to paint not only the external aspect of a plant or tree, but also the inner processes of fertilization, maturation and circulation. Filonov even had the artist paint the scent of trees and their entire biosphere: physiological processes occurring in trees as well as the smell which they exude and which surrounds them; we paint the processes occurring within them and creating numerous phenomena within their sphere.<sup>2</sup>

Filonov extended this idea to the notion of a purely biological portrait of humans and



Pavel Filonov  
*Formula of the  
Petrograd Proletariat*  
1920–1921  
Oil on canvas  
The Sate Russian  
museum,  
St. Petersburg

<sup>1</sup> P. Filonov: "Deklaratsiia Mirovogo rastsveta" in *Zhizn' iskusstva*. Petrograd, 1923, No. 20, p. 15.

English translation in Misler and Bowlt, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> P. Filonov: "Avtobiografiia" (1929). English translation in Misler and Bowlt, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 122.





Pavel Filonov  
*Flowers of the Universal Flowering*. 1915  
 Oil on canvas  
 The Sate Russian museum,  
 St. Petersburg



Pavel Filonov  
*Wild Flowers*. 1936  
 Oil on canvas  
 The Sate Russian museum,  
 St. Petersburg

animals, referring to the processes which occur: within the individual and within the sphere around him and the emanations egressing from the individual into the sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Curiously enough, Kazimir Malevich even seems to have shared Filonov's basic idea that nature was in flux, without beginning or end, as he indicated in his manifesto *On New Systems in Art* of 1919: We exclaim: «How beautiful nature is!» But why is she beautiful? Would a flower really be beautiful, if there were not another, adjacent form or if the flower lacked its variegated structure? No, it would not be. Beauty and the beautiful come forth because nature consists of the most diverse signs.<sup>2</sup>

With this inner, horticultural perspective in mind, therefore, we might approach Filonov's art as a spacious nursery or *orangérie* in which the artist tends plants, shrubs and flowers, growing, grafting, pruning and cultivating marvelous orchids, exotic hybrids and intricate bouquets. In Filonov's hot-house there are rare and precious species, highly coloured, pungent and poisonous, forming a garden run wild, a universal flowering in which lianas and creepers, pedigrees and weeds, perennials and annuals seem to be growing out of control. Here is a botanical chaos challenging Linné's classification and regimentation and seeming to extend Filonov's own obsession with the painting of "flowers and fruits of all kinds"<sup>3</sup> as, for example, in *Girl with Flowers* (1905, GRM) or *Wild Flowers* (1925, GRM). According to Filonov, "in nature the cell of the bloom is connected to the flower".<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, Filonov was expanding the Symbolists' "forest of symbols", reinforcing Charles Baudelaire's attraction to flowers, if not of evil, then of good, and perhaps remembering Mikhail Vrubel's numerous floral arrangements (e.g. *Lilacs* of 1900) or the Saratov and Moscow groups of artists, "Crimson Rose" and "Blue Rose". On the other hand, Filonov associated "flowering" not only with flowers, but also with humans, animals and, in particular the apple-tree, and, by extension, to Genesis – and, presumably, to Dürer's, Cranach's and Bosch's Gardens of Paradise: [In their paintings, drawings and sculptures] the masters of analytical art are working with the kind of content which has not yet become currency in the field of global art. For example, the biological, physiological, chemical and other phenomena and processes of the organic and inorganic world, their emergence,

<sup>1</sup> Filonov, "Deklaratsiia Mirovogo rastsveta", p.15. English translation in Misler and Bowlt, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> K. Malevich: *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve*, Vitebsk (1919). Reprinted in A. Shatskih, ed.: *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, Moscow: Gileia, 1995, p. 155

<sup>3</sup> Filonov, "Avtobiographiia" (1929). English translation in Misler and Bowlt: *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> P. Filonov: "Ideologiiia analiticheskogo iskusstva" in Boul't, Misler and Sarab'ianov, *Filonov. Khudozhnik. Issledovatel'. Uchitel'*, Vol. 1, p. 52.





Mikhail Vrubel  
*Lilac*. 1900  
 Oil on canvas  
 The State Tretyakov  
 Gallery, Moscow

transmutation, radiation, dissolution, dynamics and bio-dynamics..., sound, language, growth, etc.

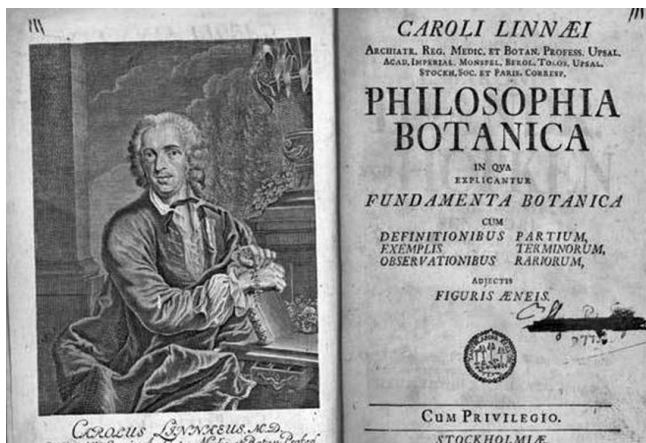
For example, when we look at the trunk, branches, leaves and flowers of, let's say, an apple-tree, we [should] also analyze and try to find out how the tendrils of the roots take in and absorb the juices of the soil, how these juices flow upwards into the cells of the wood, how they distribute themselves as they react to light and warmth, how they are converted and transformed into the atomic structure of the trunk, the branches, the green of the foliage, the red and white of the flowers, the green-yellow-pink apples and the rough bark of the tree itself.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, it makes sense to look at the works of Carl (Antoine Laurent) Linné, in particular, in order to try and discover what attracted Filonov to the organic esthetic. After all, Filonov recommended that his students read up on Linné, and, certainly, acquaintance with Linné's treatises sheds light on some of Filonov's imagery. Linné was the first to develop and publish a binominal nomenclature for plants in his fundamental tract *Philosophia Botanica* in 1751 which he then elaborated into his *Species Plantarum* two years later. Inasmuch as the latter, in particular, became a fundamental compendium for botanists, was well known

Pavel Filonov  
*Small Apple*. 1925  
 Watercolor, ink, pencil  
 on paper. The Sate  
 Russian museum,  
 St. Petersburg



<sup>1</sup> P. Filonov: "Kratkoe poiasnenie k vystavke rabot" (1928). English translation in Misler and Bowlit, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, Austin, p. 253.



Title page of first  
edition of Linnaeus'  
*Philosophia Botanica*  
Stockholm, 1751

in Russia, existed in numerous Russian translations and was known to Filonov, it is reasonable to reference it. Incidentally, one of the first Russian translations of Linné was of his *Spiritus frumenti quem praeside* (*Vodka v rukakh filosofo, vracha i prosto liudina – Vodka in the hands of the philosopher, the physician and the simple folk*, St. Petersburg, 1790)!

What brings Linné close to Filonov is not necessarily vodka or the scientific identification of plants and the application of Latin titles, but, rather, the sketches, monochrome or coloured, of the shapes and forms which plants and their various members could assume. In Linné's books Filonov read about stigma, filament, capsule, pappus, seed – and the peculiar shapes which they could adopt such as cluster, raceme, whorl and panicle, figures which Linné illustrated with his numerous images. These drawings present not only entire leaves, stems or flowers, but also cross-sections and inner structures, exactly the kind of spiral, cell or vein which Filonov explored in his compositions and which often seem to hover or float as independent organisms:

Learning about form. Analysis, intuition, spontaneity, dynamics and bio-dynamics, raw and organic form. Form sharply revealed. Pure active form. Formula. Substratum and the analytical decomposition and transformation of form. Selection. Constructive and colour deduction. Law and canon of the construction of form and their correlation with the law and canon of the construction of the painting (or of anything made, independent of the kind and principle of the material being used). Madeness of form. Madeness with form as the constructive deduction or insertion.<sup>1</sup>

That Filonov regarded the work of art as a growth – as a flower or flowering which continued to evolve irrespective of the artist – is itself arresting, although equally important is the fact that often he was attempting, literally, to paint the natural processes of a plant. Of course, Filonov's visual occupation with flowers was not that of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist

<sup>1</sup> Filonov, "Osnova prepovadaniia izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva po printsipu chistogo analiza kak vysshaia shkola tvorchestva. Sistema 'Mirovoj rastsvet'", RGALI, f. 2348, op. 1, ed. khr. 8, l. 3.

or the professional painter of flowers such as the Russian floralist Ivan Khrutsky and he would have had little praise for the pompous renderings of bouquets of daffodils or roses by artists of the salon. In Filonov's opinion the artist was to depict not only the apparently static exterior of the flower or the tree, but also its inner, dynamic processes, energy, vitality and transmutation as a living, organic entity.

On one level, the straightforward desire to paint the interior workings of the flower – the cells, spores, sap, fibers, etc. – seems overwhelmingly simple and innocent and a number of Filonov's paintings can be accepted almost as Naturalist renderings. The rose in the hand of the little boy in the photo-Realist portrait of Filonov's brother-in-law (1915, GRM) or the flowers on the screen behind his sister (also of 1915, GRM; for example, could be read almost as figures and illustrations from early 19<sup>th</sup> century textbooks on the species and varieties of the plants. Filonov would have been able to consult such books as well as specimens at the Kunstkammer in St. Petersburg which he frequented and which boasted rich holdings devoted to flowers and plants and even seaweeds. As a matter of fact, in 1936 Filonov's stepson, Anatolii Serebriakov, a natural scientist, published a long essay on the Kunstkammer for the Academy of Sciences, a conjunction which brings us to Physiology.<sup>1</sup>



Pavel Filonov  
*Portrait of Evdokiya  
Nikolaevna Glebova,  
the Artist's Sister. 1915*  
Oil on canvas  
The Sate Russian  
museum, St. Petersburg

## PHYSIOLOGY

Filonov supported and promoted what he considered to be a scientific attitude towards the natural world and – what needs to be emphasized – he was well read in the theories of Darwin and Ivan Michurin, but his vision was peculiar, to say the least. On the one hand, he regarded reality as a gigantic excrescence – a “universal flowering”; on the other, he questioned and undermined the conventional departmentalization of the organic world into animal, vegetable and mineral. For Filonov everything was alive, but what botanists, biologists and zoologists had classified and labeled was not necessarily what he accepted and he seems to have been more fascinated by the possibilities of what today is called agricultural modification and genetic engineering. In his pictures not only animals assume human expressions as in *Animals* (1925–26; GRM) and humans wear beflowered shirts (as in *East and West* (1912–17; GRM), but also freaks and mythological beasts compete with bizarre, hybrid flowers in Filonov's unending jungle.

Even more ominous are the saltatory changes in the biological sequence which Filonov seems to be proposing whereby the human, animal, vegetable and mineral transcend conventional barriers and perimeters. There

<sup>1</sup> A. Serebriakov: “Zoologicheskii kabinet Kunstkamery” in *Arkhiv istorii nauki i tekhniki*, St. Petersburg, 1936, Series 1, No. 9, pp. 69–128.





Pavel Filonov  
*Animals*. 1925–1926  
 Oil on canvas  
 The Sate Russian  
 museum, St. Petersburg

are several examples of this forced interfusion of the various species: in *The Gardener* (1913), for example, a human hand seems to be growing out of a leaf in the central pot of roses, while flowers and faces in the top left fuse into an ambiguous cameo. The blouses of the boys in *Two Boys* (1909–10; GRM) constitute an organic synthesis as if the material and texture of the shirts were animate and you even make out the head of a little girl growing out of the boy's shoulder. Here was the kind of hybrid, freak or nature's joke that Filonov would have identified with the two-headed sheep and other such malignancies of the *Kunstkammer*. Not that such specimens of re-evolution were all that outlandish. After all, the common mule is a cross between



Pavel Filonov  
*The Gardener*. 1913  
 Oil on canvas  
 The Sate Russian  
 museum,  
 St. Petersburg



a horse and an ass and nature continues to play pranks, crossing a zebra and a donkey into a “zonkey” and a whale and a dolphin into a “wolphin”. No doubt, Filonov was thinking about such transitions when he painted the man cum pig in *Formula of the Bourgeoisie* (1924–25).

Perhaps it is in this sense that Filonov used the terms “canon” and “law” as, for example, in his tract *Kanon i zakon* [Canon and law] of 1912. To Filonov there seemed to be a basic difference between the eternal and immutable laws of the universe and the shifting, flexible canons or conventions that are imposed upon them. In other words, while there might be primary species (animal, vegetable mineral), there were variants and versions that composed, decomposed and recomposed. This contrast between intrinsic law and extrinsic interpretation (something like the difference between rhythm and meter in poetry) also lay at the basis of anatomical analyses which Filonov read avidly and often paraphrased. Sections in the standard treatises of the 1890s not only highlight the traditional tension between rules and their applications, but also expose a primary source for Filonov’s own deliberations on his right to undermine and change anatomical laws – and to extrapolate and separate out the various members of the human body, something which he does, for example, in the *Head and the Thumb* of 1925 (GRM). Some of these treatises were also distinguished by a disproportionate emphasis on physiological abnormality and on the fleeting gesture and shifting expression, i.e. on digressions from the legitimate standard. Many of the photographs illustrating Russian anatomical atlases of ca. 1900, incidentally, came from the

Boris Kustodiev  
*Portrait of Peter  
Kapitza*. 1926  
Oil on canvas  
Fitzwilliam Museum,  
Cambridge

collection of Lev Dmitriev-Kavkazsky, Filonov's first professor, while the renderings of arms and legs were taken from models fashioned by the sculptor Giugo Zaleman (one of Filonov's teachers at the Academy).

All this is to say that the Russian anatomical atlas of ca. 1900 was paying homage to an intense and universal interest in the "canon", i.e. in deviations from the norm (the law), which, in turn, was engendering ideas about physiological mutation. This interest encompassed not only fantasies about the "creation of beings organized after natural laws", as the Darwinist Ernst Haeckel wrote in his *Histoire de la création des êtres organisés d'après les lois naturelles* of 1874,<sup>1</sup> but also excessive states of mind and their bodily expression such as ecstasy, epilepsy, hysteria and delirium. The further hypothesis was, therefore, that one day an experimental medicine with the advanced science of physiology would make new animals – Frankensteins – and Filonov's pictures of heads, animals and plants seem often to be weird and wonderful predictions of this, a universal growth which has no natural barriers or predators and which relates to Filonov's concurrent obsession with physiology and surgical intervention. After all, he had his students «Cut the object of your study and painting as if with a scalpel»,<sup>2</sup> advising them to acquaint themselves with the life and work of Nikolai Pirogov, Russia's 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneering surgeon. In other words, there are curious, if uncomfortable, parallels between the botanist's dissection of the flower, the surgeon's procedure at the operating-table and Filonov's incising the surface of the canvas.

### ATOMIC ENERGY

Incision brings us to the third tendency in Filonov's creativity – his focus on the atom, if not atomic energy. He often used the word atom, telling his disciples to pay attention to the "atomic and inner atomic connections"<sup>3</sup> within the object of study and to the «cubage, volume, weight, cells and atomistic quality of form»<sup>4</sup> and that what needed to be painted was not just the boots or trousers of the model, but also the atoms: "Every atom must be made... Think obdurately and accurately over each atom of the work being made".<sup>5</sup>

By bearing in mind Filonov's atomic terminology, we might understand – a little more clearly – some of his images of the early and mid-1920s with their whorls, spirals, magnetic fields, ellipses – and atoms. Filonov's more

<sup>1</sup> E. Haeckel: *Histoire de la création des êtres organisés d'après les lois naturelles*, Paris: Reinwald, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> P. Filonov: "Osnovnye polozheniia analiticheskogo iskusstva" (1923?). English translation in Misler and Bowlt, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> P. Filonov: "Kratkoe poiasnenie k vystavke rabot" (1928). Reprinted in E. Kovtun, ed.: *Pavel Filonov*, p. 108. English translation in Misler and Bowlt, *Pavel Filonov. A Hero and His Fate*, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> Filonov, "Osnova prepodavaniia izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva po printsipu chistogo analiza, kak vysshiaia shkola tvorchestva. Sistema 'Mirovyi rastsvet'". Reprinted in Misler i Bowlt, *Filonov*, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> Filonov, "Osnova prepodavaniia izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva po printsipu chistogo analiza kak shkola tvorchestva. Sistema 'Mirovyi rastsvet'", (1923). RGALI, f. 2348, op. 1, ed. khr. 8, l. 4.



abstract paintings and drawings of that time are rife with particles speeding at high velocity in circles or racing across the surface, as if released from bombardments or going awry in magnetic fields: Analytical madeness is a means of expressing the maximum understanding of the content after working obdurately on the model and the material and offering a maximum of metamorphosis of the consistency of the material being introduced into the work [of art] so that you will never allow a single atom not to be what you want it to be.<sup>1</sup>

True, in Post-Revolutionary Russia Filonov was not alone in his references to the atom. Andrei Platonov, whose prose is often compared to Filonov's painting, spoke boldly of atomic power as early as 1922: "Proletarian culture», he wrote, "Must be what is lying within the world of electromagnetic waves, in the atom split,"<sup>2</sup> (although) "even the energy of Rutherford's split atom is nothing in comparison to the energy of the ocean of light [i.e., the sun, JB]".<sup>3</sup>

But this begs the central question: How did Filonov, ill versed in physics, find out about atomic properties? In using the term "atom", did he really understand protons and neutrons? Probably, not and perhaps, like many of us, he may have been at a loss to define the differences between molecules, particles, cells and atoms. On the other hand, even in blockaded Russia and war-torn Petrograd, he must have known about Lord Ernest Rutherford's experiments in the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge and his momentous splitting of the atom in a nuclear reaction between nitrogen and alpha particles in 1917. The Russian press did report this and Russia's scientific community, however distraught at that time, was certainly aware of the discovery. Even so, on this level, the Filonov-atom connection is still guesswork based on circumstantial evidence and hard facts are needed to clinch the argument.

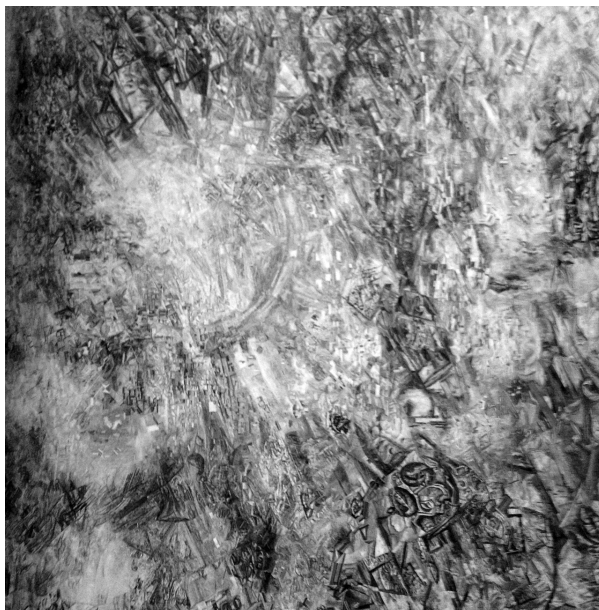
It so happens that Rutherford's principal collaborator had been a young Russian called Petr Kapitsa (Peter Kapitza).<sup>4</sup> A student of the prominent physicist Abram Ioffe and colleague of Nikolai Semenov, another physicist, Kapitsa came from Petrograd to join Rutherford in 1921 and stayed in Cambridge – with frequent returns to Leningrad – until 1934 (Boris Kustodiev's 1926 portrait of him now graces the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge). Could it be that Filonov and Kapitsa had known each other and discussed atomic energy during the latter's visits back home throughout the 1920s? Did Filonov talk to Boris Kustodiev, the Petrograd artist and creator of two portraits of Kapitsa? Alas, Kustodiev ignores Filonov in his memoirs, no critical appreciations of Filonov's art refer to Kapitsa and Filonov himself, in his highly censored and expurgated diaries of the 1920s-30s,

<sup>1</sup> P. Filonov: "Я буду говорить» (ca. 1924) in Boulton, Misler and Sarab'ianov, *Filonov. Khudozhnik, Issledovatel'. Uchitel'*, Vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> A. Platonov: "O kul'ture zapriazhennogo sveta I poznannogo elektrichestva" in *Iskusstvo i teatr*, Voronezh, 1922, August, No. 2, pp. 2–3. I am indebted to Thomas Seifrid for this reference.

<sup>3</sup> A. Platonov: "Svet i sotsializm" in *Russian Literature*, Amsterdam, 1988, No. XXIII, pp. 387–89.

<sup>4</sup> On Petr Kapitsa see D. Shoenberg, J. Boag and P. Rubinin: *Kapitza in Cambridge and Moscow: Life and Letters of a Russian Physicist*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990.



Pavel Filonov  
*Cosmos* (Universal  
 Shift via the Russian  
 Revolution). 1922  
 Oil on canvas  
 The Sate Russian  
 museum,  
 St. Petersburg

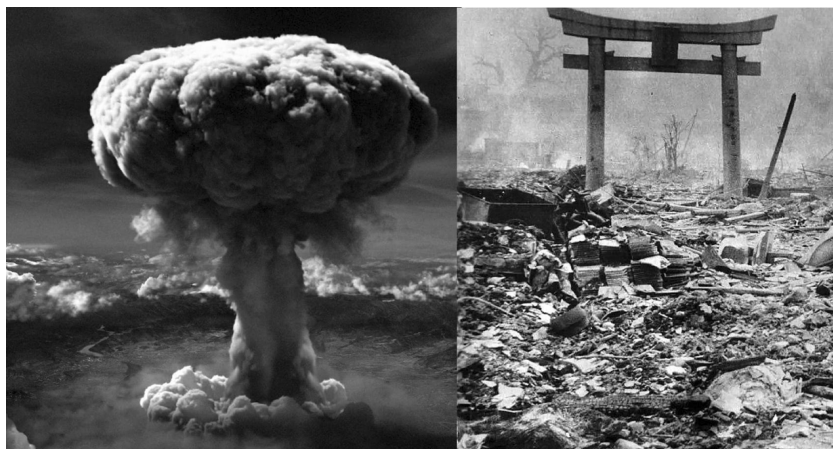
omits any reference. So the argument might be sheer speculation were it not for two curious pieces of evidence:

1) In the late 1920s and early 1930s Kapitsa's mother, Ol'ga, worked as an editor in the Detgiz publishing-house in Leningrad where Tat'iana Glebova, Alisa Poret, and other *filonovtsy* illustrated children's stories. Thanks to this connection Filonov presented Ol'ga Kapitsa with one of his drawings which, apparently, is still among Petr Kapitsa's unsorted papers in the Museum.<sup>1</sup>

2) The memoirs of Filonov's elder sister, Evdokiia, also provide valuable testimony. Writing of the almost surreptitious exhibition of Filonov's works held in Novosibirsk in 1967 long after the artist's death, she recalled that among the many prestigious guests had been Kapitsa's wife and daughter-in-law.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Kapitsa, then still hail and hearty, but now living in Moscow, had sent his wife and daughter-in-law thousands of kilometres across Siberia to look at Filonov's pictures demonstrates, surely, a long and respectful alliance – a friendship – between the artist and scientist. We also learn that, in Brezhnev's 1970s, risking his academic station, Kapitsa countenanced an unofficial exhibition of modern Russian art in the foyer of his Institute of Physical Problems in Moscow at which Filonov occupied pride of place. Well, if too early to accept these episodes as irrefutable testimony, it is still very tempting to forge the links yet tighter – and to retain faith in these cosmic or, should we say, atomic, connections.

<sup>1</sup> According to Tat'iana Baakhovskaia, director of the Petr Kapitsa Cabinet-Museum, in conversation with John E. Bowlit, Moscow, 3 March, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> E. Glebova: "Vospominaniia o brate" in Pravoverova, *Filonov. Real'nost' i mify*, p. 128



Hiroshima Photo  
1945

Filonov seems not to have used the words “formula”, “universal flowering” and “atom” after 1930. His last decade was marked by sadness and despair as his microscopic eyesight began to fail, as he fell from political grace, condemned as being alien to the proletariat; his sister’s husband was arrested and his two step-sons were executed, some of his students committed suicide or turned against him and for many years his name was absent from the history of Soviet art.

So how to end this tentative exploration into Filonov’s atomic art? Perhaps with another of those strange coincidences. Filonov died on 3 December, 1941, in the Leningrad blockade, the very moment that President Roosevelt ordered the Los Alamos Laboratory to develop the atom bomb – and suddenly we realize where we have seen Filonov’s compositions elsewhere – it is as if, in the eerie dislocations of his fissile landscapes, he foresaw the atomic tragedy which still haunts our collective memory.

Fae Brauer

**MESMERIC MODERNISM:  
FRANTIŠEK KUPKA'S ART AS A MAGNETIC FORCE FIELD<sup>1</sup>**

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.<sup>2</sup> Given the prevalence of mesmerism during the fin-de-siècle alongside the burgeoning of electromagnetism, this period has been aptly called neo-magnetism.<sup>3</sup> 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”.<sup>4</sup> Once Kupka’s

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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*.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.”

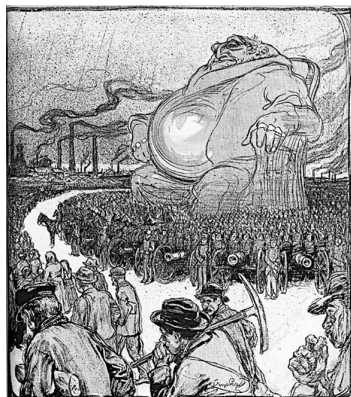


"OBSERVING THE WORLD FROM OUTSIDE": SPIRITISM,  
ANARCHO-COMMUNISM AND COSMIC UTOPIA

From his arrival in Paris, Kupka practiced as a medium.<sup>1</sup> 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".<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> 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



<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.)

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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* (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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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

Kupka, including Mesmer's Baquets for 30.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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".<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> At this Congress, the iron

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

<sup>2</sup> Judith Pinter / Stephen Jay Lynn, *Hypnosis: A Brief History*, London 2008, 81–84.

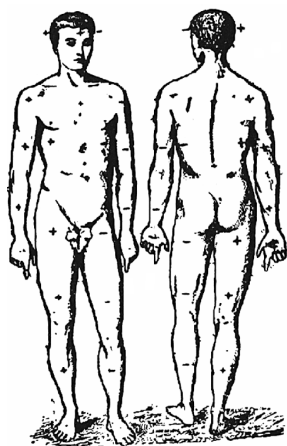
<sup>3</sup> Jean Martin Charcot, "Sur les divers états nerveux déterminés par l'hypnotisation chez les hystériques", *Comptes-rendus hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, 94, 1882, pp. 403–405. Twice animal magnetism had been rejected by the Académie. In his paper to the Académie, Charcot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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

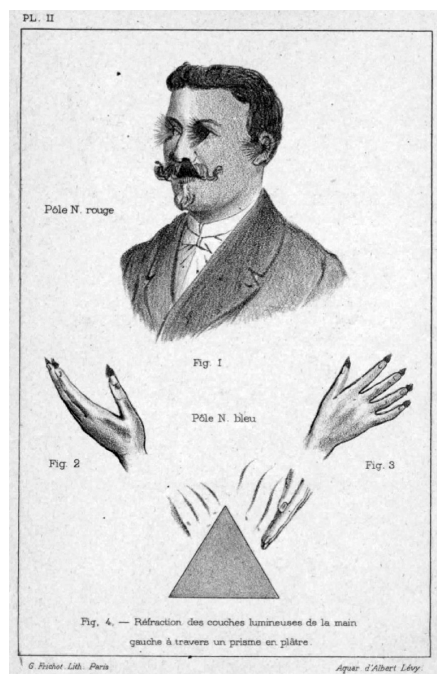
Durville's experiments into the magnetic colours exuded by the body could be traced back, according to de Rochas, to the research conducted by Karl von Reichenbach into environmental electromagnetism and his concept of an 'odic force' emanating from all living substances that functioned in a similar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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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  
experimentale et  
historique* (Paris:  
Librairie Générale  
des Sciences Occults,  
Bibliothèque  
Chacornac, 1895).  
Photograph by the  
author.

termediary colours.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 effleuves de couleurs correspondantes lances par les organes des sens (yeux, oreilles, narines, etc.).*

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Rochas, 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup> 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.*

<sup>4</sup> 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 vermillion 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Levy's artwork was able to reveal, according to Rochas,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>2</sup> 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.*

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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”.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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”.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 56; 80.

<sup>2</sup> 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...*

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 ....*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>3</sup> 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.*

<sup>4</sup> 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.*

<sup>5</sup> 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".<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> Aware that magnetic fields and electromagnetism played a key role in the dynamics and evolution of proto-planetary 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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".<sup>5</sup> To avoid confusing impressions and uncomfortable sensations, Kupka also considered the need for these vibrations from

<sup>1</sup> 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.*

<sup>2</sup> 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.*

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

<sup>4</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 266.

<sup>5</sup> 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 Notre 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> "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."<sup>3</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

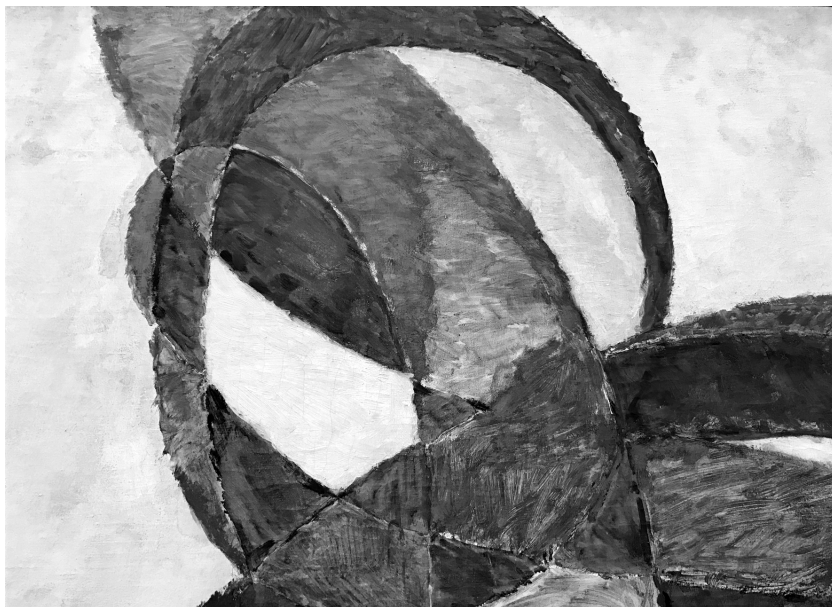
With his colours reduced to the magnetic poles in the body and the biomagnetic vital force radiation to and emanating from the magnetized body, they also act like the contrapuntal composition in a fugue, as signalled by Kupka's title. "I believe I can find something between sight and hearing", Kupka explained, "and I can produce a fugue in colours as Bach has done in music".<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> "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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.*

<sup>2</sup> 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 psychomatrocity”, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> This cognitive transference would be, in his words, “a more direct communication, which would draw upon the mediation of magnetic waves by hypnotisers”.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Kupka, *La Création dans les Arts plastiques*, 229.

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

Ekaterina Bobrinskaya

**MIKHAIL LARIONOV: RAYONISM AND RADIANT MATTER<sup>1</sup>**

I will focus on several aspects of the theory and practice of rayonism in the work of Mikhail Larionov, which have to date remained at the periphery of art historians' interest. That notwithstanding, these "forgotten" sides of painterly rayonism cannot be considered of secondary importance. In my opinion, these elements of rayonism allow us to research many trends associated with the formation of modernist art, including: the emergence of new iconographical sources; the appearance of a new interpretation of the creative process and of the figure of the artist; and the creation of a new mechanism of myth-making based on contemporary technologies and scientific experiments. Mikhail Larionov's concept of rayonism is at the centre of all of these processes.

The bringing together of positivist science and occultism was one of the most paradoxical "avant-garde" features of fin-de-siècle culture. In his memoirs, Mikhail Matiushin noted: "The question of dimensions was important for everyone at the turn of the century, especially for artists. A huge amount was written about the fourth dimension. Everything new in art and science was considered to originate in the very depths of the fourth measure. There was a strong element of occultism in the mix".<sup>2</sup> This cultural atmosphere provided nourishment for numerous avant-garde experiments in art. Mikhail Larionov's rayonism was no exception. Like many European avant-garde artists, Larionov created the concept of rayonism based on the scientific and occult mythology of his time.

Today there are two main methods of describing and interpreting painterly rayonism. The first is formal. Here, a rayonist picture is a work of pure painterly matter. Larionov undoubtedly indicated the possibility of this approach. In the preface to the catalogue of the exhibition *Target* (1913) he wrote: "We have created our own style, rayonism, which involves spatial forms

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Matiushin, "Opyt khudozhnika novoi mery", *N. Khardzhiev, M. Matiushin, K. Malevich. K istorii russkogo avangarda* (Stockholm: Gileya, 1976), 160.

and making painting which is self-sufficient and lives by its own rules.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, on the periphery of such interpretations one often finds references to the “fourth dimension”, a concept which was popular with members of the Russian avant-garde during the 1910s.<sup>2</sup> The second type of interpretation was proposed by Dmitri Sarabianov and taken up by other specialists (Tatyana Levina, Alexander Inshakov).<sup>3</sup> Sarabianov connected Larionov’s rayonism to the tradition of Hesychasm and the particular concept of light on which it is based, i.e. to an archetypical or hidden, but very important, tradition in Russian and Orthodox culture which appears even in secular painting. In his article “Mikhail Larionov and the Makovets group”, Sarabianov stressed the unconscious mechanism by which the layers of this archetypical tradition appear: “National mentalities form over centuries and make themselves known completely unexpectedly, most often independently of the position and desires of the subject of history”.<sup>4</sup> While refuting neither the formal approach nor Sarabianov’s “Jungian” method, I would like to examine yet another context for rayonist painting.

In 1936, in a letter to Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Mikhail Larionov noted, not without disappointment: “Usually I am indifferent to what people think about various issues and about me personally. I am unconcerned about whether I first spoke of rayonism a long time ago or not. In any case, even today no one is talking about it, and if they are I think that you see that they do not mean rayonism. Abstract art is not rayonism. For that reason I am contacting you, as questions of the materialisation of spirit may be of interest”.<sup>5</sup> Larionov’s phrase “materialisation of spirit” refers to a concrete and well-known term among spiritualists. Materialisation – and I emphasise here materialisation and not dematerialisation, which was of interest to Kandinsky – was, at the turn of the century, a central concern of various spiritualist practices and related scientific research. Spiritualism, which had formed within a particular subculture, with its own terminology, mythology and iconography, changed significantly at the beginning of the 20th century, having incorporated many methods and theories from positivist science. At that time, the combination of scientific knowledge and experimental methods with the mythologemes and fantasies of the occultists created a module for many cultural processes. It is important to note

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Larionov, “Mishen’. Predislovie k katalogu vystavki” in A. Kovalev, *Mikhail Larionov v Rossii 1881–1915 gg.* (Moscow: Elizium, 2005), 357.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Parton, “Russian ‘Rayism’, the Work and Theory of Mikhail Larionov and Natalya Goncharova 1912–1914: Ouspensky’s Four-Dimensional Super Race?”, *Leonardo*, 16 (4), 1983, 298–305.

<sup>3</sup> Tatyana Levina, “Abstraktsiya i ikona: Metafizicheskii realism v russkom iskusstve”, *Artikul’t* (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet), 1, 2011. A. Inshakov, *Mikhail Larionov: russkie gody* (Moscow: Gnozis, 2010), 235–238.

<sup>4</sup> Dmitri Sarabianov, “Mikhail Larionov i ob’edinenie Makovets” in Dmitri Sarabianov, *Russkaya zhivopis’. Probuzhdenie pamyati* (Moscow: Iskusstvoznanie, 1998), 407–418.

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Larionov, “Luchizm” (1936) in N. Goncharova, *M. Larionov. Issledovaniya i publikatsii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 98.

that the boundary between science and various forms of occult knowledge was significantly less strict and distinct than today. The appearance of the occult in the scientific sphere was not seen as the rational retreating before the irrational but as the final triumph of positivist science, which had at last acquired the possibility to study the most secret spheres of matter, thought and the human psyche. For their part, occultists and spiritualists attempted to use scientific discoveries to rationalise their explanations of secret phenomena. At the turn of the century, the interest in scientific, positivist methods of exploring the “materialisation of spirit” at spiritualist séances was very common. Many top scientists were involved, and the spaces where séances took place looked more like laboratories: they were full of equipment, including cameras to record the processes of radiation and materialisation.

In European culture, the turn of the century was marked by incredible discoveries which changed the accepted optical regimes and provided entry to the territory of the unseen. X-rays, the wireless telegraph, chronophotography and microphotography blurred the usual boundaries of the internal and external, the visible and the invisible, creating new models of communication. Towards the beginning of the 20th century a particular mythology, and even a particular culture, of radiation developed, based on experiences at spiritualist séances or in scientific laboratories. After late-19th-century discoveries such as X-rays, becquerels, and Marie and Pierre Curie’s work on radium and polonium, many concepts appeared that were associated with radiation, the human body and various objects. Invisible radiant matter surrounded everything. The well-known sociologist Gustave Le Bon stated: “All bodies are a constant source of rays, visible and invisible, but always consisting of light”.<sup>1</sup> Some of the popular theories of the time were no more than modern versions of Franz Mesmer’s concept of universal fluid or Carl von Reichenbach’s idea of odic light.<sup>2</sup> However, there were also new versions, based on positivist scientific principles and new technologies: Prosper-Rene Blondlot’s N-rays and Louis Darget’s V-rays; Sergei Yurevich’s Y-rays, radiated by the human organism; Naum Kotik’s “brain rays”, which were connected to thought; Julian Ochorowicz’s “hard rays”, which he envisaged as a magnetic field radiated by living organisms; or St. Petersburg doctor Mes-sira Pogorelsky’s “physiological polar energy”. These were just some of the hypotheses and mythologies connected with the phenomenon of radiation.

Radiant matter, invisible to the naked eye but detectable by equipment, surrounded all organisms and objects. Remaining invisible, it pointed to the existence of a particular dimension of reality. By the beginning of the 20th century, “radiant matter” and “radiant energy” would become popular means

<sup>1</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Zarozhdenie i ischeznovenie materii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya “T-va Andersona i Loitsyanskogo”, 1909), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Reichenbach (1788–1869) was a German natural scientist. He researched something he called “Odic force”, which was similar to Mesmer’s animal magnetism. His main ideas are set out in the works “Untersuchungen ueber die Dynamide” (1850), “Odismagnetische Briefe” (1852), and “Die Odische Lohe und einige Bewegungserscheinungen” (1867).

of interpreting a multitude of phenomena which had no rational explanation.<sup>1</sup> I will give just two examples. Cesare Lombroso connected the phenomenon of materialisation of spirit at spiritualist séances with a particular radiant state of matter, somewhat like radiation. He wrote of “radiant streams and shafts of light” which were detected during séances led by the famous medium Eusapia Palladino. The “spiritual organisms” which appeared during séances represented the fourth or radiant state of matter. According to Lombroso’s hypothesis, during a séance the medium also gave off radiant matter. Its rays interacted with the radiant matter of the “spiritual organisms” or spirits and the combination of radiation gave birth to the phenomenon of materialisation, i.e. the appearance during séances of paradoxical organisms: “luminous clouds”, body parts or whole figures. “Everything leads to the hypothesis that the spirit is made up of radiant matter”, concludes Lombroso.<sup>2</sup> Within the “biology of spirits” which the Italian researcher developed, he also underlined their radiant, illuminated nature.<sup>3</sup>

And another example. In 1907, the Russian researcher Naum Kotik published a book of his experiments, in which he wrote about n-rays, “which appear in the subject’s brain at the moment of thought and are then distributed in all directions”.<sup>4</sup> According to his theory, “thought is accompanied by the discharge of radiant energy. This radiant energy has psychic and physical characteristics and should therefore be termed psychophysical energy”.<sup>5</sup> Kotik believed that clairvoyance and telepathy were possible thanks to radiant energy, which was similar to radiation.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the world was full of life invisible to the eye: the movements or vibrations of radiant matter and the currents of radiant energy. As was written at the time: “Everything living, everything real is immersed in an ocean of radiant energy”;<sup>6</sup> “All bodies give off rays and as such the entire universe is criss-crossed by waves of rays”.<sup>7</sup> The idea of the surrounding space being filled with numerous intersecting rays, which



Physician Albert  
von Schrenck-Notzing  
and a medium  
Photograph. 1912

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, all of the hypotheses and theories of radiation filtered quickly through academic publications to the press, transforming into sensational and generally accessible knowledge of modern scientific discoveries. Such publications appeared regularly in the Russian press, for example “G-e N. Chelovek istochnik N-luchei”, *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, 27 December 1911, 3; “Nemo. Chelovek ispuskarn N-luchei”, *Ranee utro*, 5 January 1912, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in M. Sedlov, *Tsezar’ Lombroso i spiritizm* (Moscow: Musaget, 1913), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Cesare Lombroso’s research into spiritualism was published in the posthumous book *Ricerchi sui fenomeni ipnotici e spiritici con 57 figure intercalate nel testo e 2 tavole separate* (Turin: Utet, 1909).

<sup>4</sup> Naum Kotik, *Emanatsiya psikhofizicheskoi energii* (Moscow: Izdanie V.M. Sablina, 1907), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolai Pavlov, *Luchistaya besprovolochnaya peredacha mysli. (Publichnaya lektsiya)* (Moscow: Tipografiya K.L. Men’shova, 1910, n.p.

<sup>7</sup> *Novaya forma luchistoi energii. Sostavleno i izdano redaktsiei “Derevenskoi gazety”, v S.-Peterburge* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya “Derevenskoi gazety”, 1907), 12.

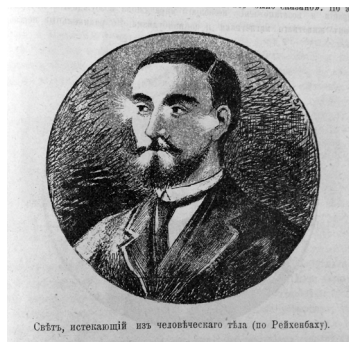


Illustration  
from book *Light  
Emissions from Human  
Bodies...* by Albert  
de Rochas  
Russian edition.  
Petrograd, 1915

create new radiant forms, is one of the main points in the concept of rayonism: "Bearing in mind not the objects themselves but the sum of the rays they emanate, we can create a picture in the following way: the sum of rays from object A intersects with the sum of rays from object B and in the space in between a certain form appears, created by the will of the artist".<sup>1</sup> If in the 1870s and 1880s the possibility of seeing radiant matter was accessible only to particularly sensitive individuals during mediumistic trances or under hypnosis, at the beginning of the 20th century a new apparatus allowed everyone to enter the hidden world of radiation. X-ray machines became a popular attraction and earlier fantasies of irradiation became an everyday occurrence associated with the miracles of domestic comfort and modern medicine.

The concept of painterly rayonism appeared in the context of research and practical experiments into the visualisation of invisible radiation. In the above-mentioned letter to Alfred Barr, Larionov insistently stressed the link between rayonism and various types of radiation: "Rayonism does not investigate questions of space and movement. It means Light as the origin of the material and of various types of radiation: radio, infra-red, ultraviolet, etc." Several lines later, he writes: "[. . .] rayonism means radiation of all types: radioactivity, the radiation of human thought. Because the expenditure of our brain, its decay (decomposition) is its giving off rays, its radioactivity".<sup>2</sup>

I note that Larionov's last statement coincides almost word-for-word with Kotik's theories and with the views which were actively repeated in the literature of the turn of the century. What follows is a typical statement from a popular book of the time: "The work of the higher nerve centres, intellectual work, involves n-rays".<sup>3</sup>

By the beginning of the 20th century a particular iconography of the light radiation of people and various bodies was formed. Its sources were varied:

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Larionov, *Luchizm* (Moscow, 1913), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Larionov, "Luchizm" (1936) in N. Goncharova, M. Larionov. *Issledovaniya i publikatsii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 97–98.

<sup>3</sup> *El'pe. Radii i ego sputniki (Luchistaya energiya)* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie A.S. Suvorina, 1904), 317. "The brain gives off radiant psychophysical energy, i.e. it is a type of radioactive substance", quoted in Kotik, op. cit, 75.





Mikahil Larionov  
*Bull's head*. 1912  
 Oil on canvas  
 The State Tretyakov  
 Gallery, Moscow

mass occult journals, illustrations in scientific literature, a vast photographic archive made during spiritualist séances, photographs of irradiated people made by Hippolyte Baraduc and Louis Darget and others.<sup>1</sup> This set of images had an important quality. It was positivist, documentary evidence of the invisible. Photography played a particular role in this iconography. Like a medium in a trance, photographic plates can capture and make visible the invisible. This magical quality of photography, and not simply its documentary nature, played an important role in fin-de siècle culture.<sup>2</sup> It enabled the opening up to the eye of the visible for contemplation and, in addition, created new vectors for painting.

The early stage of rayonism in Larionov's work often follows the widespread iconography of radiation. I will note only some of the main motifs. Bunches of rays emerging from the eyes, nose, ears and mouth of a person is one of the most common motifs in illustrations of research of a scientific-occult nature. In "realistic rayonism", as Larionov called it, such motifs can be found repeatedly (*Bull's Head*, 1912, State Tretyakov Gallery; *Male Portrait (Rayonist Construction)* in the book *Pomade*, 1913; *Rayonist Portrait* in the book *Half-Dead*, 1913).

<sup>1</sup> Hippolyte Baraduc, "Iconographie de la Force Vitale Cosmique Od" (1896), "Photographie des Etats Hypervibratoires de la Vitalité Humaine" (1897), "Méthode de Radiographie Humaine" (1987).

<sup>2</sup> See also Clement Chéroux et al, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).



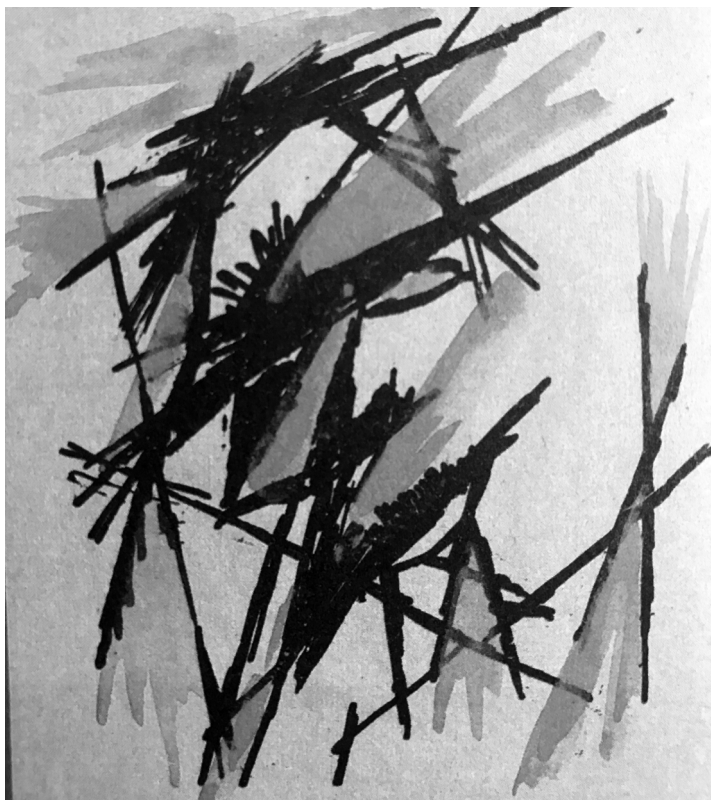
Mikhail Larionov  
*Rayonist portrait*  
 1913. From the Alexey  
 Kruchenykh's book  
*Poluzhivoy*. Moscow  
 1913

Moreover, Larionov's rayonist portraits create a particular conception of an open, permeable human body (*Portrait of Natalia Goncharova*, 1912; *Woman in a Hat* in the book *Pomade*, 1913; *Person*, 1910s, State Literary Museum, Moscow). This new anthropology in Larionov's works is born from the intersection of scientific and occult ideas of humankind, on the territory where the impermeable borders of the material world disappear and radiant matter and energy appear. William Crooks wrote about the new form of measuring reality opened up by "radiant matter": "We have touched the borders where matter and power seem to blend, the shadows between the known and the unknown".<sup>1</sup>

There is another motif of Larionov's rayonism which refers to the iconography of radiation. In his book *L'Exteriorisation de la sensibilité*, Albert de Rochas stated, based on experiments by various researchers: "Different parts of the body have different colours... right hands glow with a blueish light, left hands are dark red"; "the right side of the human body has an overall blue tone. The eyes, ears, nostrils and lips give off the same colour when irradiated... The left side of the body gives off a red radiation through the sense organs".<sup>2</sup> Similar polar red and blue divisions of space can be seen in a number

<sup>1</sup> William Crooks, *Luchistaya materiya ili chetvertoe sostoyanie tel* (Novgorod: Tipografiya A.S. Fedorova, 1889), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Albert de Rochas, *Svetovye izlucheniya cheloveka i peremeshchenie chuvstvitelnosti vnaruzhu* (*L'Exteriorisation de la sensibilité*, 1895) (Petrograd: Novyi chelovek, 1915), n.p.



of Larionov's rayonist works and they follow the aforementioned rule of blue being mainly on the right of the picture and red on the left (*Rayonist Lines*, 1912, Nesterov Bashkir State Art Museum, Ufa).

And finally, one more aspect of the iconography of radiation. At the turn of the century, electricity and radiant matter or radiant energy were often directly connected. In Russia, the most famous researcher in this field was Yakov Nardkevich-Iodko, who devised his own "method of registering the energy given off by a living organism under the influence of an electric field". He called this method electrography. Nardkevich-Iodko's photographs were well-known in Russia and Europe at the time. They were often shown at photographic exhibitions and during his public lectures, and were published in both specialist journals and popular magazines such as *Niva*. Nardkevich-Iodko considered his images of electrical discharges, made without using a camera, to be "micrographic traces of electrical currents" issuing from the human body. He wrote: "Here electricity itself plays the role of illustrator, forcing the particles (or tiny atoms of matter) to be distributed in a certain order".<sup>1</sup> In 1899, Messira Pogorelsky, in his essay "Electrophotos-

Mikhail Larionov  
*Rayonist portrait*  
1913. From the Alexey  
Kruchenykh's book  
*Pomada*. Moscow 1913

<sup>1</sup> "Nardkevich-Iodko. Novosti nauki. V laboratorii Ya.O. Nardkevicha-Iodko" in V. Kiselev, *Paradoksy "elektricheskogo cheloveka"* (Monsk: Belorusskaya nauka, 2007), 303.



Mikhail Larionov  
*Rayonist Lines*, 1913  
 Oil on canvas  
 Nesterov Bashkir State  
 Art Museum, Ufa

phens and energography”,<sup>1</sup> devised his own system of recording electrical radiation of the human body: the energogram. His alphabet of energography was based both on his own images and on those of Nardkevich-Iodko. The tree-like forms, “light clusters”, and straight or zigzag rays on many energograms create fantastic abstractions or unusual landscapes of the invisible. Certain motifs and compositional principles of these images are comparable to a number of Larionov and Goncharova’s rayonist landscapes, in which bunches of rays or “light clusters” and branched, tree-like forms reference the iconography of electrical currents (Natalia Goncharova, *Electrical Chandelier*, 1913, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; Sea. *Rayonist Composition*, 1912–1913, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Mikhail Larionov, *Rayonist Landscape*, 1912–1913, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; *Rayonist Composition*, 1912–1913, private collection, Milan). Like energograms, rayonist images capture the energetic contour of the world, which the eye cannot see.

Larionov’s rayonism does not just repeat various iconographic sources but synthesises them into a particular artistic structure where the mythology of radiation and scientific and occult research is simply a starting point. Nevertheless, these traces enable us to establish the context in which Larionov’s painterly concept was formed.

Another important aspect of rayonism is connected with a new interpretation of both the creative process and the figure of the artist. The space around us is filled with invisible forms, emanations. Using will and imagination, the artist can “see” them and transfer them to the canvas. As Larionov wrote in one of his late texts:

<sup>1</sup> Messira Pogorelsky, *Elektrofotosfery i energografiya kak dokazatel'stvo fiziologicheskoi polyarnoi energii ili tak nazymaevogo zhiivotnogo magnetizma* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Demakova, 1899).



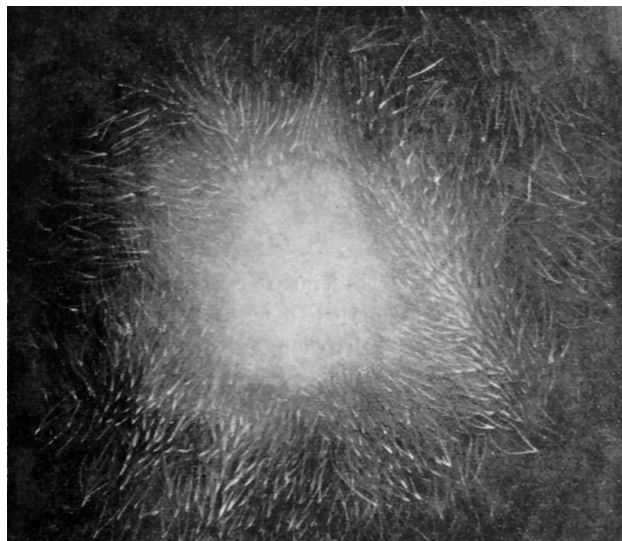
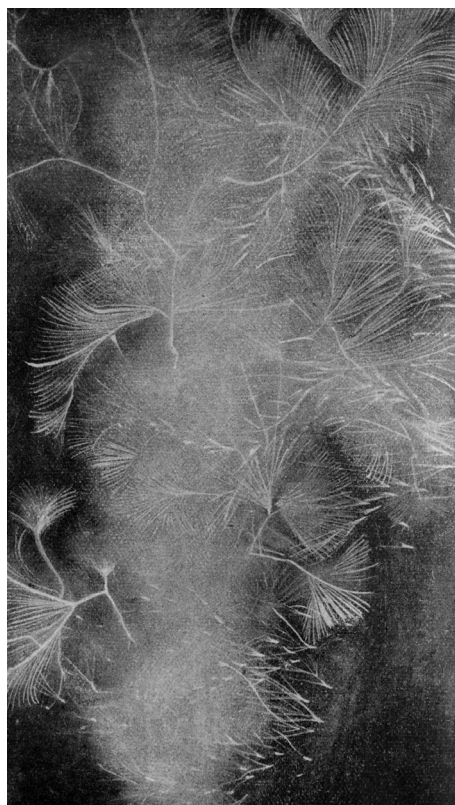


Illustration  
from book  
*Elektrofotosfery  
i energografiya  
kak dokazatel'stvo  
fiziologicheskoi  
polyarnoi energii  
ili tak nazymaevogo  
zhivotnogo  
magnetizma*  
by Messira Pogorelsky,  
St. Petersburg, 1899



There are infinite quantities of such forms [...] Let us say that between a house, a wall and a garden there is an empty piece of air called sky. With no clouds, nothing. The artist imagines within that space a certain form and depicts it on paper or canvas, a form which has nothing in common with the garden, house or wall. The artist surmises that within this space there is an infinite quantity of rays of various objects, known and unknown to him, that come from [...] the cosmic space. He surmises that the whole so-called space is filled with forms unknown to us. [...] The artist only needs to wish to do so and he can coax (the form) from the infinite space. These forms are rayonist.<sup>1</sup>

In this interpretation, the artist is a type of medium, with

Yakov Nardkevich-Iodko. *Discharge of static electricity*  
Photograph. Circa, 1896

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Larionov, "O sovremennykh napravleniyakh v iskusstve" (1950s) in N. Goncharova, M. Larionov. *Issledovaniya i publikatsii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003), 102.



Natalia Goncharova,  
*Electrical Chandelier*,  
1913, The State  
Tretyakov Gallery,  
Moscow

whose help the “materialisation of the soul” takes place. Like a medium, the artist makes contact with the invisible, seeing forms which are hidden from the eye and giving them a material existence in the picture. A rayonist picture can be compared to a light-sensitive plate which allows us to capture prints of the invisible.

Larionov’s description of the existence within the surrounding space of invisible forms refers to a popular fin-de-siècle concept. Ether was considered to be a light-bearing, universal milieu

through which radiant matter and radiant energy moved. The material world was thought to be made up of various thicknesses of ether. I stress that the concept of ether was accepted within the scientific world at the time and was included in physics textbooks as a valid scientific theory. In 1875, in the book *The Unseen Universe*, the physicists Stewart Balfour and Peter Tait proposed interpreting ether as a depository for various images, sensations, forms and feelings.<sup>1</sup> They saw ether as a space of memory, the light waves of which were imprinted with events, feelings, thoughts and images. Ether was an environment which could host invisible radiant forms. Charles Hinton, whose work was familiar to Russian artists through the publications of Peter Ouspensky, also described ether as a type of phonograph or a cosmic depository for all kinds of images.<sup>2</sup> In passing I note that Hinton’s theories focused on the practice of visualisation, working with the imagination to penetrate the invisible fourth dimension. For Larionov, working with the imagination – the resolute effort of the artist which opens up access to invisible forms – also played an important role. He stressed that rayonism meant “not objects reflected (as in a mirror), but imagined, non-existent forms which could be created by the will of the artist from the intersection of an infinite number of rays from various objects, which are dissimilar to each of these objects”.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, another important aspect of the theory of rayonism is connected with the new interpretation of the figure of the artist. The rayonist picture does not simply derive images from the invisible ephemeral archives of form. It appears as a result of the interplay of external rays and the radiating thoughts of the artist. Rayonist pictures are born from the intersection of radiant thoughts and the ether’s invisible radiant forms. As Larionov

<sup>1</sup> They described ether as “a way in which the universe conserves a memory of the last”. Stewart Balfour and Peter Tait, *The Unseen Universe or Physical Speculations on a Future State* (New York: Macmillan, 1875), 156.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hinton, *The Fourth Dimension* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1906). Published in Russian as *Chetvertoe izmerenie i era novoi mysli* (Petrograd: Knigoizdatel'stvo Novyi chelovek, 1915). Hinton’s ideas were examined in detail in Ouspensky’s book *Tertium Organum. Klyuch k zagadkam mira* (St. Petersburg, 1911).

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Larionov, “O sovremennykh napravleniyakh v iskusstve”, op. cit.





wrote: “If light, radio and other rays are material and if our thoughts are also a form of radiation, then all that is needed is the interaction of both types of rays and that of which I speak will come to pass”.<sup>1</sup> It is this aspect of rayonism, which turns the artist into a paradoxical apparatus that connects the invisible and visible world, thought and matter, which Larionov had in mind when he wrote of the presence of rayonism over and above ordinary abstract painting. According to him, rayonism speaks of “the transfer of the purely philosophical field to the purely physical”.<sup>2</sup> Ilia Zdanevich noted this side of rayonism in his book about Larionov and Goncharova: “rayonism is also enriched by the fact that it takes into account not only that which is externally radiated but also the internal spiritual”.<sup>3</sup>

Radiant matter radiates during the process of thought and physical activity.<sup>4</sup> And in the same way that other forms of radiation can be recorded on photographic plates, thoughts can leave their traces on light-sensitive surfaces. At the turn of the century, a wide range of researchers conducted scientific experiments aiming to record thoughts and feelings with the help

Natalia Goncharova  
Sea. *Rayonist*  
Composition, 1912–1913  
Oil on canvas. Stedelijk  
Museum, Khadzhiev-  
Chaga foundation,  
Amsterdam

<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Larionov, “Luchizm”, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ilia Zdanevich, “Nataliya Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov” in Ilia Zdanevich, *Futurizm i vsechestvo 1912–1914*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gileya, 2014), 115.

<sup>4</sup> The fact that such ideas were current among the artists and poets of Larionov’s circle is demonstrated by the expression “rays of thought” in Ilia Zdanevich’s manifesto “Multi-Poetry”: “Our poetry resembles the din of stations and markets, a multifaceted and many-faced murmur bursting with the rays of every thought”. See Ilia Zdanevich, “Manifest vsechestva. Mnogovaya poeziya”, 1914. State Russian Museum Archive, ф. 177 e/x 22.



Mikhail Larionov  
*Red Rayonism*  
 1914–1915  
 Oil on canvas  
 Merzbacher-Mayer  
 collection. Swiss

of contemporary equipment. Louis Darget and Hippolyte Baraduc created an entire compendium of recordings of the invisible.<sup>1</sup> Among the numerous images were those of thoughts or “psychicons”, “luminous, living images of thoughts”, as Baraduc put it.

The invention of the wireless telegraph gave a new impulse to attempts to capture thoughts on photographic plates and scientific interest in telepathy. The Russian physicist Nikolai Pavlov, who lectured on the theme “The radiant, wireless transfer of thoughts” in the 1910s, stated: “Humans are electromagnetic machines”; “our brain, like a telegraph station, can play the role of both dispatcher and receiver of electromagnetic waves”.<sup>2</sup> The concept of humans as permeable to radiation and existing in a permeable world refers to a widespread interpretation of the body of the medium as giving off and perceiving radiant matter. It is this phenomenon of mediums – in its scientific-occult interpretation – which became a new prototype for artists. The idea of the artist as a medium who can capture the ether’s vibrations, register the invisible imprints of images within it and express them in paintings would be one of the most important concepts in the development of modernist art. Such ideas would be reflected in Larionov’s rayonism, which represented “the radiant, wireless transfer of thoughts”.

Larionov’s rayonism did not, of course, exhaust the content or even the iconographic prototypes of radiation’s mythologies. Rayonism was a synthetic concept, which allowed Larionov and his associates to place rayonism

<sup>1</sup> Hippolyte Baraduc, *The Human Soul: Its Movements, its Lights and the Iconography of the Fluidic Invisible* (Paris: Librairie internationale de la pensée nouvelle, 1913).

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Pavlov, op. cit., 6, 25.

alongside everythingness, the final theory of the artist's Russian period. Larionov thought of rayonism as a concept which drew on various sources and referred to numerous contexts. I will briefly demonstrate one possible context, which is in contrast to the mythology of radiation. Icon painting, which Larionov studied seriously in the 1910s, may be yet another iconographic source for rayonist pictures. In a 1920 article, Larionov stressed the link between icons and abstract art: "Russian icon painters [...] decisively moved towards abstraction. This abstraction was manifested in the use of schemes and canons related to a predefined manner, through which they expressed the mystical and abstract meaning of life".<sup>1</sup>

One element of icons allowing for the expression of "the mystical and abstract meaning of life" was the strokes, lines or rays of gold leaf which covered clothing and objects and denoted matter transfigured by divine light. The structure and composition of these lines, which are reminiscent of the clusters of rays and linear flourishes that can be found in Larionov's pictures, may represent another pole in the painterly conception of rayonism, one that is counter to the positivistic-occult position.

In conclusion, I would like to note an important quality of Larionov's rayonism. His concept is devoid of gloomy seriousness and prophetic pathos. The early rayonist works *Bull's Head* and *Rayonist Sausage and Mackerel* are openly ironic and reference the primitive stage of the artist's work. Larionov's rayonism always retained a definite ambivalence: irony and contemplation, the scientific and the occult, play and daring immersion in the secrets of matter and spirit. The interweaving of such different (at first glance) vectors created the fantastic, radiant fabric of Larionov's rayonist works.



State of sorrow

Illustration from book  
*The human soul: its  
movements, its lights,  
and the iconography  
of the fluidic invisible*  
by I. Baradiuk. Paris,  
1913

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Andrew Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon: Russian Avant-Garde Art and the Icon Painting Tradition* (London: Lund Humphries, 2008), 59.

Elena Klyushina

### **HYPNOSIS IN THE ART OF FERNAND KHNOPFF<sup>1</sup>**

We have no intention of demonstrating that occultism, mysticism, spiritualism, Rosicrucianism or theosophy were the main drivers of fin-de siècle avant-garde art. Unlike Terence Harold Robsjohn-Gibblings,<sup>2</sup> we understand that the use by artists of practices borrowed from psychiatry, and often seriously vulgarised in the process, was not ubiquitous, had an obviously expressed personal rationale and, accordingly, cannot be considered evidence of the dominant role of occultism in avant-garde art of the turn of the century. Here Linda Henderson's thesis is more appropriate: she states that the basic differentiating factor of modernism is the openness of people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to mystical and occult ideas.<sup>3</sup> It is impossible not to agree with this opinion, as the heightened individualism which characterised the epoch was expressed not only in politics and economics but in artists' sharpened interest in investigating their own artistic self.

In order to ease the journey to self-knowledge, one could employ techniques that were actively used and no less actively popularised by psychiatry, which had been developing rapidly since the 1870s. The psychic conditions of sleep, hypnosis and trance were all subjects of intense research at the turn of the century. In allowing a person to weaken control over their consciousness, practising psychiatrists believed that such methods could open access to the unconscious. For artists, they presented a key to the hidden parts of the personality where creative inspiration is born, or even a way to open up access to the transcendental. The difference between the scientific and artistic approaches to evaluating the possibilities of hypnotic and other effects on personality is a consequence of the varying gnoseological bases of the psychiatrist and the artist at the turn of the century. Serena Keshavjee notes that: "[...] the goal for the symbolists was not so much to

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Harold Robsjohn-Gibblings, *Mona Lisa's Mustache: A Dissection of Modern Art* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> Linda Henderson, "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art", *Art Journal*, 46 (1), 1987, 5.

uncover the complexities of the layered human mind – as it was for psychologists such as Freud – but rather to uncover a path to universal and divine knowledge that they felt was buried deep in the recesses of human knowledge. For them, the double mind was a route to extra-individual knowledge and an enlightened self”.<sup>1</sup>

Like the majority of the symbolists, Fernand Khnopff was relatively knowledgeable about the scientific, semi-scientific and pseudo-scientific practices which were popular at the time. He had a large circle of acquaintances who were familiar with the material. Among them, the most influential figure for Khnopff was Sâr Joséphin Péladan, who he met in 1884. Regardless of Russian art historians’ scepticism regarding the figure of Péladan,<sup>2</sup> one must admit that he played a significant role in the formation of the aesthetics of symbolism. Largely thanks to him, the French symbolists got to know esoteric practices, tried out various methods of occultism, spiritualism and hermeticism, and became acquainted with the Kabbalah.

Joséphin Péladan had great hopes for Fernand Khnopff. He called him the equal of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, and Khnopff’s countryman Félicien Rops, who was extremely popular in France at that time. Such comparisons undoubtedly flattered the young Belgian, who was little known in the mid-1880s. The most famous artistic result of this close relationship was Khnopff’s pastel *After Joséphin Péladan, The Supreme Vice* (1885, private collection). The artist destroyed the first version at the Les XX exhibition on 22 February 1885. This public act was prompted by a complaint from the famous 1880s opera singer Rose Caron, who saw in the pastel’s heroine her own likeness. In the same year, Khnopff made a new version of *The Supreme Vice* and exhibited it at Le Salon des XX in 1886.

From the artistic point of view, *The Supreme Vice* is not particularly interesting. The inexpressive use of colour, Khnopff’s obvious inability to deal with space, and the lack of harmony of the figures do nothing to give semantic meaning to the work and, as a whole, match the poor quality of its literary source. However, in the context of a discussion of the proximity of Khnopff and Péladan’s aesthetic and philosophical views, *The Supreme Vice* is extremely interesting. The point is not even that Khnopff had obviously read Péladan’s extremely popular novel, where, using the life story of Leonora d’Este, the author demonstrates his knowledge of astrology, magic and spiritualism, but that the artist clearly shares these ideas, as can be seen in the visual structure of the work. He is equally “obsessed with androgyny, has a taste for the unexplained, esotericism and theatricalism, narcissism and a desire to cover his internal I with a shroud of secrecy”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Serena Keshavjee, “L’Art Inconscient: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Théâtre d’art”, *Canadian Art Review*, 34 (1), 2009, 62.

<sup>2</sup> Valentina Kryuchkova, *Simvolizm v izobrazitel’nom iskusstve. Frantsiya i Bel’giya* [Symbolism in Visual Art. France and Belgium] (Moscow: Izobrazitel’noe iskusstvo, 1994), 51–52.

<sup>3</sup> *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, exhibition catalogue (Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 2004), 198.



The spiritual and intellectual connection to Péladan would be particularly strong in the latter part of the 1880s. Whereas in 1884, regardless of his enthusiasm for Khnopff's work, the author preferred the more experienced Félicien Rops to illustrate *The Supreme Vice*, from 1888 onwards Khnopff regularly created frontispieces for Péladan's literary works. Here we might recall *Ishtar*, made for the eponymous novel of 1888;<sup>1</sup> *With Joséphin Péladan. Pallentis radere mores*, made for *Honest Women* in the same year;<sup>2</sup> and *Pantheon* for Péladan's eponymous novel of 1892.<sup>3</sup>

Khnopff did not even lose the connection to Péladan in the 1890s, when the writer broke with Papus and Stanislas de Guaita, left the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose-Cross and founded the Catholic Order of the Rose and Cross. Khnopff exhibited four times as an honoured guest at the Parisian Salon of the Rose and Cross (1892, 1893, 1894, and 1897). Péladan, seemingly in order to expand his territory of influence, began to visit Belgium regularly. In November 1892, he chaired a conference together with Khnopff as part of a meeting of the Pour l'Art artistic circle. The writer presented papers with the populist titles "On Art" and "On Art, Love and Secrets in Magic".<sup>4</sup>

Digressing slightly, it is worth saying something about the founder of Pour l'Art, Jean Delville, a literary mouthpiece for Péladan's ideas within Belgium and an artistic associate of Khnopff. In the literature one can find references to the fact that Delville and Khnopff met while studying at the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts. This information is doubtful, as when Khnopff joined the Academy, Delville was nine years old. It is more probable that they met in the mid-1880s, when Delville first attempted to exhibit his art works with L'Essor, published his poems in *La Wallonie* and wrote critical notes on the art scene in Belgium.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable information on how Péladan and Delville became acquainted. They most likely met around 1888. Péladan's spiritual influence on Delville had a devastating effect. From the late 1890s, the young artist began to study the Kabbalah, read hermetic texts, and translate their ideas via his critical articles. Accusing Belgian avant-garde art, and specifically the groups Les XX and La Libre Esthétique, of a lack of spirituality and a preference for materialism, Delville virtually declared war on Octave Maus and Edmond Picard.<sup>5</sup> To spite the latter, he formed the group Pour l'Art and, in 1896, opened the Salon of Idealistic Art, based on Péladan's Salon

<sup>1</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Istar* (Paris: G. Edinger, 1888).

<sup>2</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Femmes honnêtes* (Paris: C. Dalou Editeur, 1888).

<sup>3</sup> Joséphin Péladan, *Le Panthée* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1892).

<sup>4</sup> For more detail see Brendan Cole, *Jean Delville: Art between Nature and the Absolute* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 84.

<sup>5</sup> For more detail see Brendan Cole, "Jean Delville and the Belgian Avant-Garde: Anti-Materialist Polemics for 'un Art Annonciateur des Spiritualités Futures' in *Symbolism, its Origins and its Consequences*, edited by Rosina Neginsky (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 129–146.



of the Rose and Cross in Paris. However, by the mid-1890s, Delville had begun to be disappointed in Péladan. He openly criticised his former mentor, accusing him of reactionary occultism, elitism and a commitment to outdated ideas.<sup>1</sup> Delville continued his spiritual journey and, through the texts of Helena Blavatsky and Papus, moved towards theosophy.

In the 1890s, Khnopff was experiencing similar doubts. His formerly successful artistic and literary union with Péladan was gradually falling apart. His spiritual and intellectual closeness to Delville was hidden from society's prying eyes. This was mainly due to his friends' behaviour. According to Émile Verhaeren, Khnopff was "severe, reserved, closed Briton who thinks more than he speaks and observes more than he explains".<sup>2</sup> He could not but be nervous of Péladan's fervent Catholicism and monarchism, his provocative behaviour and socially unacceptable mode of dressing. Khnopff feared a repeat of the scandal of 1891, when Péladan's conflict with Bloy and Huysmans appeared in the Parisian press.<sup>3</sup> Delville's actions and statements were no less provocative. He stigmatised those whose friendship Khnopff held dear and with whom he actively exhibited, the artists of Les XX and La Libre Esthétique. Partly as a result of disappointment, partly having seen the flaws in the beliefs of his former friends and, possibly, not wishing to fall out with his Belgian colleagues or lose commissions, the artist moved away from them.

In the 1890s, Khnopff began a spiritual search for something more convincing, fundamental and less obviously radical. He found this outside Belgium, in England, which he had regularly visited since 1889. Here he became close to a Swedenborgian. Khnopff's interest in Swedenborg had a clearly expressed religious character and demonstrated a gradual refusal of the pure esotericism of the 1880s and 1890s. By 1916, Khnopff's acceptance of the doctrines of the New Church was expressed in a text in which he brought together Swedenborg's teachings in five postulates.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to the last two decades of the nineteenth century, we note that Khnopff's interest in occultism and his superficial attempts to employ occult practices sometimes led critics to use ambiguous epithets. In 1890, in a review of the annual exhibition by Les XX, Daland called Khnopff "the Bouguereau of occultism".<sup>5</sup> The critic referenced Bouguereau in the context of the viewer's inability to resist the beauty of Khnopff's academic drawing style. Occultism came to mind, it seems, because the artist's interest in the subject was well known. Jeffery Howe quotes the Viennese

<sup>1</sup> Brendan Cole, Jean Delville: Art between Nature and the Absolute, op. cit., 52.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Verhaeren, "Silhouettes d'artistes, Fernand Khnopff", *Art Moderne*, VI (36), 1886, 281.

<sup>3</sup> For more detail see Joyce Lowrie, *The Violent Mystique: Thematics of Retribution and Expiation in Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Bloy and Huysmans* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1974), 107–108.

<sup>4</sup> Fernand Khnopff, "Quelques notes sur la chapelle de la station missionnaire de l'Eglise de la Nouvelle Jérusalem à Ixelles (1 mars 1916)" in *Annexe de la Classe des Beaux-Arts, communications présentées à la Classe en 1915–1918* (Brussels: Hayez, 1919), 83–86.

<sup>5</sup> Daland, "Le Salon des XX, Bruxelles", *Mercure de France*, March 1890, 87.

critic Ludwig Hevesi who, in 1906, referred to Khnopff as “the arch-mystic of Brussels”.<sup>1</sup>

Why did critics use such epithets for Khnopff? Above all, because of the artist’s own work. One could name a whole series of works in which Khnopff demonstrates his interest in occultism. In playing with potential viewers, he often deliberately leaves clues that are understood as evidence of his involvement with Secret Knowledge. For example, at the bottom of the drawing *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889, private collection) we can see kabbalistic symbols among the columns of an ancient building, which have clearly been added to strengthen the symbolic weight of the work. In the second version of this work, *Angel* (1889, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), the symbols are readable, despite the fact they have been retouched. Khnopff often used text as a structural element of paintings. We can find kabbalistic symbols, which cannot be completely decoded, in the *The Supreme Vice* and also in the well-known painting of the mid-1890s, *Caresses* (1896, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels).

The iconographic construction of Khnopff’s works of the 1880s and 1890s also openly demonstrates his close association with the idea of hermeticism and occultism. He regularly uses an image of the many-breasted Artemis of Ephesus, whose semantic ambiguity is characteristic of the fin de siècle. In the pastel *From the Animal World* (1885, private collection), the sanctuary of Artemis of Ephesus, decorated with columns of dark marble with many-breasted capitals and skulls, is transformed into a temple of base temptation whose only fruit can be death. However, in *Orpheus* (1913, Modern Art Museum, Liège) Artemis is the supreme manifestation of creative fertility.

The artist’s interest in magic and clairvoyance can also be seen in a number of his works. A particularly good example is *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City* (1889, private collection). Khnopff made the work three years before Rodenbach’s short novel *Bruges-la-Morte*, which would become one of the most important symbolist texts in Belgium. In the background we see Bruges, the city where Khnopff spent his childhood and to which he refused to return until the early 1900s. In Belgium at that time, Bruges had a reputation as an empty city devoid of its former glory, which had been forgotten for several centuries. The literature on this work usually states that the girl in the foreground is an embodiment of the city and the crown she is admiring is a symbol of the forgotten might of Bruges.<sup>2</sup>

However, in our view, the work demands a broader reading. The crown at which the heroine is so attentively gazing is bright azure. The same colour is reflected in the girl’s eyes. Her connection with the object of her gaze is incredibly deep. In our view, the crown performs the role of a beryl or a crystal

<sup>1</sup> Jeffery Howe, “Les thèmes religieux dans l’art de Fernand Khnopff” in *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, op. cit., 31.

<sup>2</sup> Lynne Pudles, “Fernand Khnopff, Georges Rodenbach, and Bruges, the Dead City”, *The Art Bulletin*, 74 (4), 1992, 643.

ball, an indispensable tool for scrying, which was popular throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and particularly in England.

It is important to underline the immense role that English visual art played in Khnopff's life. At the beginning of his career, he was a keen admirer and imitator of Whistler. However, by the mid-1880s, and with Péladan's blessing, Khnopff discovered the Pre-Raphaelites. He was fascinated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Here it was not simply the proximity of their artistic and aesthetic programmes which played a role. Khnopff appreciated Rossetti's interest in numerology, astrology, scrying and mesmerism. In the 1860s and 1870s, Rossetti had only a superficial and intuitive knowledge of these subjects. However, for Khnopff, they were an organic part of the image system which Rossetti developed for visual art and literature.

It is obvious that, while making *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City*, anglophile and dandy Khnopff recalled uses of beryl or magical crystals in English culture. A number of works come immediately to mind: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, Rossetti's *Rose Mary*, and a whole series of paintings, such as Edward Burne-Jones's *Astrology* (1865, private collection) or *The Days of Creation* (1870–1876, Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA) and Simeon Solomon's *Allegorical Self-Portrait* (1873, Minneapolis Institute of Art) or *The Acolyte* (1873, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane). As can be seen from these examples, this image was very common. By focusing their gaze on a beryl, a practising clairvoyant could go into a trance and predict the future or see the past. It is therefore entirely possible that Bruges, in the background of Khnopff's drawing, is seen by the girl as an unexpectedly revealed memory or as an indication of the ghostly future of the city. *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City* is not the only example of Khnopff's use of a beryl or a crystal ball. The same iconography can be seen in *Loneliness* (1890–1891, Newmann Museum, Zhingen, *By the Sea* (1890, private collection) and *Requiem* (1907, private collection).

The artist was particularly interested in borderline personality states as a means of touching the unconscious. Various means of entering a trance and the condition of trance itself are often found in his work. The most striking example of Khnopff's interest in hypnosis is the painting *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* (1891, Neue Pinakothek, Munich), which is his best-known work. In Russian texts, the painting is usually referred to as *The Recluse*, which we consider incorrect because the translation does not match the original title, reduces it considerably and distorts the meaning of the work. Also, the translation from English to Russian usurps Khnopff's right to use the original English text at the point of creating a single semantic field for the work. *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is a quote from Christina Rossetti's sonnet "Who Shall Deliver Me?" and brings to mind the literary allusion which Khnopff deliberately incorporated in the picture. Khnopff's heroine "locks the door upon herself", announcing her extreme escapism and immediately postulating the personal, emotional and spatial hermeticism of the work.

Without getting into comparative literary analysis (as it is not particularly helpful with regard to our theme) we note, however, that Khnopff always had

a dual position in relation to the titles of his works. He often included in the title a quote from the literary work that was his creative catalyst. The title often also incorporated a semantic expansion, which underlined the independent and detached position of the artist in relation to the text. Khnopff refused to play the role of illustrator, something he thought beneath him. He considered himself a co-author and reflected this in the title. For example, instead of “Mon Coeur pleure d’autrefois” he uses *Avec Grégoire Le Roy. Mon coeur pleure d’autrefois* (With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Weeps for the Past). Rather than “Pallentis radere mores” he gives the title *With Joséphin Péladan. Pallentis radere mores* (1888) or *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889) instead of “Angel”. A single preposition at the beginning and lines of verse in the title are transformed from a primary source to a literary reminiscence with the function of an epigraph. The title *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* should be considered exactly this type of literary reminiscence.

Unfortunately, the story of the making of *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is not known. Nor is the name of the model. The simplest solution is to suggest that Khnopff used his sister Marguerite as a model, but a comparison of photographs and the work makes it clear that this is not the case. The literature also suggests that the model might have been one of the Maquet sisters, Elsie, who often posed for Khnopff after Marguerite married and left for Liège in 1890. However, there is no evidence for this. The most likely solution is that this is a collective image, created by Khnopff in homage to the Burne-Jones canon which he idolised: a rectangular face with sharp features, pronounced masculinity of figure, fiery hair and a thoughtful, distracted gaze.

In the context of our theme, the name of the model is not particularly significant. The objects with which she is surrounded are much more interesting. The most noticeable object is the bust of the pagan god Hypnos which stands on the shelf behind her. The fact that this is Hypnos is hinted at by the withered poppy which is also on the shelf, an attribute of the Greek god of sleep. The iconographic prototype of the bust of Hypnos in *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is the eponymous sculpture in the British Museum, which Khnopff visited during his trip to England in 1891. The museum’s bronze bust of Hypnos dates to the 1st or 2nd century CE and is considered a copy of a work from the Hellenistic period. For Khnopff, this sculpture is transformed into an archetypal prototype to which he will return a number of times. He uses it in *A Blue Wing* (1894, private collection), in the drawing for *A Blue Wing* (Prints Department, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels), in *Woman, Black and Gold* (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels) and in *Loneliness* (1890–1891, Newmann Museum, Zwingen). Of particular interest are two almost exact copies of the bust made by Khnopff around 1900 in bronze (1900, private collection) and plaster (not extant, known through photographs). While making the sculptures the artist was involved in appropriation, i.e. he virtually copied the ancient image, but was happy to apply his own signature – FK.

There is no strict iconographic regularity of the bust of the god Hypnos in Khnopff’s art. The image changes from work to work. Khnopff slightly strengthens the chin, accentuates the lips, lengthens the oval of the face,

sometimes softens and sometimes strengthens the line of the complex hair-style. Khnopff's *Hypnos*, which has obvious androgynous features, increasingly adheres to the Pre-Raphaelite, Burne-Jones canon, in which masculinity and femininity are of equal weight and successfully exist side by side.

Unfortunately, in those sources where Khnopff's own voice is heard, such as *The Studio*, we cannot find any comments which might help us to determine the semantic meaning of the head of the god *Hypnos* in his work. The opinion of experts differs significantly.

Some attempt to give a simple and accessible explanation, which might be applied to virtually any symbolist artist. Michael Sagroske states that "[In Khnopff's work] *Hypnos* played a particularly important role. He can be interpreted as one of the artist's signatures. According to Robert Delevois, *Hypnos* represents 'the image of desire. The desire to do, work, plan. To plan one's future. The desire to write'. Furthermore, for Khnopff sleep was the most welcome state. In this way, sleep could be connected with imagination, i.e. a concept connected with everything that 'could be used by the artist in the process of conceptualising a work of art'. One can consider it as an unconscious state of the creative act. In this condition, the artist is inspired, generates ideas".<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Sagroske asserts that in Khnopff's works *Hypnos* is a direct embodiment of sleep as a source of inspiration.

In our view, one can go further and read the image of *Hypnos* more directly, as the embodiment of hypnotic trance or hypnosis. As applied to *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*, this reading appears to us to be entirely plausible, as the artist gives us a hint in the small tiara which is hanging on a long chain at the centre front of the painting. It is interesting that most viewers do not notice this detail, even when carefully examining the work, which is on display at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. The silver chain with a gold half-moon at the end appears to cut the canvas in two slightly to the left of the centre line. This detail ought to be immediately noticeable, but instead it remains unseen, blending in with the stem of the dried-up flower. The purpose of this object is, of course, not defined, but we can surmise that it can be used as a mechanical irritant, a pendulum with the help of which a person is put into a hypnotic trance.

The practice of hypnotising people in this way was common in the latter half of the 19th century. The method was first described in 1843 by James Braid, a Scottish surgeon who would become the father of hypnosis. Braid's experiments were well known in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His methods were employed in medical practice by professionals such as Jean-Martin Charcot in his work at the Salpêtrière Hospital, Hippolyte Bernheim, Sigmund Freud and Ivan Pavlov. They were also actively popularised by theosophists and occultists (such as Helen Blavatsky), with whose theories Khnopff was familiar.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Sagroske, "La Méduse dans l'oeuvre de Fernand Khnopff" in *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, op. cit., 63.



The 1880s and 1890s were the golden age of hypnosis. During these two decades it was recognised as an official science. In 1889, the First International Congress for Experimental and Therapeutic Hypnotism was held in parallel with the Exposition Universelle in Paris and attracted around 300 participants from across the globe. At this time a large number of scientific papers were published on the subject, including Charcot's "Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System" (1885), Pierre Marie Janet's "Psychic Automatism" (1889), Bernheim's "Suggestive Therapeutics: A Treatise on the Nature and Uses of Hypnotism" (1889), and Alfred Binet's "On the Duality of Consciousness" (1896). Hypnosis was regularly discussed in the press, in publications such as *L'Illustration*, *La Revue*, *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui* and *Revue des deux mondes*.

In *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, Debora Silverman gives numerous examples in support of her argument that hypnosis and suggestion were conspicuous features of fin-de-siècle culture.<sup>1</sup> The image of the hypnotist and his dependent subject are often found in literary works. Examples include Guy de Maupassant's *The Horla* (1886), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), and short stories by Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Parasite*, 1894), Anatole France (*M. Pigeonneau*, 1908?), and Bram Stoker (*The Lair of the White Worm*, 1911).

In visual art, the process of putting someone into a trance, i.e. the presence on the canvas of hypnotist and subject rather than the representation of a subject under hypnosis, is relatively rare. The best-known work demonstrating Braid's method in action is Richard Bergh's *Hypnotic Séance* (1887, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm). Created four years before *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*, this realistic Swedish work is of interest more as evidence of an epoch rather than as a key to understanding Khnopff's work. Nevertheless, *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is thematically related to Bergh's painting, as Khnopff depicts not only the object-irritant which is necessary to put the subject in a trance, but also the hypnotist, whose chimeric reflection is barely detectable at the lower right of the picture. With a composition carefully constructed using the principle of *mise en abyme*, Khnopff plays a game with us. He suggests that we, the viewer, take on the role of hypnotist. We are responsible for putting the heroine in a trance. We force her pupils to cloud over and gaze upwards, as with Mrs Stuart Merrill in Jean Delville's *Mysteriosa* (1892, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels).

The sum of symbols concentrated by Khnopff in the central part of the picture – the bust of Hypnos, the poppy, the gold tiara on a silver chain, the cloudy reflection in the right half of the canvas – allow us to suggest that the condition in which we see the heroine is one of hypnosis, during which the person is immersed in another world, in knowing themselves, and yet "switched off" from this mortal world. In this context, *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* can be read as a departure for another existence, a search for a new psycho-emotional state with no hope of return.

<sup>1</sup> For more detail see Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1989), 75–106.

As well as relatively obviously illustrating Braid's method, in a number of works Khnopff demonstrates his knowledge of other contemporaneous means of putting people into a trance, particularly meditation. Meditation, alongside images of a meditative state, is one of the main leitmotifs of Khnopff's work. The artist sees meditation as both the simple process of deep consideration of an issue in the calm of the domestic setting and the meditative practice of trance, which he may have practised himself or with the help of his sister.

The first type of meditation is illustrated in works made from 1881 to 1886. We usually find people who are close to Khnopff in such situations, often in the form of portraits or interior scenes: *Portrait of Mother* (1882, Modern Art Museum, Liege), *Listening to Schumann* (1883, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), *Portrait of Marguerite Khnopff* (1887, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), *Portrait of Marie Monnom* (1887, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), *Portrait of Father* (1881, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), and others. In each of these works, Khnopff deliberately accentuates silence, which was an important concept for him. Silence is treated as an element of the structure of the image, a state in which the model and artist employ meditation and together achieve the high state of concentration, lifting the veil of Secrecy.

Images of meditation as trance appear in Khnopff's paintings from the mid-1880s through the 1890s. Such paintings include *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889, private collection) and *Paganism* (1910, private collection). Of particular interest is a series of drawings entitled *The Dreamer*, which Khnopff made in 1900. These include *The Dreamer. Never Again* (1900, private collection), *The Dreamer* (1900, private collection), and *The Dreamer II* (1900, private collection). This series was created based on photographs of the artist's sister, Marguerite. While working on the drawings, Khnopff made major changes to the photographic image. He rejected the richly decorated satin garments and tenderly wrapped Marguerite in light fabric in her favourite colour, blue. He dissolved the objects in the background and transformed them into a wondrous mirage. The only thing which remained almost untouched were her closed eyes and her hands. This woman is fast asleep. However, she is not lying in bed, but seated, drowsing in a trance.

Jeffery Howe proposes the idea that the role of medium, in which Marguerite is shown here, is confirmed by her unusual clothing.<sup>1</sup> We tend not to agree with this, for several reasons. Firstly, the clothing is more like a chasuble, the ceremonial vestment of an Orthodox priest, which may have been borrowed by Khnopff from Simeon Solomon's works of the 1870s. Secondly, photographs of spiritualist seances of the late 19th century show the opposite. The medium's dress differs little from everyday attire. It may be that Khnopff borrowed the image from Pélandan or Les Nabis, whose theatre productions he could have seen in Paris. But this also not convincing, due to the series being dated 1900. By then Khnopff was no longer particularly associated with Parisian Rosicrucianism.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffery Howe, op. cit., 31.

More important as far as the series *The Dreamer* is concerned is the state which Khnopff depicts. Falling into a medium's trance does not require the presence of another person. The link which was important to the artist in *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is absent here. Unlike a person who is in a hypnotic trance and submits to the will of the hypnotist, a medium can control themselves. In addition, doctors who practised dynamic psychiatry, which was particularly popular in francophone countries at the turn of the 20th century, believed that mediums in a state of trance could describe their visions, and use automatic writing and drawing.

If we apply this version to the series *The Dreamer*, we are able to reconsider the interpretation of one of Khnopff's most important works, *Memories (Lawn Tennis)* (1889, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels). The artist made this pastel in 1889. In the same year it was shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris and awarded a second-class medal.

It is likely that the composition was decided upon after Khnopff saw *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886, The Art Institute of Chicago). Seurat's painting was exhibited at Le Salon des XX in 1887 and created a revolution in Belgian art. Khnopff turned out to be one of those more resistant to Seurat among the artists of Les XX. He was considerably less influenced by him than other members of the group. Nevertheless, much in *Memories* came from Seurat: the large format, the idea of creating a multi-figure composition, the delicate structural and rhythmic arrangement and the illusion of harmony on the brink of destruction. The quiet and still nature of the figures in Khnopff's work, as in Seurat's canvas, communicates a lack of freedom which the characters are unknowingly experiencing. Donald Kuspit compares the figures in *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* to petrified rocks painted to look alive and concludes that this is a deliberate reification and objectification of the characters by the artist.<sup>1</sup> Khnopff's characters are also objectified and do not belong to themselves. They are controlled by a force, the force of sleep, hypnosis, trance. This impression is strengthened by the airless, timeless space of *Memories*. Khnopff minimises the landscape, making it a boundless and silent green lawn for tennis. The girls, who are all alike, in imitation of Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* (1876, Tate, London), endlessly multiply against a monotonous background where there is no shade and, accordingly, no indication of time of day. Despite their consciousness, they are sleepwalkers, indifferent to each other's fate. Their gazes are not destined to meet. Regardless of the title of the work, a game is impossible.

There are numerous examples of research which unlocks the secret meaning of *Memories*. Some refer to the artist's brilliant knowledge of the philosophical questions of his day, recall

Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and even use Bergson's quote about two types of memory as proof. Unfortunately, this work, which was key for the French avant-garde, was not published until 1896. One could refer

<sup>1</sup> Donald Kuspit, *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 90.

to Bergson's public lectures, which attracted a broad audience. But the philosopher began lecturing only at the beginning of the 20th century. Plus, lectures took place in Paris, which was an obvious constraint for Brussels resident Khnopff. The key to understanding *Memories* is more likely to be found outside the French philosophical, intuitive tradition, even though it formed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The literature includes a number of such attempts. A number of researchers suggest considering *Memories* as an illustration of Leibniz's teachings on monads or a reflection of Swedenborg's concept of correspondences. There are many other examples. Most of them are speculative theorisations, which are often the only accessible means of transcribing the complex symbolic meaning of Khnopff's work. And as Khnopff's art, with its semantic hermeticism, allows for freedom of investigative expression, we will allow ourselves the pleasure of putting forward our own theory.

In the context of heightened interest in borderline states of consciousness such as hypnosis, trance, clairvoyance and scrying, Khnopff could have been trying to reflect that which his sister Marguerite told him during meditation. This is why external reality is combined with the depiction of internal reality, born in the depths of the unconscious. This is why the space in which the scene takes place looks derivative. This is why the characters multiply like reminiscences about regular summer games of tennis. Time contracts, temporal planes combine and mingle. The repeating nature of the composition does not prevent a feeling of disintegration because in *Memories* both time and space are phantoms born and existing in the unconscious.

Khnopff's interest in hypnosis and hypnotic states was not only reflected in visual art. In the early 1900s, he built a shrine to individual polytheism. It was the house built to his design on Avenue des Courses in Brussels. Like many of his contemporaries, Khnopff devised his own personal religion, which ruled his everyday life. Rare visitors to his home were required to be quiet. He drew a circle on the floor of his studio in which he placed his easel while working and into which only the artist could step. Near the bedhead, Khnopff placed a notebook in order to note down his dreams. Also nearby was an improvised altar to the god Hypnos, whose role in Khnopff's work, as we noted, is difficult to overestimate.

Ilona Svetlikova<sup>1</sup>

## ORPHISM AND THE CINEMA: NOTES ON ANDREI BELY'S PETERSBURG<sup>2</sup>

The novel *Petersburg* (1913–1914) is constructed like a film: rapidly changing episodes, the use of “ruptures”, chapter titles in capital letters which sometimes imitate the style of silent movies.<sup>3</sup> What does this accentuated similarity mean? Yuri Tsivyan, author of the best text on *Petersburg* and cinema, suggests that the presence of allusions to cinema within the novel are due to the fact that, for Bely, the cinema was “a clotting agent of the city’s elements, like a car or a tram”.<sup>4</sup> The novel is about St. Petersburg. This is why the author used cinematic material, which, in his imagination, was closely associated with city life.

Such reasoning can be complemented by examining the role of Orphism in *Petersburg*.<sup>5</sup>

1. The second volume of Bely’s memoirs contains the following: “I catch myself wandering through fields, tanned, hirsute and gesticulating wildly above a ravine like a conductor rushing around the rostrum with a baton: the trumpets, French horns, kettle drums and violins are subordinate to him. It’s as if stones were dancing before my eyes. How can people not follow my rhythm? A dreadful conceit! I excuse myself because, it seems, the idea of Orpheus, of the new commune, was in the air [...]”.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> National Research University – Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg; my study has been supported by Russian Science Foundation (RSF), project 16-18-10250.

<sup>3</sup> On Petersburg and cinema, see primarily Yuri Tsivyan, *Istoricheskaya retseptsiya kino: Kinematograf v Rossii. 1896–1930* (Riga: Zinatne, 1991), 216–238 (and other pages according to the index; on the use of “breaks in Bely’s novel see 132); Tatiana Nicolescu, *Andrei Bely i teatr* (Moscow: Radiks, 1995), 125.

<sup>4</sup> Tsivyan, op. cit., 229.

<sup>5</sup> On Orphism in Bely and the symbolists see primarily E.V. Glukhova, “Ya, samozvanets, ‘Orfei’...” in *Vladimir Soloviev i kul’tura Serebryanova veka. K 150-letiyu V.I. Solovieva i 110-letiyu A.F. Loseva* (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 248–254; Lena Silard, “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma” in Lena Silard, *Germetizm i germenevtika* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2002), 54–101.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*. Podgotovka teksta i komment. A.V. Lavrova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990), 289–290.

After the chapter “Correspondence with Blok”, which ends with Bely’s memory of himself as an unlucky Orpheus,<sup>1</sup> comes “The Cinema”, which mostly concerns the events of the “confused autumn” of 1903. Here the cinema, as is often the case with Bely, is a synonym for confusion and chaos (“a incoherent film, which distracts me”<sup>2</sup>). The transition from Orpheus to the cinema is based on Bely’s idea of Orpheus the exorcist of chaos leading to the legend of the voyage of the Argonauts (Bely is referring to the so-called “Argonauts circle”). Recalling his claims on the role of Orpheus, Bely describes chaos which he could not overcome. We will attempt to show how the “idea of Orpheus”, ironically mentioned in his memoirs but conceptualised by Bely with more seriousness at the beginning of the 1910s than in the early 1900s, defined the cinematic look of his main novel.

2. The most important material for examining the Orphic theme in *Petersburg* is the article “Orpheus”, which was published in the first issue of the journal *Trudy i dni*. It consists of two parts (in fact, two separate articles), written by Vyacheslav Ivanov and Bely. Its purpose is to present the eponymous series by the publishing house Musaget on mystical literature (or that which was considered as such<sup>3</sup>).

In one of the darkest passages of “Orpheus”, Bely writes about the “opening up of secret symbolism” which takes place in “the depths of the human soul”: “[...] the awareness of the highest symbols of creativity transforms them into real symbolism. [...] [Apollo Musagetes], transformed into Orpheus, begins to breathe and live within him: the stony mask of art melts away and the cold marble is given movement, as Orpheus makes the stones of the idols move”.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, Bely calls Orpheus that feeling which gives life to dead thoughts.<sup>5</sup> Here the subject is the same: Orpheus is an emotional experience which gives “cold marble” movement, i.e. meanings and symbols which are dead without him.

<sup>1</sup> The final sentence of the chapter “Correspondence with Blok” reads: “Tanned, bearded, not recognising myself, I was an impostor playing the subject of “*Not That One*”, the poem I had just written in the summer”. (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*, 290; Bely’s italics). Elsewhere in the book, Bely writes of himself as “the impostor, ‘Orpheus’” (316). The image of Orpheus the impostor also appears in *Petersburg* (see below).

<sup>2</sup> Andrei bely, *Nachalo veka*, 291. “Instead of life, the cinema; instead of feelings, chaos” (Andrei Bely, *Arabeski* (Moscow: Musaget, 1911), 51); “the disjointed cinema” (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*, 18); “Without connection, without aim, without dramatic meaning, the dying souls gently pours its images over us; symbolism is a number of cinematographic associations, incoherence is the meaning of Blok’s drama” (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya (1923)*. Podgotovka teksta i komment. A.V. Lavrova (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2014), 545. On the perception of early films as a disconnected conglomeration of episodes, see Yuri Tsivyan, “K genezisu russkogo stilya v kinematografе” in *Wiener slawistischer Almanach* vol. 14, 1984, 264.

<sup>3</sup> V.O. Nilender’s translation of *Fragments of Heraclitus* (1910) was published in the series *Orpheus*. On the link between Heraclitus and Orphism, see below.

<sup>4</sup> Andrei Bely, “Orfei”, *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 66 (author’s spacing).

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Bely, *Arabeski*, 58.



This quote should be placed alongside an excerpt from the chapter "The Guest" from *Petersburg* (the Bronze Horseman appears to the hallucinating terrorist Dudkin):

The metal Guest, glowing beneath the moon with a thousand-degree fever, now sat before him burning, red-purple; now, annealed, he turned a dazzling white and flowed towards the inclining Aleksandr Ivanovich in an incinerating flood; in complete delirium Aleksandr Ivanovich trembled in an embrace of many poods: the Bronze Horseman flowed with metal into his veins.<sup>1</sup>

The hallucination gives Dudkin the ability to make "stone idols" move (the visit of the metal Guest).<sup>2</sup> Apollon Apollonovich, against whom Dudkin plots, and Peter the Great embody one and the same principle, that of state power based on European rationalism (to be more precise, as for Bely the state is more an emblem than an independent theme, the power of European rationalism). The Bronze Horseman, who flows into Aleksandr Ivanovich's veins, repeats the words about Apollo transformed into Orpheus: "the stony mask of art melts" (literally, the monument to Peter the Great; in the novel the "stoniness" of the senator [Apollon Apollonovich], his "stony eyes", "stony gaze", "stony face", the "stony mass" of his head, etc.<sup>3</sup>), beginning to "breathe and live" in Dudkin. After Lippanchenko's murder, Dudkin becomes the living image of the Bronze Horseman.

This excerpt allows us to note that Dudkin (the fruit of Apollon Apollonovich's thoughts) plays the role of Orpheus in the novel (according to a common version of the myth, he is Apollo's son) or that of an impostor who has taken on the task of Orpheus, which is beyond him.<sup>4</sup>

3. It should be noted that Bely was interested not only in the figure of Orpheus but in the Orphic tradition as a whole. In particular, the traces of this interest can be found in the collected articles *Symbolism* (1910). In his comments on the article "The Meaning of Art", Bely retells the so-called "rhapsodic" Theogony. This is the beginning of his retelling: "time, ether and chaos are the basis of everything real".<sup>5</sup> Time (Chronos) is the first of the first

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> I was unable to find a source from which Bely could have taken the notion of Orpheus setting statues in motion. It is possible that the idea appeared in connection with his (simultaneous) work on the novel.

<sup>3</sup> On the motif of the animated statue in the novel, see E.G. Melnikova and V.M. Paperny, "Mednyi Vsadnik v kontekste skul'pturnoi simvoliki romana Andrey Belogo 'Peterburg'", *Blokovskii sbornik VI. Blok i ego okruzhenie* (Tartu, 1985), 85–92.

<sup>4</sup> "Orpheus": the Dionysian disembodiment of the world's formation" (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 607). For more detail on Orphic elements in the image of Dudkin, see Ilona Svetlikova, "Prazdnost' i svoboda ot vremeni: kommentarii k romanu Andrey Belogo 'Peterburg'", *Die Welt der Slaven* (in production).

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910), 546. "At the beginning there was Time (Chronos), Ether and endless Chaos" (Sergei Trubetskoy, *Istoriya drevnei filosofii*, part 1 (Moscow, 1906), 52. Trubetskoy's book was based on a course of lectures which Bely had attended at university (Andrei Bely, "Material k biografii" in Andrei Bely, *Avtobiograficheskie svody: Material k biografii; Rakurs k dnevniku; Registratsionnye zapisi; Dnevnik 1930-kh godov* (Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 105), edited by A.V. Lavrov, et al (Moscow, 2016), 352.

principles. The primacy of time in this version of Orphic Theogony matches the key role played by time in *Petersburg*. Regardless of the fact that the plot of the novel has nothing in common with that of Theogony, such correspondences are hardly accidental. It is difficult to surmise that senator Ableukhov, the main character in the novel, happens to be Chronos without any link to Orphism, which was an important part of Bely's thought at that time.

Also, in the commentary on the article "The Forms of Art" there is a detailed footnote regarding mysteries. Bely mentions Orphic hymns (his information on the mysteries and Orphism came mainly from Vyacheslav Ivanov, who believed that Orphics played a particular role in the history of the Eleusinian Mysteries<sup>1</sup>). Referencing N.I. Novosadsky's book *Orphic Hymns* (1900), Bely noted the syncretism typical of the hymns, "the identification of gods with each other (Hecate with Artemis, Nyx with Cypris, Protogonus with Priapus, Pan with Zeus)".<sup>2</sup> Bely had already "glued together" the characteristics of various prototypes in his "Symphonies". However, he would not use this method so persistently and with such virtuosity until *Petersburg*. In one of his mythological incarnations, the senator is Apollo and Saturn and Chronos.

4. Dudkin arrives from the islands like a "bluish shadow"<sup>3</sup> and several times throughout the novel is called a "shadow". Playing the role of Orpheus, he who is able to make dead matter move and bring the deceased Eurydice back to life,<sup>4</sup> Dudkin is no more than a "shadow". The same logic can be found in the choice of "Dudkin" as his family name. Like Orpheus, who played the lyre, a stringed instrument, Dudkin, the "son" of Apollo, is a pianist (the keyboard of his "executive apparatus" serves "the agitationally inclined masses which are stirred by social instincts"<sup>5</sup>), but he chooses a family name based on a wind instrument similar to the Dionysian flute [*dudka* in Russian]. Bely was following Greek mythology: "The rivalry of two gods [Apollo and Dionysius] is embodied within the cultural and religious sphere in the antagonism of two types of music – wind and strings. A number of myths include the attempt to glorify the cithara and belittle the flute, for example the myth of Marsyas".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On Orphism in Vyacheslav Ivanov's research, see Philip Westbrook, "Dionis i dionisiiskaya traditsiya. Vyacheslav Ivanov: filologicheskie i filosofskie idei o dionisiistve", dissertation, 2007, 65–75.

<sup>2</sup> Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm*, 523; N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny* (Warsaw, 1900), 102–103 (see also 65, 76).

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

<sup>4</sup> See also the image of Orpheus the revolutionary in Bely's article "Green Meadow" (1905), where Eurydice is sleeping Russia, "bound by the hell of death": "Orpheus goes to hell in vain in order to wake her" (Andrei Bely, *Lug zelenyi* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910, 5).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Ellinicheskaya religiia stradayushchego boga. Fragmenty verstki knigi 1917g., pogibshiei pri pozhare v dome Sabashnikovykh v Moskve (publikatsiya N.V. Kotreleva)" in Aeschylus, *Tragedii*, translated by Vyacheslav Ivanov (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 345. On the motif of rivalry between wind and string instruments in *Petersburg* and the resemblance of Lippanchenko to Marsyas, see Robert Mann, "Apollo and Dionysus in Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*", *Russian Review*, 4 (57), 1998, 519.

A similar dialectic produces the constructive principle of *Petersburg*. The senator Ableukhov, who embodies the source which is an enemy of the revolution, is a descendant of Shem,<sup>1</sup> which unambiguously points to his secret revolutionary nature: Bely's political views were close to those of the extreme right, who believed that the Jews were the instigators of the revolution. Furthermore, Ableukhov is related to the "red-skinned peoples".<sup>2</sup> In a conversation, Omry Ronen noted that this can be compared with A.V. Nikitchenko's diaries, which denounced "red-skinned liberals".<sup>3</sup> The senator's passion for geometry indicates that he is both a conservative and a freemason.<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Apollonovich's interest in Kantianism and in the idea of Kant as an "Aryan" philosopher underlines the "Semitic" motive behind the thoughts and actions of the senator's son.<sup>5</sup>

There are many similar examples. It is unlikely that the accent on this type of dialectic is simply a consequence of Bely's intellectual style or a fear of provocation, which formed part of his keen interest in the subject of provocation. In his book on Orphic hymns, Novosadsky notes – and Bely will go on to note – that they contain traces of Heracliticism.<sup>6</sup> Novosadsky was not the only source thanks to whom Bely's contemporaries saw a link between Orphism and Heraclitus. V.O. Nilender's translation of *Fragments of Heraclitus* was the first book published by Musaget in the series *Orpheus*. In his commentary, Nilender notes: "Heraclitus enthusiastically clothes his metaphysics in the language of the mysteries, which Clement of Alexandria expresses in saying that Heraclitus robbed Orpheus".<sup>7</sup> Sergei Trubetskoy, one of Bely's main sources on Greek philosophy, also wrote about how Heraclitus was influenced by the Greek mysteries.<sup>8</sup> Trubetskoy found traces of Orphism in Heraclitus's

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> A.V. Nikitchenko, *Zapiski i dnevnik (1826–1877)*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1893), 13. For Nikitchenko, "redskins" were the embodiment of barbarism and the lack of "any understanding of duty, justice and the law, especially the law" (ibid., 500).

<sup>4</sup> On the ideological undertones of the motif of geometry in the novel, see Ilona Svetlikova, *Moscow Pythagoreans: Mathematics, Mysticism, and Anti-Semitism in Russian Symbolism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ilona Svetlikova, "Kant-semit i Kant-ariets u Belogo", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 5 (93), 2008, 62–98.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm*, 523. N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny*, 54–56, 80–81. Bely focused on the Pythagorean and Stoic elements of the Orphic hymns, noted by Novosadsky (*Simvolizm*, 523; N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny*, 53–56, 77–80, 81–99). Pythagoreanism was extremely important for *Petersburg* (see Ilona Svetlikova, *Moscow Pythagoreans*). The echoes of Stoic teachings in the novel, indirectly via Bely's sources on antique philosophy, require further examination.

<sup>7</sup> *Fragments of Heraclitus*. Clement of Alexandria writes literally "took much from Orpheus" (παρ' Ὀρφέως τὰ πλεῖστα εἴληφεν; Strom. VI, 2.27.2).

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Trubetskoy, *Metafizika v drevnei Gretsii* (Moscow: Mysl', 2010), 224, 248–249, 251.

teachings.<sup>1</sup> According to him, the Heraclitic dialectic involved “a hidden unity, which occurs as a result of the visible struggle between opposing elements and origins”.<sup>2</sup> The “hidden unity, which occurs as a result of the visible struggle between opposites” is an exact description of the logical basis of the novel: for Bely, the revolutionary struggle is “a visible struggle of opposites” or an imaginary struggle: the terrorist is like the senator; the senator is like the terrorist; they are fighting against themselves. Considering Bely’s interest in Orphism and Heraclitus’s involvement in its context (of which Bely was aware), we can cautiously suggest that the accent on this type of dialectic was connected with its supposedly being part of the Orphic tradition.

5. In the preface to his famous book *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (1935), W.K.C. Guthrie wrote that his work will raise suspicions among those “who have learned to read and appreciate classical literature without ever acquiring a specialist’s interest in matters of religion, and who since their sixth-form days have felt an unsatisfied curiosity, not to say exasperation, on reading in their commentaries or hearing from their teachers that this or that passage in one of the great writers, Plato or Pindar or Virgil, is a reflection of Orphic doctrine. ‘This passage is Orphic’, runs the simple comment, and the student is left wondering whether or not his understanding of the text has been helped by the vague associations which the note calls up, and if not, whether his own or the commentator’s stupidity is to blame”.<sup>3</sup> Guthrie suggested that academics were no less likely to be suspicious, having “more than once been given excellent grounds for believing Orphism to be nothing more than a field of rash speculation on insufficient evidence”.<sup>4</sup> We are writing of an epoch which formed a similar relationship to Orphism.

In calling their series of mystical literature *Orpheus*, the Musaget group displayed the same “pan-Orphic” views as Salomon Reinach, who gave the name *Orpheus* to his history of religion (1909): from his point of view, there were Orphic elements in all religions.<sup>5</sup> In a similar way, the “Orphics” at Musaget saw in Orphism the common dominator of the entire mystical tradition.<sup>6</sup> In addition, as both Bely and Ivanov saw religious and mystical experi-

<sup>1</sup> Sergei Trubetskoy, *Istoriya filosofii v drevnei Gretsii*, 51. On the defining role of Orphic mysticism in the history of Greek mythology: *ibid.*, 55 (Heraclitus is among the philosophers named as influenced by it). Also, W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London: Methuen & Co, 1952), 224–231.

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Trubetskoy, “Uchenie o Logose v ego istorii: filosofsko istoricheskoe issledovanie” in Trubetskoy, *Sochineniya* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1994), 57.

<sup>3</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, vii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> On Reinach’s “pan-Orphism”, see Guy G. Stroumsa, “The Afterlife of Orphism: Jewish, Gnostic and Christian Perspectives”, *Historia religionum. An International Journal*, 4, 2012, 139–140. Reinach’s work was published in Russian in its entirety in 1910 (later other translations of the first book were published: in 1913, edited by I.I. Tolstoy and in 1919, edited by A.E. Yanovsky).

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie noted the tendency to use the term “Orphic” for all manifestations of mysticism in Greek religion (W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, ix).

ence as the root of culture, the Orphic tradition was considered to be a source of the latest cultural values. Ivanov, like Guthrie's teachers, surmised that only knowledge of Orphism could provide the key to "the world outlook of Pindar, Aeschylus and Plato".<sup>1</sup>

6. At the basis of religious "pan-Orphism" lay the idea of the historical link between Christianity and Orphism which, as Guthrie put it, was a subject of "endless speculation", to which Ivanov paid tribute in his research into Greek religion.<sup>2</sup>

In order to comment on *Petersburg*, it is useful to consider the European context of interest in "Christian" Orphism. Developing Fritz Graff's observations on the link between this interest and Kulturkampf in Bismarck's Germany (the similarity to Greek religion allowed for Christianity to be considered as a historical phenomenon, supporting the striving for a Christianity which was free of official institutions), Guy Stroumsa – based on materials about French Catholicism post-1905 (after the separation of church and state) – came to the conclusion that a particular interest in Orphism appeared as a result of the discussion of the relationship between official religion and personal religious experience. The Orphic tradition attracted those who found the latter more valuable.<sup>3</sup>

There was a similar situation in Russia. In discussing the Orphic interests of the Musaget group, one must consider the problem of the interrelationship of church and state.<sup>4</sup> "The catacomb-like image of Orpheus as a Christian symbol is also our symbol",<sup>5</sup> wrote Bely. In commenting on his words, one must refer to his article "Leo Tolstoy and Culture" (1912), which ends with a call to leave for the "catacombs":<sup>6</sup> the flight and death of Tolstoy, who had been excommunicated, was a stimulus for discussion of the church-state; the "catacomb image of Orpheus" symbolised spiritual freedom.

In order to locate the variations on this theme in *Petersburg*, it is necessary to make a number of comments regarding Musaget's "Orphic" line.

7. There were "two separate lines" at Musaget: the philosophical, which was embodied in the journal *Logos*; and the mystical, in *Orpheus*.<sup>7</sup> They were in conflict, but not so much because the philosophers looked down on mysticism and the mystics despised philosophy, but because, in that ideological

<sup>1</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Religiya Dionisa", *Voprosy zhizni*, 7, 1905, 132.

<sup>2</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 261. On Orphism and Christianity in Vyacheslav Ivanov see primarily Lena Silard, "'Orfei rasterzannyi' i nasledie orfizma", 58–61; see also E.V. Glukhova, "Ya, samozvanets, 'Orfei'..."

<sup>3</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, "The Afterlife of Orphism", 154–155.

<sup>4</sup> Lena Silard, "'Orfei rasterzannyi' i nasledie orfizma", 59.

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Bely, "Orfei", 66.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei Bely, "Lev Tolstoi i kul'tura" in *O religii L'va Tolstogo* (Moscow: Put', 1912), 171.

<sup>7</sup> Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 607. On Musaget, see primarily M.V. Bezrodny, "Izdatel'stvo 'Musaget': gruppovoi portret na fone modernizma", *Russkaya literatura*, 2, 1988, 119–131. M.V. Bezrodny, "Iz istorii russkogo germanofil'stva: izdatel'stvo 'Musaget'" in *Issledovaniya po istorii russkoi mysli: Ezhegodnik za 1999 god* (Moscow: OGI, 1999), 157–198.

context, philosophers and mystics were rivals. The pivot for Musaget's programme was the problem of culture. Interest in this problem was closely connected with the German orientation of the publisher: culture occupied a very important place in German intellectual life at the turn of the century. At first it was intended to name the publishing house Kultura [Culture], while *Logos* was not simply a philosophical journal, but one dedicated to the philosophy of culture.

Articles which set out the ideological platform of *Orpheus* and *Logos* were not so much about mysticism and philosophy as their place within culture. Vyacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bely, who represented *Orpheus*, pointed to the fundamental cultural significance of religious and mystical experience; Fyodor Stepun, of *Logos*, attributed the same significance to philosophy. However, each side attempted to demonstrate not only the superiority of their field over that of their opponent, but their superior knowledge of the latter's field, a superiority due to one's being part of the "main core" of culture, i.e. philosophy (*Logos*) or mystical insight and religious traditions (*Orpheus*). Accordingly, in Stepun's article cautioning against the Orphic hymns sounding like "the tempting songs of fascinating sirens", we find a most clear formulation of the paradigmatic role allotted to Orphism at Musaget: "For every people wishing to achieve the orbit of genuine culture, it is endlessly important to direct one's inner hearing to the sacred hymns of Orpheus, i.e. to feel the effective, concrete, mystical link with the sacred place of eternity".<sup>1</sup> For this reason, Ivanov stresses that authentic *Logos* comes from Orpheus: "Mystic Musaget" is Orpheus, the sun of dark places, the logos of deep, internal, experimental knowledge. Orpheus is a creative word which moves the world; and he signifies God the Word in early Christian symbolism. Orpheus is the source of order in chaos; the exorcist of chaos and its liberator in order. To invoke the name Orpheus means to call the heavenly, organising strength of *Logos* into the darkness of the last depths of personality, which cannot re-alise its own existence without this: fiat lux".<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this conflict, if not from the very beginning, Bely began to perceive *Orpheus* as the "nucleus" of Musaget.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Orphism became key for *Petersburg* for two reasons, which overlap: due to the significance which Bely attributed to the Orphic tradition as such; and due to the significance that it gained during the polemic with *Logos*. During work on the novel, the former was strongly coloured by the latter.

8. Sergei Gessen's article "Mysticism and Metaphysics" was published in the first issue of *Logos*. To a reader interested in mysticism and indifferent to neo-Kantianism, the article was bound to seem an insolent "invasion" of foreign territory. A similar reaction was anticipated from those who were involved in philosophy, but far from neo-Kantianism. Possibly the most

<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Stepun, "Logos", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 72.

<sup>2</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Orfei", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 608. See also Georgy Nefediev, "Ital'yanskije pis'ma Andrey Belogo: rakurs k 'Posvyashcheniyu'" in *Archivio Italo-Russo II*, edited by D. Rizzi and A. Shishkin (Salerno, 2002), 119–120.



irritating and simultaneously weak part of Gessen's article concerned the aims of philosophy: "The liberating role of philosophy as a formal science of values [...] is that it delimits separate fields of science, reconciles disagreements that are a result of metaphysics introducing a particular point of view in to the general and, in this way, removes problems arising from the incorrect statement of the question, within which metaphysical thought struggled helplessly. This is the 'policing role of philosophy' of which Kant spoke".<sup>1</sup> Answering Gessen in his book *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Nikolai Berdyaev called Kant's philosophy "police philosophy".<sup>2</sup> Bely reacted to the position of *Logos* in a very similar way. Many years later, he compared the formalists with "Kant's policemen",<sup>3</sup> an image drawn from the memory of the past polemic with the neo-Kantians, i.e. the philosophical "formalists" of *Logos*.

From the point of view of "philosophical policeman" Fyodor Stepun, Bely's philosophical endeavours and his attempt in the collected articles *Symbolism* to formulate the basis of the symbolist world view were the actions of a dilettante.<sup>4</sup> Bely responded with the article "Cranes and Tomtits": "The first lyric poet was, of course, a dilettante: he did not attempt to show that he was just a poet. Perhaps the last poet will completely forget to think about his poetic purity. He will sing only of that which his dilettante's soul desires. Today he will sing us a system, tomorrow a song, the next day a prayer. And those of us who are grateful to the singer will forget on which shelf we should place that which he has sung".<sup>5</sup> The article was signed with the pseudonym Cunctator. For Bely, the polemic with *Logos* was like a war with encroaching barbarians.<sup>6</sup> And they were not simply barbarians, but, in the context of Musaget, the worst kind: Jews, who were perceived as entirely alien to culture and a danger to it.<sup>7</sup> "Isolated, the princes of Aryan culture perish, defeated by the evil arrows of the barbarians who surround them" wrote Bely, describing the course of "military action" in the above-mentioned article "Lev Tolstoy and

<sup>1</sup> Sergei Gessen, "Mistika i metafizika", *Logos*, 1, 1910, 127. Immanuel Kant, *Kritika chistogo razuma*, translated by N.O. Lossky (Moscow: Nauka, 1998), 40.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Berdyaev, "Filosofiya svobody" in Berdyaev, *Filosofiya svobody. Smysl' tvorchestva* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Bely, *Ritm kak dialektika i "Mednyi Vsadnik"* (Moscow: Federatsiya, 1929), 40.

<sup>4</sup> F.S. [Fyodor Stepun] and Andrei Bely, "Simvolizm", *Logos*, 1, 1910, 281.

<sup>5</sup> Cunctator [Bely], "Zhuravly i sinitsy", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 84.

<sup>6</sup> "Carthaginian razors" are mentioned in connection with encroaching barbarism in "The Crisis of Life" (Andrei Bely, *Na perevale* (Berlin/St. Petersburg/Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Z.I. Grzhebina, 1923), 48). For Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who to a great extent defined Musaget's ideology, the Carthaginian wars – within the framework of the racial concept of history – were fought between "Semites" (Carthaginians) and "Aryans" (Romans) and were one of the defining moments of "Aryan" culture (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, 10th edition (Munich: Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1912), 161–164).

<sup>7</sup> Boris Bugaev, "Shtempelevannaya kul'tura", *Vesy*, 9, 1909, 72–80. On the anti-Semitic phobias of Bely within the context of Musaget, see primarily Mikhail Bezrodny, "O 'yudoboyazni' Andreyeva Belogo", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 28, 1997, 100–125.

Culture”, in which Tolstoy appears in the role of a dilettante who has fallen victim to modernity, poisoned by the spirit of Semitic methodology.<sup>1</sup>

The polemic against *Logos* was led by Bely “under the sign of Orpheus”. Orphism, in Bely’s imagination, was a combination of religious and mystical experience, art and philosophy, and represented that “catacomb” to which it was necessary to flee from the “strictly ruled city” of modern culture, overseen by “Kant’s policemen”: “Walking along street A, I will never reach street B; revealing myself like an artist, I create valuable art works in conditions where it is impossible to create philosophical values. In the universally recognised city of culture there are a number of parallel, unconnected streets – art, science, philosophy – and rarely permitted passages from one street to another, but there are no squares at which the streets meet”.<sup>2</sup> In *Petersburg*, Shem’s descendant, senator Ableukhov, dreams that a “mesh of parallel prospects” will spread across the world.<sup>3</sup> We note that in describing the senator’s dream, Bely calls him a “man of state”: it is not simply Ableukhov who floats above the “black cube” of the carriage in his “geometric” dreams, but a “man of state”.<sup>4</sup> This is not an accidental term. In the article “Stamped Culture”, Bely maintained that “Jews are by their nature men of state” (“any true breath of Aryan culture is non-state, free, rhythmic”).<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, Orphism is part of the struggle not only with state religion, but also with “Semitic” neo-Kantianism, in which Bely saw the philosophical equivalent of state violence. The Orphic tradition, as a banner of this struggle, takes on racial connotations. Furthermore, Bely may have based his ideas on Vyacheslav Ivanov’s notions of “the struggle of the Aryan spirit for freedom of religious creativity”<sup>6</sup> and of Orphism as an “Aryan” weapon in that struggle: “If Christianity were to merge with Orphism, the religion of the Aryans would be saved”.<sup>7</sup>

It is symptomatic that the image of Apollo transubstantiated with Orpheus-emotion in the article “Orpheus” (see above) – bearing in mind that it is about Musaget’s mystical series – was evidently prompted by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (or by Chamberlain as quoted by Emily Metner): “Mysticism is a mythology restored from symbolic images to the field

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Bely, “Lev Tolstoy i kul’tura”, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p. In the article “Lev Tolstoi i kul’tura”, the “modern cultural ideal” is defined as a mesh of parallel prospects” (163).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Bugaev, “Shtempelevannaya kul’tura”, 77–78.

<sup>6</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, “Religiya Dionisa”, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 142. This requires separate comment, connected, in the main, with racial views of the so-called “feeling of nature”. From the point of view of our theme, the only important point is the direct reference to the “Aryan” nature of Orphism. Following Ivanov, Bely suggests a parallel between Orphism and Indian religion (Vyacheslav Ivanov, “Religiya Dionisa”, 132; “Andrei Bely. Vyacheslav Ivanov” in *Russkaya literatura XX veka. 1890–1910*, edited by S.A. Vengerov, vol. 3, book 8 (Moscow: Izd. T-va “Mir”, 1918), 129).

of internal experience and feelings".<sup>1</sup> The scene where Dudkin-Orpheus-emotion is "fused" with the metal Guest literally – like a nightmarish hallucination – embodies the racial notion of mysticism and mystical emotion (because, for Chamberlain, only "Aryans" can access mystical experience). We recall Bely's letter to Razumnik Ivanov-Razumnik of 12 (25) December 1913 in which he states that *Petersburg* "depicts in symbols the places and times of the unconscious life of distorted mental forms" and that "the true location of the novel is the soul of a person who does not feature within it, who is overburdened with intellectual work, and the characters are mental forms which have yet to reach the threshold of consciousness".<sup>2</sup>

9. Evidently, Bely wrote *Petersburg* while directing "[his] inner hearing to the sacred hymns of Orpheus" (see above). The main character in the novel is an Orphic Chronos, "glued together" through syncretism with Saturn and Apollo. The Heraclitic dialectic, perceived as a philosophical development of Orphic mysticism, corresponds to the distinctive dialectic which pervades the novel. It is a hopeless, fatal, "pagan" dialectic.<sup>3</sup> The exception is the dialectic move used in the construction of the Ableukhov coat of arms: the unicorn [*edinorog*] goring a knight represents the fate [*rok*] of heroes<sup>4</sup> and is also a symbol of Christ.<sup>5</sup> The coat of arms of the main characters contains a cypher for the source of danger and how to avoid it: the author plays the traditional role of Orpheus, the herald of Christ.

Bely saw himself as Orpheus from the age of the Argonauts. Dudkin, an imaginary Orpheus, is deliberately referred to as "my shadow",<sup>6</sup> that of the author. One of the similarities between Dudkin and the author is the claim to the role of Orpheus. In a letter to Metner written in February 1913 (in the final period of work on the novel), when Bely was splitting everything he had written into small chapters, he wrote: "[...] it's necessary to *melt down* the chapters into the atomic rudiments of what I have written and fuse them again".<sup>7</sup> "Melt down" [*rasplavlyat'*] is the verb which is used in the article "Orpheus":

<sup>1</sup> Russian State Library, Ф. 167.17.8 Л.6 (underlined by Metner: "Mystik ist Mythologie, zurückge-deutet aus den symbolischen Bildern in die innere Erfahrung des Unaussprechbaren" (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, 694). See also "Mystical experience as an imageless (taking place within the individual soul) phenomenon" (Emily Metner, "Wagneriana. Nabroski k kommentariyu", *Trudy i dni*, 4–5, 1912, 35).

<sup>2</sup> *Andrei Bely and Ivanov-Razumnik. Perepiska* (St. Petersburg: Atheneum-Feniks, 1998), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Bely perceived modernity as deeply pagan (see "Lev Tolstoi i kul'tura", 165, 166, 170). On the pagan features of Heraclitus's philosophy, i.e. on the fatal character of the world process in his philosophy, see Sergei Trubetskoy, *Metafizika v drevnei Gretsii*, 229–230.

<sup>4</sup> See Ilona Svetlikova, "Andrei Belyi o ritme 'Mednogo vsadnika'", *Revue des Etudes Slaves* (in production).

<sup>5</sup> S.D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1973), 150–151; Maria Carlson, "The Ableukhov Coat of Arms" in *Andrey Bely Centenary Papers*, edited by Boris Christa (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1980), 157–170.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

<sup>7</sup> "Iz pisem A. Belogo" in Andrei Bely, *Peterburg* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2004), 516 (Bely's italic).

Orpheus-emotion “melts down” dead symbols (also in the later work “Aaron’s Rod”: “the content of feelings melts down objectness”<sup>1</sup>). As demonstrated earlier, the corresponding passage of “Orpheus” has something in common with Dudkin’s hallucination (the “shadow” of Bely, the imaginary Orpheus), in which the metal Guest melts into him. It seems that this verb – which in this context may invite comparison with Heraclitic fire – appears here because Bely saw his work on the novel as that of a new Orpheus, the guardian and successor of the Orphic tradition. In the phrase “to *melt down* the chapters into the atomic rudiments of what I have written and fuse them again” one can find Vyacheslav Ivanov’s logic for Orpheus’s calling: “the exorcist of chaos and its liberator in order” (see above). “Melting down” liberates chaos and “fusion” harmonises or “exorcises” it.<sup>2</sup> In dividing the novel into short chapters, naming some of them in the style of silent film captions and, accordingly, creating the effect of “the chaos of cinematic associations”,<sup>3</sup> Bely acted like Orpheus, the “liberator” of chaos.

The similarity of *Petersburg* to cinema takes on a new sense. Cinema had meanings which allowed it to be used to create a modern Orphic myth. In Bely’s imagination, the cinema was connected not only with a chaos with Orphic connotations but also with death.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, cinemas were compared to the “kingdom of the dead” and images on the screen were called “shadows”.<sup>5</sup> The leitmotif of shadows in *Petersburg*, which reinforces the similarity of the novel with cinema, gives it the characteristics of a modern Orphic katabasis.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Bely, “Zhezl Aarona”, *Skify*, 1, 1917, 155.

<sup>2</sup> The internal monologue of Dudkin, or perhaps of the author himself (such ambiguity is characteristic), which ends with an address to the Sun as protection against approaching chaos (Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.), can evidently be read as the language of the author-Orpheus, who has carefully studied Vyacheslav Ivanov (“Andrei Bely. Vyacheslav Ivanov”, 141; we propose a more detailed analysis of this excerpt in the book about *Petersburg*).

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Bely, *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg/Moscow: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo “AkademicheskiiProekt”, Progress-Pleyada, 2006), 179.

<sup>4</sup> See also Andrei Bely, *Arabeski*, 46, 53; Bely, *Nachalo veka. Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 545–546.

<sup>5</sup> Yuri Tsivyan, “K genezisu russkogo stilya v kinematografe”, 265, 270–271; Tsivyan, *Istoricheskaya retseptsiya kino: Kinematograf v Rossii. 1896–1930*, 22, 69–70. *Petersburg*’s central motif of Plato’s Cave or a gnoseological prison also motivated the transformation of the characters into shadows and the novel into something akin to cinema (on this motif, see Evgeny Soshkin, *Gipogrammatika. Kniga o Mandel’shtame* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 72–87; Iлона Svetlikova, “Prazdnost’ i svoboda ot vremeni”).

<sup>6</sup> This idea was prompted by Omry Ronen’s article “Katabasis” (see Omry Ronen, *Zaglaviya: Chetvertaya kniga iz goroda Ann*).

Nicoletta Misler

**IMAGES OF THE ORIENT BETWEEN SPONTANEITY  
AND CIVILISATION: FROM NIKOLAY KARAZIN  
TO LEON BAKST<sup>1</sup>**

Beyond doubt, the 1890–1 Eastern journey of Tsesarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich laid the cornerstone of relations between Russia and the East, as Olga Sosnina stressed with the exhibition she organized in Moscow in 2010.<sup>2</sup>

On the first leg of his journey, Greece, the Tsesarevich was accompanied by his cousin George, son of the King of Greece. At that time Greece was viewed not as the land of classical culture, but rather as a country full of primordial colours, light and darkness, that had long been influenced strongly by the East, be it the Byzantine or Ottoman Empire. In other words, Greece was

E. Ukhtomsky  
*A Journey to the East  
of the Tsesarevich*  
Saint Petersburg:  
F.A. Brockhaus, 1893–7.  
Photoprint of the party



<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ludmila Lezhneva.

<sup>2</sup> *Panorama Imperii. Puteshestvie tsesarevicha Nikolaia Aleksandrovicha na Vostok v 1890–1891 gg.* Catalog of the exhibition curated by Olga Sosnina. Tsaritsyno museum complex, Moscow, 2011.

a sort of antechamber to the East.

Almost simultaneously, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists of the “World of Art” association (“miriskussniki”) of Saint Petersburg also addressed the East, which as a mirage or dream became an auxiliary means of the theatricalization of their creative world and formed part of their cosmopolitanism as a local version of chinoiserie and japonism.<sup>1</sup>

A multitude of black-and-white photographs that were brought from the East and spread across Russia and Europe largely inspired that attitude. For instance, Alexander Benois obviously admired the so-called Chinese Palace of Oranienbaum (also referred to as “Dutch” or “Gothic”), which was, incidentally, built by the Italian architect Antonio Rinaldi (1710–1794) and decorated by another Italian, Stefano Torelli (1762–1768). Genuine Chinese tapestries imported by Count Alexey Bestuzhev-Ryumin on Catherine the Great’s personal order<sup>2</sup> were just part of the décor.

Benois saw Torelli as a representative of “decadence” (like the “miriskussniki” themselves), an admirer of their idolized 18<sup>th</sup> century and advocate of chinoiserie, who on the Empress’s whim, for instance, “copied” the gardens of Versailles in the icy winter of Saint Petersburg. Neither Benois, Sergei Diaghilev nor Leon Bakst had ever been to even Central Asia in Eastern Russia, to say nothing of the Middle or Far East, because they invariably went to Paris, Munich, Monte Carlo and Venice while Bakst and Diaghilev even to the United States.

However, Bakst, the most worldly of the “miriskussniki”, was the first to set himself the aim of upsetting that frivolous idea of the East and thus foreshadowed the advent of the avant-garde. To a certain extent his fresh approach, enriched by the new view of primitive art, changed modern art concepts in general. Bakst’s passion for the Orient of India, Persia and Egypt in particular, as well as South East Asia, is well “documented: in the bulk of his better-known stage sets and costumes made for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes from *Cleopatra* (1909) to *Schéhérazade* (1910), *Orientalia* (1910), *Le Dieu Bleu* (The Blue God, 1912) and others. Even the Paris studio of Bakst on Boulevard Malesherbes brimmed with Oriental objects d’art in the 1920s as seen on the famous photographs of Pierre Choumoff and Hélène Roger-Viollet. The Chinese dragon, two figurines of Hindu elephants, a tapestry from Thailand and a statuette of Siam Buddha from Sukhothai, similar to those in the collection Charles Plançon de Regnier (1859 – late 1930s), are now all in the Hermitage.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in none of his writings did Bakst ever mention anything

<sup>1</sup> See *Voobrazhaemy Vostok. Kitai “po-russki” XVII – nachalo XX veka*. Catalog of the exhibition curated by Olga Sosnina. Tsaritsyno museum complex, Moscow, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> In 1763, Catherine sent him as a diplomat to the Chinese border. See Uspensky, A. “Kitaiskii dvorets v Oranienbaume” and also Benois, A. “Kitaiskii dvorets v Oranienbaume”, both in *Khudozhestvennyye sokrovishcha v Rossii*, No. 1, 1901, pp. 184–95 and 196–201.

<sup>3</sup> The Hermitage collection of artworks from Siam (or Thailand) includes not only the gifts of King Rama V of Siam brought in 1907, but also the collection of Charles Plançon de Regnier, a diplomat and Orientalist, who graduated from the law department in Saint Petersburg and was sent





S. Kononov. *Eos*, 1913,  
tinted marble,  
97 × 35.5 × 42  
State Tretyakov  
Gallery, Moscow

that would justify his predilection for Oriental objects (from miniatures to photographs) as the main source of inspiration. This omission may not be accidental: on the contrary, all his pronouncements are on classicism.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, his love for the East was fake while that for classicism quite genuine, almost “physical”.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the easternmost point of his pilgrimages abroad was Greece, which he visited in May 1907 together with Valentin Serov.<sup>3</sup> He felt that that country was not so much an Eastern outpost as the primordial cradle of culture itself, one syncretically identical and close to the Eastern world. That vision is contrasted with the tinted marble sculpture by Sergei Kononov, who for the most part “extracted” imaginary wood folks from roots and tree trunks. As for his *Eos*, the Greek goddess

of the dawn, he barely outlined her face in marble as a metaphor for the myth being born of marble itself, the very essence of the material.

Bakst, who started as a stage designer, had a passion for Greece and classicism that equalled and perhaps even exceeded his sincere love for the East (at least from the theoretical point of view). That was why his trip to Greece was a long-cherished dream come true. A letter to his wife written by Bakst upon his arrival in Athens after a stop in Constantinople is a sort of metaphorical description of the transfer and the connection between the East and Classicism: “I am delighted with Constantinople: motley, dirty, picturesque and oriental. Bought rose oil, sandal and lavender for myself!... Sophia stunned us, the best monument of Byzantium... Acropolis today is sheer delight... Got there by night, downright beyond description”<sup>4</sup>

to the court of the King of Siam as Russia’s ambassador general in 1910. He emigrated after the 1917 revolution, leaving behind his collection, which landed in the Hermitage and was not identified until 1997 in connection with the exhibition “The Art of Siam of the 14<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in the State Hermitage Collection” curated by Olga Deshpande. Saint Petersburg, 1997.

<sup>1</sup> After formulating his special opinion of classicism in art, Bakst published an article, “Puti klassitsizma v iskusstve”, in the journal *Apollo*, No. 2, 1909, pp. 63–78 and no. 3, pp. 46–61. He attached special importance to that essay as attested by its publication in French and English: “Les formes nouvelles du classicisme dans l’art” in *Le Grande Revue*, No. 12, 25 June 1910, pp. 771–800, and “The Paths of Classicism in Art” in *Dance Chronicle*, No. 2, vol. 13, New York, 1990, pp. 170–92. See Bakst, L. *Moia dusha otkryta*. Eds. E. Terkel and J.E. Bowl. Moscow, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to recall the prank he pulled off when he stroked the breast and shoulders of Niobe on the pediment of the Temple of Zeus at the Olympia Museum. Bakst, L. “Serov i Ya v Gretsii. Dorozhnye zapisi”, *Slovo*, Berlin, 1923, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, C. *Bakst in Greece*, Atene, 2009. See also *Muzy i maski. Teatr i muzyka v antichnosti. Antichnyi mir na peterburgskoi stsene*. Exhibition catalog. The Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, 2005. See Lev Bakst. *Serov i Ya v Gretsii*. Ed.E. Terkel. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Cit. Lev Bakst. Letter to Liubov Gritsenko-Bakst of 26 May 1907 in Bakst, L. *Moia dusha otkryta*. vol. II, p. 274.



Sketchbooks with drawings and notes have survived from his Greek journey, strewn about between the Lincoln Center in New York, the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg and several private collections, together with his brief survey of what he had seen published in Russian in Berlin in 1923.<sup>1</sup> *Terror Antiquus*, a picture that Bakst finished a year later, in 1908, was the high point of his impressions from that trip.

L. Bakst. *Terror Antiquus*, 1908, oil on canvas, 250 × 270, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg

That famous painting offers a key to pinpointing the coordinates of the concept of the Orient in Russia to a greater extent from the anthropological and ethnographic than the geographical point of view.

The boundaries of that concept expand or shrink, or even “tumble”, depending on the place from which the East is considered.<sup>2</sup> Location takes us back to the Tsesarevich’s Eastern journey, as is confirmed by an illustration provided by Nikolai Karazin (1842–1908). It captured the moment when the Tsesarevich and his retinue stopped at the hills of Olympia, enraptured by the ruins of the Temple of Zeus. Prince Esper Ukhtomsky (1861–1921), who took part in that expedition as its official chronicler, Sinologist and a leading expert in Buddhism in Russia, described that visit to the ruins of Olympia in minute detail.<sup>3</sup> A storm suddenly broke out and the lightning illuminated the gigantic ruins of the temple. In his vivid illustration Karazin the artist reproduced that literally supernatural scene. It could be claimed that the highly symbolical *topos* served as the first instinctive stimulus for Bakst to visually study another aspect of classicism, that is, not only archaic classicism, but the barbarian one, which had existed still earlier and which he named in Latin *Terror Antiquus*. In fact, although he did not finalize the work until 1908, he had begun working on his project already under that name three years earlier, soon after the publication of Ukhtomsky’s

N. Karazin  
*Self-Portrait*  
from N. Karazin,  
*My Tales*. Saint  
Petersburg: Editions  
A.F. Devrien, 1895



<sup>1</sup> Cit. Lev Bakst. *Serov i Ya v Gretsii*.

<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of Russian geography and culture this was brilliantly demonstrated by Aldo Ferrari in *La foresta e la steppa. Il mito dell'Eurasia nella cultura russa*, Milan, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Ukhtomsky, E. *Puteshestvie tsesarevicha Nikolaia Aleksandrovicha na Vostok v 1890–1891 gg.* In three volumes published by F.A. Brockhaus in Saint Petersburg. The first volume came out in 1893, the second in 1895 and the third in 1897. See also Dmitriev, M. “Syn velikogo belogo tsaria. Puteshestvie Nikolaia Aleksandrovicha po vostoku”. *Antik-inform*, No. 26 March 2005, pp. 93–5.



N. Karazin. Illustrations  
to E. Ukhtomsky's book  
*A Journey to the East  
of the Tsesarevich*. Saint  
Petersburg, 1893–7

a) *Among the ruins  
of the Temple of Zeus  
in Olympia*, India ink  
and white on yellow  
cardboard, 33.1 × 24.7

b) *Ancient sculpture  
(Olympia Museum)*,  
India ink and white  
on yellow cardboard,  
State Russian Museum,  
Saint Petersburg







volumes (the first volume in 1893, the second in 1895 and the third in 1897). Their different and highly popular translations into English, French and German were published somewhat later.

The tongue-in-cheek representation of Zeus the thunder god that Bakst published on the cover of the journal *Satyricon* in 1908 references precisely Ukhtomsky's description of that storm.

Going back to the Olympia visit of the Tsesarevich and his party, we see that Karazin depicted the events in his engraving, analyzing the details and, above all, capturing with nearly photographic precision the most dramatic moment as Ukhtomsky related it:

"The air is sultry. The sky is enveloped with thick clouds. We have to hurry up with our examination of the ruins [...]. We keep walking, now and then stumbling upon rocks. Within the boundaries of the extinct altar of Zeus, by which the priests had foretold the future in the haze of

L. Bakst. Cover  
of the journal  
*Satyricon*, No. 1, 1908,  
Saint Petersburg

burnt offering smouldering before them, Olympia was full of mystical nature.”<sup>1</sup>

The mystical description of Olympia by Ukhtomsky is not surprising, taking into account his leanings towards Eastern religions and meeting with members of the Theosophy Society in Adyar, India. In his chronicle he devoted several fascinating passages to the Tsesarevich's journey. During the august visit Olympia was a sanctuary with numerous monuments, already partially restored, with the ruins of the Temple of Zeus still in the middle. The colossal statue of god made by Phidias of gold and ivory specially for that temple lived on not only in historical memory, but also in the countless replicas reconstructed based on several oral descriptions, one of which, hailing from Rome, was and still is in the Hermitage. Ukhtomsky went on as follows: “His Imperial Highness approaches the shattered seat of the ‘senior pagan celestial being’. The breath of the storm is ever more tangible in the air”.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of that static immersion into the ruins, “The lingering elements finally explode. Snakes of fire pierce the sky. The rain falls in large clear drops. The Crown Prince leaves the abode of Zeus and heads up the mountain”.<sup>3</sup> The Prince and his retinue had to leave the Temple of Zeus fast and look for shelter in the museum. It was with the museum and the image of Zeus, which was in the eastern part of the temple pediment – a classical and calm image of the omnipotent god establishing justice – that Ukhtomsky carries on his narrative to assert that the development of that image of god could be taken as a measure of Greek art development: “Here, in Olympia [...] one gets to know the gradual and agonizingly long development of local art. The extremely naïve prehistorical images of people and animals [...], the increasingly well-thought-out manner and knowledge of anatomy in the impersonation of Zeus, who first appears only as power and storm and is eventually defined as the power of regal wisdom, justice and beauty with the features of a deity and ruler...”,<sup>4</sup> possibly invoking refined and flattering associations with the autocratic rule of the Russian Tsar. Such interpretation of the storm – with Zeus in the centre – conveyed in Ukhtomsky's chronicle the connection between barbarity and Eastern culture, which was expected to become popular in Russia. It was not by chance that Ukhtomsky described that region of Greece only as an isolated land, yet one which “... constantly absorbed outside elements, and even the East had tangibly and profoundly influenced it from times immemorial. The Phoenicians settled there and inculcated the cult of Asian Aphrodite”.<sup>5</sup>

Bakst's contemporaries frequently identified the impassive “goddess” in *Terror Antiquus* as Aphrodite not only by her symbol – the dove in her hand – but also as a prototype of consummate female deity by her patently

<sup>1</sup> Ukhtomsky, E. *Puteshestvie tsesarevicha Nikolaia Aleksandrovicha...*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

“archaic nature”.<sup>117</sup> “Any study of the history of female deities, whatever names the Polyonymous concealed herself under – be it Artemis or Aphrodite or Athena or Astarte or Isis – leads us to the traces of initial femino-monotheism. All images of female deities are varieties of the one goddess, and this goddess is the female beginning of the world, one absolutized gender.”<sup>2</sup>

Echoing the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov’s pronouncements on the matriarchy of the century, the philosopher Florensky enthusiastically welcomed Bakst’s painting: “Small wonder that the destruction of Atlantis became a source of inspiration for one of the most cultured Russian artists – Leon Bakst – in his picture *Terror Antiquus*, which seems the most significant thing that our historical painting of the past few years has produced”.<sup>3</sup>

Rather intuitively than philosophically, Bakst created that archaic primitive Eastern triangle in *Terror Antiquus*, as if reproducing the short circuit of Karazin’s lightning, to illustrate his first impression of the Delphi ruins: the panorama of steep Greek mountains, the outlines of which frequently crop up in the sketchbooks of his Greek journey, seems to have been taken from a bird’s eye view. A parallel with Karazin’s illustration is found in the description of the storm that “welcomed” Bakst and Serov right after their nighttime arrival in a Delphi hotel. The “stormy” welcome was described in the last, more comprehensive and private pages of Bakst’s brief account of his trip across Greece: “Endless wide lightnings are slashing the eye like huge blades – the bottomless abyss beneath the windows seems even more velvety and wilder”. In the unfathomable night “... the gigantic abyss at night – quite at my feet... somewhere deep below in the valley, to the blinding purple – like blue lightnings lie white marble temples. Fairy-like houses that have crumbled under the monstrous arms of the Cyclopes”.<sup>4</sup>

Regrettably, we do not know what his first drawing named *Terror Antiquus* (1905) and shown that year at the exhibition of the “Union of Russian Artists” looked like because it was lost, just as were all the subsequent versions preceding the big painting. However, his amazing account of the storm in Delphi might reflect the fact that Bakst saw it as a portentous and alarming event because in his mind’s eye he associated it with nightmares and death. An apocalyptic vision of a tsunami and swarming people, who are looking for shelter and moving towards, possibly, the Atlantis sanctuaries on the mountain. Karazin’s illustrations were beyond doubt chronologically and ethnographically precise and a far cry from those fantasies of Bakst. With his nearly

<sup>1</sup> C. Kondoleon, G. e M. Behrakis, *Aphrodite and the Gods of Love*. Exhibition catalog, Getty Villa, curated by D. Saunders, Malibu, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ivanov, V.I. “Drevnii uzhas” in *Po zvezdam*, Ory, Saint Petersburg, 1907, p. 413. Reprinted in Ivanov, V. “Drevnii uzhas. Po povodu kartiny L. Baksta *Terror Antiquus*”. See Ivanov, V. *Sobraniye sochinenii v 4-h tomakh*, vol. 3, Brussels, 1979, pp. 91–110.

<sup>3</sup> Florensky, P. “Prashchury liubomudriia” in *Sochineniia*, Moscow, 1985, vol. 2, p. 84. See Florensky, P. *Le Stratificazioni della cultura Egea*, in P. Florenskij, *Stratificazioni*. Ed.N. Misler, translated by V. Parisi, Reggio Emilia, 2008, pp. 107–67.

<sup>4</sup> Cit. Lev Bakst. *Serov i Ya v Gretsii*, p. 58.



maniacal thoroughness, Karazin really interpreted the “esoteric” spirit of the Tsarevich’s tour. It is known from the sundry brief biographies of Karazin<sup>1</sup> that he was not directly involved in the campaign and had been invited owing to his knowledge of India that expanded in the course of his expedition that coincided with the itinerary of the Tsarevich in 1890–1, his fame as an illustrator and author of books for grownups and children and, naturally, his close relations with Tsar Alexander III, for whom he had worked on several commissions to produce illustrations (some 700 pictures!) for different editions of the historical chronicles of Ukhtomsky.

Karazin started his career in the army, then was transferred to diplomatic service, afterwards became a battle scene artist affiliated with the Saint Petersburg Academy and, finally, emerged as an expert on Central Asia, Turkmenistan in particular, and an influential member of the Russian Geographical Society. Under the aegis of the latter Karazin took part in ethnographical expeditions to the Amu-Darya basin. During his long career of a war artist chronicler (in Turkmenistan and then in the Serbian-Turkish and Russo-Turkish wars of 1877–8) and ethnographer, he proved especially reliable for the veracity of his pictures. He did illustrations for Ukhtomsky’s book using the numerous photographs taken by expedition members and those purchased by or gifted to the Tsarevich in the lands he visited. Karazin was the first artist to make Russian postcards. He made them in the form of collages using elements typical of every country he had been to. He employed the same technique when illustrating Ukhtomsky’s chronicles, excelling in conveying the spirit of the author and scrupulously detailing the ethnographical distinctions between different countries and individual localities. Now and then, as in the case of the Greek episode, he nearly succeeded in making his presence felt. His representations of India and especially Siam are memorable not only for his exceptional technique, but also for his ability to achieve nearly tactile perception of the tropical atmosphere, the hypnotizing charm of animals and exotic monsters, and the ecstatic visions of monuments discernible in the sizzling tropical fogs. Needless to say, he owed the precision of his representations of monuments to the numerous photographs that King Rama V (Chulalongkorn, 1853–1910) of Siam gifted to the Tsarevich at their meeting in Siam.<sup>2</sup> Bakst, too, managed to convey the warmth and mystery of the jungle, especially in his picture of the *Siamese Dance* (1901, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), which reproduced one of the most ravishing dances – the Lantern

<sup>1</sup> Sadoven, V. *Russkie khudozhniki-batalisty XVII–XIX vv.* Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1955, pp. 301–5; Nagaevskaia, E. “N.N. Karazin 1842–1908” in *Russkoie iskusstvo. Ocherki o zhizni i tvorchestve khudozhnikov 2-oi poloviny XIX veka*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971, vol. 2, pp. 357–68, Gerasimova, D. “Karazin Nikolai Nikolaevich”, <http://www.artsait.ru/art/k/karazin/main.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Over 200 photographs taken by V.D. Mendeleev (1865–1898), son of the famous chemist, at a semi-professional level during journeys are at the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg and the Naval Museum, St. Petersburg. Some were exhibited at “Journey to the East”. Introduction by Alexander Teriukov. EGO Museum and Exhibition Centre, Saint Petersburg, 1998. It was the reconstruction of an exhibition held at the Raphael Loggias of the Hermitage in the winter of 1894/5.



Dance performed by the ballet company of the royal court of Siam on a tour of Saint Petersburg in 1900.<sup>1</sup> I mean here the only canvas Bakst painted on the “Eastern” subject, which was neither transformed nor used in his countless stage sets on the Oriental theme. The fact that, just as in *Terror Antiquus* of 1908, Bakst did an oil painting and that, for all its dramatic nature and obvious “staginess”, that painting was never reworked for the stage, makes one believe that Bakst had no desire to comment on his work, regarding the two pictures as a single declaration of his creative and philosophical creed.

N. Karazin. Illustration to E. Ukhtomsky's book *A Journey to the East of the Tsesarevich Temples of Siam, India* ink and white on yellow cardboard, 33.1 × 24.7, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg

<sup>1</sup> Misler, N. “Ex-Oriente Lux: The Siamese Ballet in St. Petersburg in 1900” in *Annali I.U.O.*, vol. 46, Napoli, 1986, pp. 197–21. For an updated version see “Siamese Dancing and the Ballets Russes” in *The Art of the Enchantment. Diaghilev's Ballets Russes 1909–1929*. Exhibition catalog. Ed. N. von Baer. M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, 1988, pp. 78–83.



N. Karazin. Illustrations to E. Ukhtomsky's book *A Journey to the East of the Tsarevich* Photograph of Hindu temples, 1890–1, National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg

of early Symbolism he admired so much in the academic craftsmanship of Karazin and his fantastic illustrations.

Finally, Bakst faced the problem of self-identification, or rather, wished to be accepted by “good society” as a “Russian artist”,<sup>1</sup> and in this sense he could take Karazin as “an ally”. With his background of a traveller and ethnographer Karazin developed tolerance for and openness towards “others”, which was unusual in Russia at that time. In one of his well-known tales – *From North to South* (1890)<sup>2</sup> – that he illustrated himself, Karazin wrote that Father Stork reproached his son for misusing the term “ours” and explained its meaning as follows: according to him, although peoples, personalities and interests may differ, the word “ours” means “everybody”, so the world should not be divided into “ours” and “others” because in the long run life and death are the same for everyone.<sup>3</sup>

Now if Bakst could easily attribute the representation of a lightning on the Olympia ruins in Karazin's work to his apocalyptic vision of classical Greece, the precision of Karazin's ethnographical reconstructions was akin to the meticulousness with which Bakst himself studied and prepared his stage designs, paying more attention to the precision of individual detail than to the reconstruction of the historical context. This is seen, for instance, in a fragment from one of his Greek journey sketchbooks subsequently incorporated into the backdrop for Maurice Ravel's ballet *Daphnis and Chloe* (1912). The same is true of his costumes for Euripides's tragedy *Hippolytus* (1903) at the Aleksandrinsky Theatre of Saint Petersburg. It was the first time

Anyhow, in his free “Oriental” reconstructions Bakst seemed to have been inspired not so much by Karazin's illustrations as by the watercolours of the seascape artist Nikolai Gritsenko (1856–1900), who earned the title of the official artist of the Naval Ministry in 1894 and accompanied Tsarevich Nicholas in his capacity of the artist. He did about 300 pictures of localities, objects and people he met. Gritsenko and Bakst maintained close relations when the former was still the first husband of Liubov, who was to become the wife of the latter.

Bakst might have found the forms

<sup>1</sup> Bakst is known to have avoided speaking about his family and his native Grodno, a shtetl in the Pale of Settlement, and repeatedly claimed in his interviews abroad that he was born in Saint Petersburg. See Bakst, L. *Moia dusha otkryta*.

<sup>2</sup> Karazin, N. *S severa na iug. Putevyie vospominaniia Starogo Zhuravlia*. Saint Petersburg: Editions A.F. Devrien, 1890.

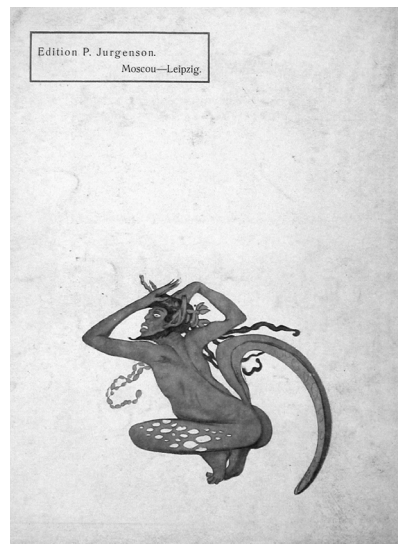
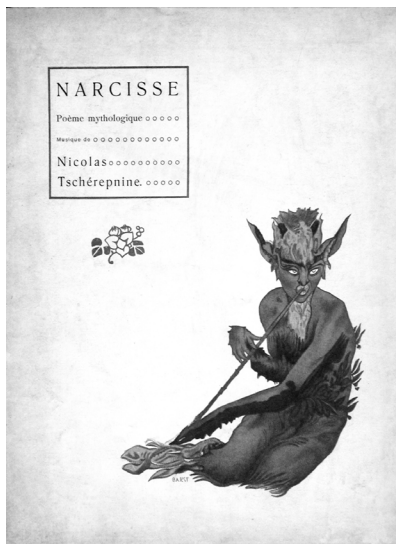
<sup>3</sup> Cit. Gerasimova, D. *Karazin Nikolai Nikolaievich*.





L. Bakst. *Narcisse*,  
1911. Music by  
N. Tcherepnin,  
playbill

L. Bakst. Front  
and back covers.  
Leipzig-Moscow:  
Editions P. Jurgenson



been striving to make the picture baffle myself with terror; the water in the foreground is ‘bottomless’”.<sup>1</sup>

He uses the same word “bottomless” when describing the stormy night in Delphi, lit up by flashes of lightning and turning ever more dreadful with a flock of eagles flying above the valley.

During the stormy spring nights, according to Bakst, the nocturnal Persephone on the black basalt throne is waiting for the sons of the sun with the threatening lightnings of Zeus in the background. This chthonic and Dionysian aspect of Greek culture graphically conveys Bakst’s vision of the Orient. This is corroborated by all the designs of ballet costumes he made both on classical and Oriental themes: those made for the orgiastic dances of nymphs, bacchantes and women of Boeotia (*Narcissus*, 1911), whose movements have much in common with the sensuality of odalisques in *Schéhérazaïde* or *Cleopatra*. His fauns (*L’après midi d’un faune*) or the “lower” deities and monsters in *Narcissus* evoking the much maligned monsters<sup>2</sup> of the Hindu empyreans are just as diverse. Now if Valentin Serov, his travelling companion, returned from Greece with a sunny picture of the virgin *Nausicaa in a Chariot on the Seashore* (1910, Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg), Bakst brought back the nightmares of *Terror Antiquus* and the oneiric fear of obscure rituals, the unaccountable link of which with the standard representation of eastern sensuality he had studied only too well.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lev Bakst. Letter to Liubov Gritsenko-Bakst of 27 July 1908 in Bakst, L. *Moia dusha otkryta*, vol. I, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Mitter, P. *Much Maligned Monsters. A History of European Reaction to Indian Art*, Chicago, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, D. “Diaghilev Ballets Russes and the Vogue for Orientalism” in *Sensualismens Triumf*. Exhibition catalog. Ed.E. Näslund. Dansmuseet, Stockholm, 1993, pp. 125–30.

While doing so, he established a far deeper connection between ancient culture (be it Greek or Eastern) and primitivism. This conclusion revolutionized the very concept of the primitive and soon found reflection in the desire of the avant-garde to take credit for its origin. For instance, Alexander Shevchenko offered the following explanation in his *Neoprimitivism* manifesto of 1913:

“The word primitive points directly to its Eastern derivation, because today we understand by it a whole pleiad of Eastern arts – Japanese art, Chinese, Korean, Indo-Persian, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

This categorical conclusion is strongly supported by Natalia Goncharova’s well-known statement that the East is “the primary source of all arts”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shevchenko, A.V. *Neoprimitivizm. Ego teoriia. Ego vozmozhnosti. Ego dostizheniia*, Moscow, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Goncharova, N. *Vystavka kartin Natalii Sergeevny Goncharovoi, 1900–1913*. Exhibition catalog, Moscow, 1913.



Tessel Bauduin

## PSYCHIC AUTOMATISM IN EARLY SURREALISM<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Surrealism was officially established in 1924 with the publication of the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* by Andre Breton (1896–1966), but its first experimental activities had already taken place during the early 1920s. Among these was a series of experimental seances, known as “the sleeping sessions”, which were held between the autumn of 1922 and early spring 1923. During these sessions, automatism was experimented with and unconscious states were explored.

The very first sleeping session took place on the night of 25 September, 1922. Breton and his wife Simone Kahn-Breton entertained the young poets Rene Crevel, Max Morise and Robert Desnos at their house on 42, rue Fontaine, Paris. At 9 p.m. they proceeded to conduct what appeared to be a seance: the lights were dimmed and they sat around a table holding hands. After a while, Crevel – the instigator of the whole adventure – entered a trance-like state, uttering cries, words and sentences. Afterwards, when awakened, he remembered nothing. A second attempt was made immediately: now Desnos entered a trance-state, during which he too uttered some words and scratched at the table. This first session was considered a success and over the following days, weeks and then months a varying group of young poets and artists, who would soon form the core of the officially established Surrealist movement, conducted many more sessions. Additional participants included the couple Gala and Paul filuard, the poet Benjamin Peret, the German artist Max Ernst, the poet Louis Aragon, the American

<sup>1</sup> The text is published as submitted by the author.

This essay originally appeared as ‘Psychic Automatism in Early Surrealism’, in: Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible, K. Almqvist and L. Belfrage (eds.). Stockholm: Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015, 141–158. Reproduced here by kind permission of the editors.

© Axson Johnson Foundation and Tessel M. Bauduin.



Man Ray  
 Working Dream  
 Seance. 1924,  
 gelatin silver print  
 11,3 × 83 cm

photographer Man Ray, and the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, among others. In a 1924 photograph taken by Man Ray, we see many of these Surrealists gathered for a re-enactment of a sleeping session at the Bureau of Surrealist Research.

Crevel, Desnos and Peret proved to be the most adept at entering ranees. While in a trance-state, they recounted stories, recited poems, answered questions, wrote or drew on paper, and even moved and walked about. Other committed participants, however, such as Breton, Ernst, filuard, and Morise, were never able to enter what was termed a “sleeping state”, “despite their good will”.<sup>1</sup>

The sessions took their toll on the participants. As Kahn wrote to her cousin: We’re living simultaneously in the present, the past, and the future. After each seance we’re so dazed and broken that we swear never to start up again, and the next day all we can think about is putting ourselves back in that catastrophic atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

A catastrophic atmosphere indeed; the sessions turned dark and even violent. Illness and death were predicted for several participants. Desnos proved more and more difficult to wake up. Jugs of water were thrown around, penknives were drawn, people even attempted to hang themselves. In an essay entitled “A Wave of Dreams”, Aragon wrote:

Those who submit themselves to these incessant experiments endure a constant state of appalling agitation, become increasingly manic. They grow thin. Their trances last longer and longer. They don’t want anyone to bring them round any more. They go into trances to meet one another and converse like people in a faraway world where everyone is blind, they quarrel and sometimes knives have to be snatched from their hands. The very evident

<sup>1</sup> Breton A. *The Lost Steps* / Ed. Mark Polizzotti. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 1996. P. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Polizzotti M. Profound Occultation // *Parnassus* 30, 1–2 (2008), P. 1–37.

physical ravages suffered by the subjects of this extraordinary experiment, as well as frequent difficulties in wrenching them from a cataleptic death-like state, will soon force them to give in to the entreaties of the onlookers leaning on the parapet of wakefulness, and suspend the activities which neither laughter nor misgivings have hitherto interrupted.<sup>1</sup>

Things were clearly getting out of hand. Early in 1923 the sessions came to an end.<sup>2</sup>

For all that the sessions ended in rather negative circumstances, the Surrealists were still very much impressed with the experiences they had gained during what came to be called “the time of slumbers”. Several poems and spoonerisms first spoken or written during these sessions were published. Breton and Aragon, among the first Surrealists, published written accounts of the seances – Breton “The Mediums Enter”, which came out while the sleeping sessions were still in full swing, and Aragon the essay “A Wave of Dreams”, already mentioned, which was published in 1924.<sup>3</sup>

The experiences of these sessions formed the basis for Breton’s (first and famous) definition of Surrealism: tessel m. bauduin

*SURREALISM*, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.<sup>4</sup>

Below, I will discuss the Surrealist practice of “psychic automatism”, using the activities of the sleeping sessions as my point of departure. I will briefly touch upon the origins of the sleeping sessions, as well as the origins of the practice of automatism, before discussing the development of automatism within Surrealism. Issues that will be highlighted include the Surrealist fascination with dreams, various automatic techniques and questions of authorship. This will lead to a definition of “psychic automatism” and insight into the role of automatism as a practice in Surrealism. Finally, I will make some brief comparison to the case of the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944), who painted large parts of her *oeuvre* in an automatic state.

<sup>1</sup> Aragon L. A Wave of Dreams [1924] / Trans. S. de Muth (2003) // *Papers of Surrealism* 1 (2010), [http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal/acrobat\\_les/deMuth.pdf](http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal/acrobat_les/deMuth.pdf) (accessed 4.7.2013), p. 6f.

<sup>2</sup> Find description of the sleeping sessions in Gerard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* / Trans. A. Anderson. Chicago; London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002. P. 38–41. See original documentation in: *The Autobiography of Surrealism* / Ed. by M. Jean (New York, 1980), pp. 100–107.

<sup>3</sup> Entrée des médiums // *Littérature* (new series) 6. November, 1922; later included in: Breton A. *The Lost Steps*. Op. cit. 89–95. «Une vague des rêves» appeared originally in «Commerce 2» (1924).

<sup>4</sup> Breton A. *Manifestoes of Surrealism* / Trans. R. Seaver & H. R. Lane. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1972. P. 26.

## AUTOMATISM AND SLEEP

The Surrealists were fascinated by the concept of the unconscious, first elaborated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and still quite novel in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Various early Surrealists, most importantly Breton and Aragon (1897–1982), had studied medicine, psychiatry in particular. They were familiar with psychiatric handbooks, as well as with the works of important psychiatrists of the time, such as Pierre Janet, and the treatises of Sigmund Freud, so they knew of medical research into states of consciousness, hypnosis, mental illness and psychoanalysis. The unconscious is not easily accessed. In accordance with medical theory of the time, the Surrealists believed that the unconscious expressed itself in dreams, for instance. Another way of accessing it was through automatism. The idea was that in an “automatic” state – that is to say when one is fully dissociated from one’s conscious personality and therefore acting without thinking, as if one is an automaton or machine – one can establish direct contact with the unconscious. Breton and his fellow poet Philippe Soupault (1897–1990), had already been experimenting with automatic writing since 1919. This had resulted in *The Magnetic Fields* (1920), a co-authored composition consisting entirely of automatic writing. It is a milestone in the Surrealist exploration of automatic writing, and a milestone of automatic writing in modern literature generally.<sup>1</sup>

The Surrealists considered automatism in two ways: as a mental state (to be automatic or act automatically), and as a mental technique (to practice automatism). Although automatism is often considered the quintessential Surrealist practice, it should be noted that the Surrealists did not invent it; rather, they appropriated it from the medical science of their day: dynamic psychiatry, the precursor to modern psychiatry and psychology. In dynamic psychiatry automatism served two functions: that of therapeutic practice and tool for studying particular states of consciousness. The adjective “psychic”, in Breton’s definition of Surrealism as psychic automatism, was adapted from the discipline of psychical research, in which many dynamic psychiatrists engaged. It refers to the *psyche*, the mind. This fact illustrates the important connections between early Surrealism and dynamic psychiatry, but also the Surrealists’ obsession with all things to do with the mind, in particular the dark, unexplored and therefore fascinating and inspiring recesses of the mind. The idea was that there one would find “pure thought” – that is to say, thought that is free from the “control” of reason, as well as from the “aesthetic and moral concern” that Breton mentioned in his definition. After all, reason and concerns about aesthetics and morals were only bourgeois constructions, from which, as an avant-garde movement, Surrealism wanted to break away.

<sup>1</sup> Breton A. & Soupault Ph. *The Magnetic Fields* / Trans. D. Gascoyne // Breton A., Eluard P & Soupault Ph. *The Automatic Message – The Magnetic Fields – The Immaculate Conception* / Ed. by D. Gascoyne & A. Melville. London: Atlas, 1997. P. 37–145.

There is a more or less natural human state that is also exempt from reason and morals: dreaming. Building upon theories about dreams formulated by Freud and others, the early Surrealists associated “pure functioning of thought” with dreams and sleep states. As Breton wrote as early as 1923, the year of the sleeping sessions, the term “surrealism” designates “a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state”.<sup>1</sup> Automatism and dreaming were regarded as related.

As dreams were considered manifestations of the unconscious, the Surrealists aimed at integrating the dream into waking life. This might create sur-reality (that is to say, hyper-reality), rather like integrating the fantastical into the quotidian, the chaotic into the ordered, the unconscious into the conscious would. One way of bringing dreams into waking life was to tell them to each other or to write them down, both of which the Surrealists did. Max Ernst (1891–1976), for one, experimented at length with dream work and used his dreams as the departure point for many of his paintings during this period. Scholars even speak of an “oneiric [dream] climate” in Surrealism.

However, Breton and others worried that in the process of writing dreams down, as in telling them afterwards, the dreams would be edited and restructured, not to mention negatively influenced by fallible memory. This would negate the objective of bringing one’s dreams out in the open so as to celebrate the unconscious directly and circumvent the conscious. Impressed by the early successes with automatic writing and spurred on by the need to access their dreams as purely as possible, the Surrealists began to experiment with automatic speaking in a dream-like state: the sleeping sessions. I argue therefore that the early Surrealist seances should be considered sessions of lucid dreaming. Breton described the mental state during the sessions as hypnotic sleep or slumber, and he would call the entire period the *epoque dessommeils* (or “time of slumbers”). Aragon’s text, tellingly entitled “A Wave of Dreams”, overflows with references to sleeping and dreaming and, conversely, waking. Terms such as “trance” and “unconscious states”, often used in discussions of the Surrealist sleeping sessions, are only later interpretations of translators and art historians. In fact, what the Surrealists were attempting to do during the seances was to dream lucidly: to give a “live” account, as it were, of their dreams, by means of verbal automatism.

Automatic writing is one thing, though: how does one go about automatically speaking one’s dreams?

#### THE TIME OF SLUMBERS: A CLOSER LOOK

Surrealist automatism was not based solely upon contemporary psychiatry. Both the origins of automatism as a practice, and of the Surrealist sleeping sessions as seance, can be located in Spiritualism, the 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritual movement founded on a belief in the possibility of communication with the

<sup>1</sup> Breton A. *The Lost Steps*. Op. cit. P. 90.

dead, and other non-bodily and possibly non-human beings. In fact, automatic writing was originally a spiritualist practice, appropriated for psychiatry by the psychiatrist Pierre Janet.

The Surrealists' decision to organise the sleeping sessions as a seance was directly inspired by spiritualism. Spiritualism had regained popularity in France in the years after World War I and many Surrealists were fairly familiar with its practices. Rene Crevel (1900–35), instigator of the sessions, had himself been “initiated” by a spiritualist medium, as Breton described:

Two weeks ago... Rene Crevel described to us the beginnings of a “spiritualist” initiation he had had, thanks to a certain Madame D. This person, having discerned particular mediumistic qualities in him, had taught him how to develop these qualities; so it was that, in the conditions necessary for the production of such phenomena (darkness and silence in the room, a “chain” of hands around the table), he had soon fallen asleep and uttered words that were organised into a generally coherent discourse, to which the usual waking techniques put a stop at a given moment.

In the same text, however, Breton immediately made it clear that the Surrealist involvement with Spiritualism went no further than Crevel's initiation and the acceptance of the necessary conditions:

It goes without saying that at no time, starting with the day we agreed to try these experiments [the sleeping sessions], have we ever adopted the spiritualistic viewpoint. As far as I'm concerned, I absolutely refuse to admit that any communication whatsoever can exist between the living and the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Other Surrealists also emphasised their disbelief in spiritualism. Spiritualist techniques, however, were clearly acceptable enough.

The story of Crevel's initiation by Madame D provides several clues to how we should interpret the sessions: the reference to the necessary conditions, as well as to such phenomena as Crevel falling asleep and subsequently being woken by “the usual waking techniques” and, lastly, Breton's use of terms such as “words” and “discourse”. I will explore these four issues below.

The references to sleeping and waking are further evidence that the surrealists considered the mental state during the sessions one of semi-sleep, of lucid dreaming, as argued above. The phenomena referred to are the instances of speaking, writing, talking, drawing etc – the actual experiences during the sessions. As Surrealism during this early time was primarily a literary movement, it is no surprise that the phenomena are mostly those of a poet or novelist (automatic speaking, automatic writing), which also squares with Breton's emphasis on words and discourse – quintessential concerns of the aspiring poet and writer. Finally, the trappings of the seance, such as holding hands and dimming the lights, are considered conditions: the prerequisite formal arrangements for making something happen.

However, the Surrealists quickly left those particular conditions behind. They dispensed with the form, the seances, while continuing the practice,

<sup>1</sup> Breton A. *The Lost Steps*. Op. cit. P. 92



automatism. Someone like Desnos could eventually “sleep” anywhere, whether on the couch in Breton’s home or in a Parisian cafe. He was captured often on film by Man Ray, entranced in a slumbering state.

With his famous definition of 1924 (“pure psychic automatism”), Breton codified the entire practice of Surrealism as investigation of the psyche, explicitly referring to the technique of automatism. By means of psychic automatism, the early Surrealists attempted to establish contact with “pure thought”, which was understood as authentic and original, and therefore the basis – or even object – of art. His condition that automatism could be either verbal or written emphasises that the first experiments were conceived within a literary framework. The phrase “or in any other manner” opens the door for the other arts as well.

#### FROM AUTOMATIC WRITING TO AUTOMATIC PAINTING

Besides automatic writing and speaking, automatic drawing was also used during the sleeping sessions, and although the sessions were discontinued, all these practices continued afterwards. The French artist Andre Masson (1896–1986), in particular, was adept at automatic drawing and would employ it throughout his career. As we can see in illustration, his automatic drawing is characterised by a flowing and quickly drawn free line.

The pen hardly leaves the paper, which is characteristic of automatic and mediumistic drawing in general. Often Masson’s drawings suggest an erotic theme, which is consistent with the fact that they were more or less unconsciously created and therefore reflected unconscious desires and/or anxieties.

During the second half of the 1920s, Surrealism developed from a literary movement into a fully fledged artistic movement in which the visual arts took a central role. This required that the practice of automatism was adopted so that painters too could work more or less automatically. The Surrealists were already familiar with the technique of collage, which was practised by many Dadaist artists and dates back to Cubism. It became a staple of Surrealist art, whether in the form of literary games (the *cadavre exquis*, or stringing together of strange words and phrases); or through creating images by pasting various cut-outs together; or as photo collage and photomontage, often seen in the Surrealist journals. Ernst, in particular, often worked with automatic techniques and many of his works are created with the techniques of frottage and grattage. Both are a way of creating patterns by means of chance, by rubbing a pencil on paper over a textured surface such as wood, or in the case of grattage, doing the same with canvas and scraping paint over it with a palette knife. The resulting patterns formed the basis for the art work, to which the artist would add a few other elements.<sup>1</sup> In *The Petrified Forest*, for instance, we can see that Ernst has obtained strange and haunting patterns by laying

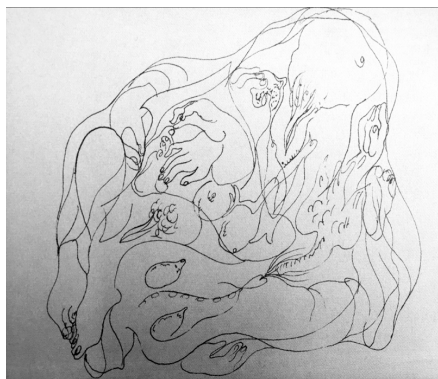
<sup>1</sup> See also: Spies W. *Nightmare and Deliverance* // Max Ernst: *A Retrospective* / Ed. by W. Spies & S. Rewald. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. P. 3–20.

the paper upon differently patterned wood and little pieces of string, as well as a perfectly round object. Ernst would continue to use these techniques during his life, creating large oil canvases during the war such as *The Sound of Silence* that combine frottage, grattage and ink blotting with very finely painted details.

As these techniques indicate, the practice of automatism developed to maximise chance and randomness and minimise the conceptual intent of the artist in creating the art work, at least in its initial stages. The patterns formed the basis for associations on the part of the artist, as unconscious as possible. Obviously, there would eventually be a stage of conscious, active and intentional creation anyway, which is why these visual techniques are also sometimes referred to as semi-automatic. The unconscious associations often spring from fear, anxiety or desire, leading to the strange and fascinating, and typically Surrealist, art works. In turn, these works may serve viewers as departure points for their own unconscious associations or daydreams, as both images by Ernst well illustrate.

In parallel, the photographer Man Ray developed techniques of “automatic” photography, such as the “rayogramme” (camera-less photography or photogram, a technique that already existed), which again try to minimise the input of the artist. Ray would leave certain objects, such as a piece of rope or film, lying on top of photosensitive paper and wait for natural light (the sun) to develop the negative. Again, this is a technique in which chance acts as a creator, but always in concert with the artist. For all the dreamy quality of the photograms, such as *Rayograph*, it is obvious that a significant amount of conscious choice on the part of the photographer is still involved.

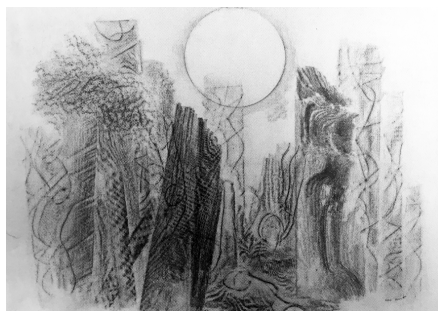
Eventually many different techniques of automatism were practised in Surrealism. They all have one thing in common: they were considered above all a liberating technique. Automatism frees one from the role of having to be the author, that is to say, from having to consciously and intentionally envision a work of art or literature within one’s mind and then actively create it. Rather, one can rely upon chance and unconscious associations in creating the work, opening the way for the psyche (pure thought) to come through. Automatism therefore liberates the



Andre Masson

*Automatic Drawing*, 1924

ink on paper 23,5 × 20,6 cm



Max Ernst

*The Petrified forest*

1929, charcoal on paper

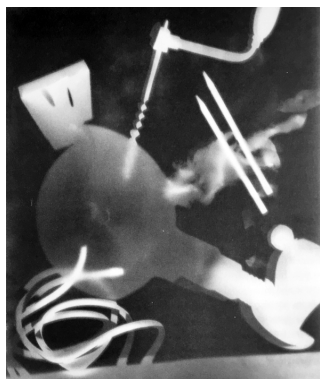


Max Ernst

*The Sound of Silence*

1943–44, oil on canvas

108 × 141 cm



Man Ray  
*Rayographe*,  
 1923, photogram  
 49 × 39,5 cm

artist from the constraints placed on the mind by rationality, morality, society at large, and in particular, from artistic training. Once one has learned something, it is difficult to unlearn, which means that poets and painters struggle to create authentically from the unconscious, rather than rationally and mediated by the techniques they have been taught. The Surrealist idea behind psychic automatism is to contact one's own thought directly, without interference by the intermediary of the conscious, rational and cultured self. We can therefore say that psychic automatism is a mechanism of "de-skilling":<sup>1</sup> of moving beyond the interference of one's training and creating directly from the unconscious.

#### AUTOMATISM, AUTHORSHIP AND TALENT

It is only the trained artist or poet who needs to use automatism as a technique to create without skill – those who are untrained, such as outsider artists, can enter into an automatic state directly when they create. According to the Surrealists, examples of such automatic artists were simple people, who created naive or folk art, or the mentally unbalanced, who created so-called asylum art. The archetypal untrained artists were children and "primitives" or tribal peoples, who were still unburdened by the moral and aesthetic concerns of Western civilised adult society. Surrealism should strive to emulate these types of "pure" artists. To that end, the Surrealists should be talentless, because "talent" was considered a bourgeois deceit.

Furthermore, they should be as much as possible like a mechanical device – in other words, something automatic – or so Breton maintained: "simple receptacles of so many echoes" or "modest recording instruments". As such, the Surrealist is naturally, as it were, "without talent".<sup>2</sup> There are clear overtones here of Spiritualism, in which the medium too was understood to function as a medium, in the sense of device or apparatus. Spiritualist mediums were thought to be mere instruments recording messages, in their case coming from the other side of death or from metaphysical planes, so that they had no need of something like talent, or even skill.

The technological discourse that underlies all of this is obvious and important. Spiritualism followed directly in the footsteps of technological inventions in the field of communication: after the telegraph had been invented, spirits started knocking on tables, and as soon as the telephone and radio became widespread, mediums also began speaking. After all, if one can establish contact with a disembodied voice halfway around the world, why

<sup>1</sup> «Deskilling» is described by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois & Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. Cm.: *Art since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011. P. 575.

<sup>2</sup> Breton A. *Manifestoes*. Op.cit. P.27f.

not from the other side of death as well? And even though communication technology is not so prominent in Surrealist discourse, Surrealism too responded to modernity's mechanisation and imposition of technology. The very word "automatism" is derived from the automaton, and not only indicates the mechanical nature of something, or in this case of a certain action, but also points towards the uncanny nature of many automata, which often look humanoid. A modern equivalent – and source of unending fascination for the Surrealists – was the mannequin, which while not a machine was a human-looking, specifically woman-looking, but still lifeless artefact; scary and (erotically) exciting at the same time.

The concept of wo/man as machine contains a further important subtext in relation to Surrealist automatism. A machine that writes, like a graph charting the earth's movement, or a machine that speaks, like a radio, is not an individual and conscious being. A Surrealist engaging in automatism, as if a mere "recording instrument", should theoretically not be considered the author of whatever is spoken, written, drawn, painted etc. As one is merely recording the unconscious, that is to say dreams or pure thought, one is not directly involved consciously and individually and therefore not responsible. As direct thought speaks, in theory, the person of the poet recedes to the background: there is not really an author, or perhaps the author doesn't matter. The work in question is not authored. While this can also be said of the spiritualist medium – after all, it is not s/he who speaks or knocks, it is a ghost or spirit – the difference the automatic drawings she created with her Spiritualist group, The Five, returning often in her later, mediumistic, work. That body of work, also known as *The Paintings for the Temple*, is stylistically very different from her early work, which is clearly indebted to her artistic training. For both the Surrealists and af Klint, therefore, the technique of automatism was a means of divesting themselves of the rational control of their training. Both are unlike traditional mediums in that they are skilled and trained as artists and therefore practise automatism, not only as a mental state but also as a technique.

A further similarity between af Klint and the Surrealists is their initial reliance upon the seance and mediumistic states, and later ability to do fine without them. The Surrealists very quickly moved beyond the "necessary conditions",<sup>1</sup> the trappings of the seance. For af Klint, everything started in the seances as well, in particular those she participated in with The Five.

<sup>1</sup> See: Müller-Westermann I. *Painting for the Future: Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction in seclusion* // Hilma af Klint: A Pioneer of Abstraction / Ed. by I. Müller-Westermann & J. Wido. Stockholm, 2013. P. 33–51.

For more on dynamic psychiatry: Ellenberger H.F. *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. London, 1970.

For more on automatic writing: Shamasani S. *Automatic Writing and the Discovery of the Unconscious* // Spring. *Journal of Archetype and Culture*, 54, 1993. P. 100–131, 102f.

For more on Surrealism and dynamic psychiatry: Chénieux-Gendron J. *Towards a New Definition of Automatism: L'Immaculée Conception*. Dada/Surrealism, 17, 1988. P. 74–90.

When she started work on *The Paintings for the Temple*, commissioned by the spirit guide Amaliel, she moved somewhat beyond the seance, although the first works, between 1906 and 1908, were still created in a mediumistic state. For the second part of *The Paintings for the Temple*, carried out between 1912 and 1915, she was already more conscious, and her later *œuvre*, starting in 1916, was created more or less consciously. She therefore moved beyond mediumism in stages, and at a certain point also moved beyond automatism. In the case of the Surrealists, although it has not been touched upon here, automatism became during the 1930s only one of an array of literary and painterly techniques employed; another, rather famous technique was the paranoid-critical method developed by Salvador Dalí.

Another important point is that of authorship. As said, the (supposedly) automatic – i.e. more or less mechanical – nature of the process exempts one from the responsibility of being an author. One is merely an instrument, after all. For spiritualists the external agent can be said to be the author. In Hilma af Klint's case, *The Paintings for the Temple* were made at the direct instigation of Amaliel, or so af Klint experienced it. For Surrealists, in contrast, the (supposed) lack of an author was part of the avant-garde practice of celebrating free expression and subverting traditional notions of authorship, talent and genius.

Nina Gurjanova

**THE POOR KNIGHT AND THE POETICS OF ALCHEMY:  
THE PHENOMENON OF “CREATIVITY OF THE SPIRIT”  
IN THE WORK OF ELENA GURO<sup>1</sup>**

The aesthetics of the early avant-garde were based on an understanding of the world that differed from the stereotypes of the civilisation of that time, rooted in the ideological neo-Gnosticism and free creativity of the soul that were behind all of the formal discoveries of early Russian futurism. In one of his theoretical articles Aleksei Kruchenykh declared a “new way”: Symbolism cannot sustain the scrutiny of contemporary gnoseology and of the spontaneous soul. The more subjective truth is, the more objective it is. Subjective objectivity is our way. One must not fear total freedom [...] (Lawton 1988, 76).

Evaluating the meaning of the futurist period, another member of the movement, Olga Rozanova, wrote that: futurism is the only example in art – in terms of strength and the sharpness of expression of the confluence of two worlds, the subjective and the objective – which may not be destined to be repeated. [...]

But ideological Gnosticism, futurism, did not touch the stupid consciousness of the majority, which repeats to this day that futurism is a clumsy leap in the course of global art, *a crisis of art* [author's italics]. As if up to now a single, faceless art had existed and not a mass of peaks of its 110 historical epochs. [...] Futurism expressed the character of modernity with exceptional insight and completeness (Rozanova, 1922, 335).

The entire polyphony of artistic and critical texts of the early avant-garde, which are alike in terms of their ‘unalikeness’, has in common the theme of the *internal freedom* of personality and creativity. It is not so much freedom of choice and the rethinking of traditions as freedom from templates and dogmas, which are inevitably expressed in the creation of models, the canon, in seeing the world as a closed system, a completed, perfect structure.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the title of Nikolai Kulbin's article this theme was named “Free Art as a the Basis of Life” (1910) and in B. Lifshitz's article it was called “the liberation of the word” (1913). In many works Kruchenykh stressed the significance of *zaum* as “free language”.



The aesthetics of the early avant-garde broke with the laws of everyday reason and rational human cognition (following twentieth-century science) and made a Gnostic appeal to other spheres of cognition, in particular intuitive knowledge: [...] leaping from theosophy to socialism, biology to philosophy, mystical anarchism to egocentrism and back and, finally, to ego-futurism, intuitive realisation, intuitive illumination (Ignatiev 1967, 35).

Art will become a struggle for the "new deepening of the soul" (to quote Kruchenykh) or the "creativity of the spirit" (Guro, see Gurjanova 1994) based on an acceptance of the necessity of freedom of creativity and the assertion of its intuitive nature. Art once again gathers strength and, through the energy of action and deeds, will become "the creativity of the new life".

The influence of one of the main principles of this new aesthetics – "the principle of free creativity", as Union of Youth member V. Markov<sup>1</sup> (Waldemar Matvejs) defined it in his article "Principles of the New Art" (1912) – was inherent in the entire early avant-garde movement and was particularly prominent among the *budetlyane*/members of Hylaea and the circle of artists that were close to them: in the ideas of such Union of Youth members as Markov, Nikolai Kulbin, Rozanova and, finally, in the concept of art of Mikhail Larionov and his group. Nevertheless, this tendency, which might be called the romantic line of the Russian avant-garde, could not be a differentiating characteristic between the various artistic schools of the avant-garde of the late 1910s and early 1920s, although its elements are constantly present in the new culture. They either come to the forefront (as in futurism) or virtually disappear, forming only one of a multitude of potential lines of development within the movement and coexisting with tendencies which are completely opposite, such as utopianism, the desire for universalism or the canonisation of schools within the avant-garde.

It was this this worldview which was embodied in the formation of the "principle of chance",<sup>2</sup> the first evidence of the "event of being"; incompleteness and fragmentariness as an aesthetic method provided a truly endless possibility for "meaning",<sup>3</sup> which did not exist in completed, perfect form. The idea of incompleteness also reflected consciousness of the impossibility of rationally recreating the whole or the absolute. Finally, in the appearance

<sup>1</sup> "Free creativity [...] always gives birth to independent principles which wholly originate from it (Markov 1912).

<sup>2</sup> Markov, in his article "Principles of the New Art", pays particular attention to "the principle of accidental creativity", speaking about the lost unbiasedness of gaze and the ability to admire "the accidental" and "the non-constructive".

<sup>3</sup> "Dissatisfaction with form gave me today's denial of form, but here I suffer from [...] a lack of that laconic meaning which make one interpret a book, ask it for a new, half-existing possibility. That which is so wonderful in new quests" (letter from Guro to Kruchenykh, 1913 – Mayakovsky Museum, ф. 7, on. 1, 7900).

of dissonance (*zloglas*) and “mistakes”<sup>1</sup> in painting and poetry, the futurists saw the manifestation of the living, unstoppable movement of art and everyday life. If the symbolists attempted to construct life as a work of art, the futurists-*budetlyane* directly referred to the process of everyday life, subordinating their art to the laws of constant, mutable movement of matter and time: “We were led by the motion of art and love towards life” (Zdanevich, Larionov 1967, 173–174).

Mikhail Matiushin wrote of the “experience of art” as “a step of life itself” (Matiushin 1923). The idea of “the creativity of the new life” and the creativity of the spirit<sup>2</sup> was “predicted” more fully and yet in a more contradictory way in the work of Elena Guro. It was no accident that she became an advocate of the new for *budetlyane* Velimir Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh. Her irrationality, neo-romanticism and anti-positivistic ideas, which could only be reflected in an incomplete, fluid form which mirrored the process of creation – fragmentary sketches, notes, letters, personal contact – were alien to the concept of any kind of absolute. Guro defined the aim of art as the compassionate transformation of all earthly life or, to be more precise, life in everything. For her, art would remain not logically rational knowledge or a means of achieving even the “highest” utilitarian-utopian aim – a tradition arising from the platonic idea of “state art” (for example, Tolstoy’s references to the creation of the “international brotherhood of man”) – but an exaltation, a “re-humanisation» (in the Pasternakian sense) of the world and of art as part of that world: “a poet is a figure and not a remover of life” (Guro 1914, 14). In the compendium *Three* (1913), published in Guro’s memory, Kruchenykh wrote: “Russian readers [...] see in words algebraic symbols, which solve the mechanistic problem of little thoughts”. One might say that the destruction of this “mechanics” was extremely important for Guro’s work and that of her companions.

There were no manifestos or provocations in Guro’s work, but nevertheless it contained a kernel loaded with enormous potential for the destruction of artistic templates and “diagrams”, whether academic or avant-garde. There is nothing which resembles a personal canon. The essence of her late works, which Matiushin defined as “synthetism”, is expressed in the surprising “mobility” and tolerance of her individual style, which often borders on eclecticism.

Any of Guro’s preferred systems may be subject to criticism and partially not accepted while remaining extremely important to the writer (Mints 1991, 9). Continuing Zara Mints’s idea of the “polygenetic” nature (Mints 1991, 11) of Guro’s style, the lack definition of style and genre and the complex symbolism in Guro’s last, unfinished work *The Poor Knight* can be read – and was read by Matiushin – as her spiritual testament, a type of “gospel of Guro”,

<sup>1</sup> “Our aim is only to indicate the means of incorrectness, to show its necessity and importance for art” (Kruchenykh 1967, 70).

<sup>2</sup> “Life is very serious and can be productive apart from success in art even for us [...] we can create neither a book nor an exhibition but life itself” (Guro 1988, 53).

which allows for varied interpretations. This work, which contains many motifs from her oeuvre and is therefore of great interest to researchers, holds the key to her visual metaphors, such as the symbolism of colour and light in her late drawings.

The literature on *The Poor Knight* mentions the influence on Guro of spiritualism, Indian philosophy and the ideas of Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Ivan Kon-evskoy and Aleksandr Dobrolyubov, with reference to theosophist, spiritualist, pantheistic, cosmogonic, hermetic and Christian motifs in her poetry (see Mints 1988, Gum 1988, Toporov 1993, Bobrinskaya 1997; the latter article was the first to present an interesting analysis of the influence on Guro of Aleksandr Dobrolyubov's religious teachings and his theory of "expiation of the earth"). Guro, with her unorthodox, almost heretical (from the traditional theological point of view) interpretation of the Christian idea does not accept Christianity as dogma, but sees in it a constantly changing mystical revelation. This explains the free, eclectic combination of aspects of pantheism, mysticism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and even nietzscheanism in Guro's ideas. Like many of her contemporaries, in her work Guro was more likely a free interpreter of the religious, spiritualist and philosophical concepts (often from secondary sources) which were in the ether at that time. She had a "mobile" character, which makes nonsense of questions regarding her strict adherence to one or other ideological circle. For example, in support of her idea of the earthly, which is particularly prevalent in the late period when she constructs for herself the image of "mother of the entire earth," "mother of the world", one can see aspects of zoism or hylozoism (a term introduced by Ralph Cudworth in the 17th century), a philosophical teaching regarding the universal living nature of matter, which was typical of early Greek philosophy, including Stoicism, of the natural-philosophical epoch of the Renaissance, and Schelling's school of natural philosophy.<sup>1</sup> It is this latter line, connected to Renaissance natural philosophy and, through it, to hermetic traditions, in particular alchemy, that is of interest in this essay.

Of course one cannot interpret such a complex and eclectic work as *The Poor Knight* as a literal illustration – or even an illustration – of spiritual transformation achieved through the process of alchemical work, unlike a number of more open literary and poetic texts of the 20th century. As always, Guro's style and poetics incorporates numerous influences, styles and concepts. As always, she works "outside the genre", but nevertheless one cannot deny that in this more didactic and, simultaneously, confessional text there are traditional hermetic symbols and this, we consider, allows for yet another possible interpretation of this enigmatic work. Regardless of the fact that there is, as yet, no direct evidence that Guro was acquainted with alchemical literature, it would be illegitimate to deny her knowledge of these ideas. At the end of the nineteenth century, literature on alchemy was not only easily accessible but widely available and popular in intellectual and artistic, particularly symbolist, circles (see Antoshevsky 1911). Nikolai Kulbin,

<sup>1</sup> On natural-philosophical motifs in Guro see Bobrinskaya 1997.

one of the founders of the Union of Youth, was interested in alchemy as was its other founder and chairman, patron of the arts Levky Zheverzheev, who owned a significant collection of alchemical books and manuscripts. The other major patron who supported the avant-garde, A. Troyanovsky, was the publisher of the most popular occult journal of the time, *Izida [Isis]*, which printed excerpts from the works of Paracelsus, Papus and others alongside articles by contemporary Russian writers.<sup>1</sup>

The most direct and weighty evidence for Guro's acquaintance with the entire circle of these ideas are the figurative metaphors of her last book, with their obvious parallels with the symbolism of alchemy. Guro's text begins with "The Tale of Madame Elsa", who spent her evenings in dreams and anticipation: But once, when she was sitting and dreaming, looking into her being, an airy youth, tall and thin, came to her [...] she thought that this was her dream and was not surprised (Guro RGALI, 1).<sup>2</sup>

It is known that the motifs of the dreams, visions, contemplation and meditation are important for Guro. We will not dwell on the symbolist and romantic roots of these motifs, nor on the influence of Nietzsche's poetics on the development of this leitmotif in Guro's work.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this article, we are primarily interested in the definition of creativity as contemplation, the accent on the role of *imagination* (which for Guro is often a synonym for *dreaming*) in the alchemical tradition. In particular, in Paracelsus's conception, who considered imagination a "celestial" human quality, which forms and crystallises within a person their true essence, i.e. the astral man. In his famous *Romrzum*, the following rule is given at the beginning: Check that your door is firmly closed so that which is within you does not disappear. [...] Nature creates in stages and so must you. Let your imagination be ruled by nature. [...] And imagine yourself as a true and not a fantastic imagination (Fabricius 1994, 11).

Elsa's dreams awake in her the internal essence of her being, from which is born the ephemeral image of a son ("For it is my dream. If I do not wish it he will not be on the earth, and if I do he will be with me" – Guro RGALI, 1). In the occult tradition there are three incarnations of the body: the first is the physical, material, earthly body of flesh and blood; the second is the astral body, spiritual, "as light as the sun's rays", which has an intuitive knowledge of nature, the cosmos and the occult that cannot be experienced through physical senses, and which has higher instincts that are formed by thought and feelings, an intermediary stage before the third category; the third is a body

<sup>1</sup> The journal *Izida. Zhurnal okkul'tnykh nauk* [Isis: A Journal of Occult Sciences] was published from 1909 to 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Here and later the text cited is a typewritten version from the Guro archive, prepared by Matiushin after Guro's death according to her plan: Elena Guro, *Istoriya Bednogo Rytsarya* [The Story of the Poor Knight], typescript, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI).

<sup>3</sup> See Gurjanova 1994.

incarnated in light, "the divine spark", the body after resurrection (Paracelsus 1995, 249).<sup>1</sup> The first two categories are mortal, the third is immortal. The young man appears to Elsa as an astral body not incarnated in heavy matter: "she felt him like a star above her head, as if starry rays pierced her from above"; "she wanted to kiss him and regretted that he was fleshless"; "she saw in the outline of the clouds what appeared to be his temples, his brow [...]. And she was no longer sorry that he had not been incarnated, that he retained his purity and became a soul of joyful moments", but he had not yet attained complete spiritual transformation as he was capable of suffering and, accordingly, mortal: "I did not refuse to be here. I am more incarnate than you think" (Guro RGALI, 1,3,4). He would become Elsa's bridge between the physical and spiritual, her bridge into another world, another stage of incarnation: "They stand in two different worlds and vainly reach out their hands to one another. She did not know that this is a threshold, which must be gradually erased, the boundary between the visible and the invisible, between different forms of flesh" (Guro RGALI, 45).

The genesis of these two images – Madame Elsa and her disembodied son – has its roots in Guro's early work. The image of the disembodied son – the Youth, the Knight of the Earth, the Stork Baron – have echoes in *Autumn Dream* (and particularly in the play's dedication, in which Guro first references the mythologeme of the dead son), in her early short stories and in the miniatures *Heavenly Baby Camels*. The Christian and symbolist sources of this image, as well as the nietzscheian influence on the appearance of this character in Guro's texts, are considered in detail in works by Zara Mints, Maria Tsimborska-Leboda, Kevin O' Brien and the author of this essay. A recently published work on Guro proposes what seems to me a particularly fruitful interpretation of this image as a hermetic Mercury, the central figure in alchemical work, the spirit of earth or, to be more accurate, the spirit of the transformed earth.<sup>2</sup> We will return to this interpretation.

From the position of the hermetic context, the image of Elsa is no less complex and multi-faceted: it is eclectic, like the image of her "disembodied" son. One can hear in it echoes of the archetypal mother earth ("and the earth looked like the holy Virgin Mary, like the Madonna" – Guro RGALI, 22), the divine original mother of many ancient religions and primitive cults ("And she laughed with joy that she had understood him. Through his eyes she saw far distant cities of exalted dreams. And she understood that she was his mother" – Guro RGALI, 22), and the hermetic image of the *anima mundi* as opposed to the Spirit (*spiritus animatus*), Mercury ("He who sees the soul everywhere

<sup>1</sup> According to occult tradition, the elementary physical body becomes water and earth, the astral body slowly dissolves in the air, and the resurrected body rises up to God.

<sup>2</sup> "Probably the most interesting parallels with this subject, which allow us to understand the internal logic linking the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of creativity in Elena Guro's work, can be found in one the central figures of hermetic literature, Mercury. [...] It is with him that the main character of *The Poor Knight* sees a number of parallels" (Bobrinskaya 1977, 169).

and considers everything to be living will never remain in darkness” – Guro RGALI, 3), and the image of the Lady of alchemical tradition (“She wept and rejoiced that he called her mother. He more often called her Madame distantly” – Guro RGALI, 3), the Queen who embodies primary matter, which is transformed in an alchemical marriage with the King, or Spirit. At the same time, the image definitely contains autobiographical characteristics, as seen particularly in the narrative style, which is very close to that of her late, personal diaries, and in the description of Elsa’s room and everyday life: “By the bed were her warm felt boots with socks inside, which she had been given six years ago by her late mother” (Guro RGALI, 14).

The internal development of Guro’s story is built around the metaphysical interrelationship of these two images, broken into prosaic and poetic visionary fragments, which are sometimes entitled and marked out in the text, sometimes smoothly move from one to the other, in which the realism of a detail or episode is suddenly combined with the poetics of dreams, hallucinations and revelations. The central place in the story’s structure is occupied by a vision of Resurrection and Birth, connected to a central theme in Guro’s work: death and resurrection. This time it is presented using the alchemical purification of matter (“And everything that can move from life to death, from perishability, can become imperishable and, for you, death itself will be a sign of immortality. It is but *a movement*”), resurrection as liberation (“Those for whom death itself comes lie and wait and suffer, but those for whom death is an action are free”), victory “over flesh and time”: “For you came to destroy flesh and time”, Elsa exclaims to her son (Guro RGALI, 58, 61, 11).

We recall that the basic aim of alchemical work is not the creation of a particular recipe for transforming lead into gold (this is a late, vulgar interpretation of the alchemical tradition), but the transmutation and purification of incomplete primary matter and its transformation into the philosopher’s stone, symbolic gold, the so-called “sun of the philosophers”, which is invisible to many. The meditative aspect of alchemical work turns it into a psychic process of transformation which is parallel to the chemical process. In one of the precepts of the disembodied Youth, the Knight of the Earth in the second part of the text, Guro almost literally follows this doctrine: “you will be present and create like spirits in all things and all actions. And at the highest step you will attend the chemical unification of substances, change their qualities and give them a new chemical affinity. You will live by the laws of plenty and your flesh will be transformed” (Guro RGALI, 65).

In the alchemical tradition, built on the principle of work (dissolve and unify), the principle of purification is based on the doctrine of renewal as a result of dying, on resurrection through death. This concept is reflected in the basic symbolic stages of alchemical work: *nigredo* (or the black stage, which symbolises descent into a chaotic condition, amalgamation with primary matter, death), followed by *albedo* (the white stage of purification) and the final stage, *rubedo*, which is associated with red and embodies the idea of resurrection.

Often in alchemical symbolism purification through death is metaphorically depicted in the form of an alchemical marriage, the unification of the King



and Queen, an act of metaphysical incest which results in the death of the King and his subsequent resurrection. The King and Queen, the Sun (associated with the symbol for gold) and the Moon (silver) are classical images in alchemical texts and illustrated codes. One cannot but note the constant use of metaphors for gold and the sun in Guro's description of the Knight. In this context, the following details of Guro's narrative are intriguing: awaiting the appearance of the Youth, Elsa dons a green dress with "silver netting" (in the alchemical tradition green is the colour of the Holy Spirit and also of Venus, life and resurrection). Elsewhere she metaphorically compares the image of the son with a golden ray: "a golden ray got caught up in twigs and stayed for a long time" (Guro RGALI, 2, 3). The motif of the mystical marriage is like a metaphysical unification of the main opposing natural principles: matter and spirit, female/earthly and male/celestial. One of the central leitmotifs of alchemical symbolism is present in a veiled manner in Guro's text: "Earth, earth, accept the heart given to you forever... Earth humbled..." exclaims the Spirit, the Knight of the Earth (Guro RGALI, 7).

As a rule, many of the familiar variations of this myth are connected to the act of incest. In most cases this involves brother and sister, while, for instance, in the texts of the anonymous author Delphinus (mid-15th century – Antiqui III, 87) and the medieval English poet George Ripley there are images of mother and son. Ripley's poem was carefully analysed by Jung, who found in it a new religious declaration: God is not only in the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is concealed within everything, in "poor", "contemptible" substances, even in dirt and sewage (Jung 1989, 280). This alchemical idea of God, which grew out of the Gnostic tradition, is considerably more mystical and more connected to magic. According to one Gnostic concept, as well as having a divine soul, humans have a second soul which embodies the unity of nature, having "grown" successively through the mineral, plant and animal stages to the human world (Jung 1989, 280). Dissolution in the mother's womb is dissolution in its natural origin, the *prima materia*, associated with the Moon, Venus, the Virgin, Mater Alchimia, the overall feminine that exists "outside the male" and is simultaneously the essence of all things (Jung 1989, 18–19). Mircea Eliade also examines this concept, which is connected to the archetype of mother earth, nature and its primordial condition. Eliade notes that, according to Paracelsus, "the entire world must enter its original mother", which is the *prima materia*, in order to achieve immortality. Paracelsus repeats this in the following symbolic thesis: "He who wishes to enter the kingdom of God must first enter the body of his mother and die there" (Eliade 1971, 154–155). One can find a reflection of this theme in contemporary hermetic poetry, for example in Helen Ruggieri's poem "The Alchemists Wedding", which includes the following epigraph from Delphinus: "When the mother unites with the son it is not incest because it is directed by nature and demanded by the holy law of fate, and that is not unpleasing to God" (Ruggieri, 127).

In the context of this motif, which is not directly expressed in Guro but is definitely present, many unclear, enigmatic fragments of her text – such

as the transformation of Elsa's Son into her Knight, which is difficult to explain from the point of view of logical literary narrative – attain a particular meaning: "Why do you so often call me madame and so rarely mother?" exclaimed Elsa, tearfully. He looked at her with incredible tenderness. "I am afraid that you will recall more than a person is permitted to. You are still weak and I do not wish you to think that you gave birth to a Spirit, as a Spirit can only give birth to itself, it is eternal. Spirit is born of Spirit and happy is the flesh which gives entry to the Spirit, as through the Spirit the flesh shall become immortal. And you are immeasurably happy. But you do not know this and therefore you are weeping once more". She decided not to ask him of which happiness he spoke, but her tears ceased as a result of a vague trepidation. The night was drawing to a close, the gaps between the peaks were becoming light. It was time for him to leave, but they were not ready. They loved each other, joining hands, weeping and laughing (Guro RGALI, 9).

In another episode, her son is already transforming into a knight (in the text he is called not only her son, but also Madame Elsa's Knight and the Knight of the Earth) and Guro uses a fairly direct allusion which reminds the reader of the myth of Danae: "A strange, enigmatic rain fell on her as night descended on the created world. It was his love" (Guro RGALI, 19).

Later there is a very candid reference to the idea of incest: Trustingly, he fell asleep in her bed, not understanding what he was doing to her. [...] And she was obliged continually to leave that room where he breathed his innocent faith on her in sleep, because otherwise she choked and tears burned her eyes and she was unbearably confused. She was a sinner... (Guro RGALI, 43).

The theme and poetics of sleep, dreams and hallucinations transformed into revelations are important aspects of the internal development of the subject and in the figurative, symbolic structure of *The Poor Knight*. We recall the repeated mysterious images of the seven knights in "shining armour" (the seven metals or seven planets required to complete the great work in alchemical symbolism?), "seven crosses rising to the heavens" and also the numerous mentions of the Holy Grail. We will not dwell on the possible narcotic nature of some of Guro's visions and images, but this could be the subject of a separate article which would enable us to bring together the imagery and logic of the work using the nature of alchemical and initiation rituals, which often incorporate the use of narcotics.<sup>1</sup> According to her notes, Guro practised meditation, contemplating the branches and trunks of fir-trees seen through the window (images of "the lively branches of a fir" can be found in her later diaries). These descriptions of trees, of branches "reaching for the sky" are a leitmotif in all of Guro's late texts. Real, seen and "felt" trees are transformed in her dreams and visions, revealing their symbolic essence, their quintessence. One of the key phrases of the work – "the meaning of a tree is heart and radiance, the Heart united with the depths of the earth, the branches belong to the sun and the air to the sky" (Guro RGALI, 6) – shows the depth

<sup>1</sup> According to Matiushin, during the last months of her illness Guro was prescribed morphine injections for the pain.

of Guro's poetics and the symbolic wealth of her images. The metaphor of the tree open to the earthly and the heavenly reflects not only the duality of the story's main character, the Poor Knight ("he did not simply become a tree, the tree became him" – Guro RGALI, 9) but also the human essence as a whole and the bringing together of the "earthly" mother and the "heavenly" son, the "earthly" bride and the "heavenly" groom. The joining of the physical body and the soul, matter and spirit, the unity of everything – "one spirit in all things" – is one of the basic principles of alchemy, an action concealed in the symbolism of purification and enlightenment: "he entered clouds and animals, in trees, flowers and blades of grass, regardless of size. There was always a tearful enlightenment of the thing" (Guro RGALI, 9, 10).

Accordingly, the symbolic subject of Guro's text is nothing less than an instance of the purification and transformation of *prima materia*, of earth. In Guro, "earth is spirit", "the living spirit is everywhere" through destruction, bodily suffering and spiritual joy: "Everything which is transformed, carried off to spirituality, will soon be freed! [...] Do not call Christ's testament suffering, but call it joy. Not only the sacrament of the flesh is given but also the sacrament of the spirit! I am a transgressor. [...] Through me you too will be enlightened", Elsa is told by her son (Guro RGALI, 4, 12, 11, 28). The Gnostic concept within Hellenistic alchemy of the freeing of a person and their soul from the dark prison of the material world was continued in Christian alchemy, transformed into the image of Christ atoning for our sins. In medieval alchemy, the philosopher's stone was often compared to the suffering of Christ and this image was identified with Mercury (Jung 1989, 222). Alchemy assumes the equivalence of ascension and descent to earth: earth cannot achieve purification until the Spirit has descended to earth. The atonement of the earth occurs only after it has dissolved in the spirit (Jung 1989, 222). This archetype of purification and atonement exists in Indian alchemy, in the tradition of yoga, transformed into the action of being freed from karma (the term karma occurs several times in the second part of Guro's text), the freeing of human spiritual nature through suffering. Jung treats this concept of ascension and descent as the sequence of purification of the soul from the darkness of the unconscious and primary chaos, its ascent and receipt of higher knowledge, after which the soul returns to earth enriched with heavenly power (Jung 1989, 224).

The hermetic nature of Guro's text is strongly expressed in the symbolism of light and colour which pervades the entire text. The Christmas scene is particularly characteristic. It unambivalently refers the reader to the symbolism of Gnosticism and the Cathar church: The winter sun struck with sparks of sapphire and golden and silver rain, playing off the scarlet star on the Christmas tree and filling the celestial cup with a flash of fiery wine [...]. It was that same cup from which the knights of the Holy Grail received communion (Guro RGALI, 41).

Several colours are mentioned more often in Guro's text: blue, the "heavenly" colour; pink, which Guro considers the colour of hope; white, red and gold. In *The Poor Knight*, red or scarlet is always the colour of blood

(“splashes of blood” – Guro RGALI, 32), a holy colour. White plays a similar role, and can be found in many incarnations: “the white joy of Resurrection”; snow “like a christening robe” or “the robe of Christ”; “I am a white flame”, says the light knight to his mother when he is born (Guro RGALI, 25, 33, 42). The symbolism of colour is directly intertwined with the rich symbolism of flowers in the text: “to believe in the spiritual liberation of the whiteness of a drooping snowdrop”; “At New Year there were white narcissi on the table. And it was as if from each star a white, pure flame arose”; “hyacinths and their white curls reminded her of the tender, glimmering body of the spirit”; “white cyclamens, innocent like heavenly lambs” (Guro RGALI, 25, 4, 24, 44). In one of the first episodes, the youth helps Elsa to smooth out a pattern which she is embroidering in wool: “he began carefully to correct the pattern, tracing out flowers and leaves on God’s earth” and the corrected pattern “blossomed with the colours of the meadow” (Guro RGALI, 2). It is interesting that in Paracelsus the beginning of the great work is described metaphorically as the appearance within the hermetic vessel of a wide variety of fantastic plants in all the colours of the rainbow. According to the alchemical idea (like the doctrine of zoism), divine symbolism is poured into nature and transformed equally into the animal, plant and mineral worlds (“and stones (...) have a soul”; “stones will be resurrected and become children” – Guro RGALI, 41, 57).

However, the most frequently mentioned colour in *The Poor Knight* is gold. In her hermetic text, Guro is following an archetype: the divine source is associated with gold and it is the embodiment of light. “The sun shone like gold all day, did you notice?”, the “airy youth” asks Elsa; and in another place there is “the gold of morning” (Guro RGALI 1, 20). Even yellow turns into gold: the yellow flower on a blue tablecloth is like “the sun in the sky”.

In the text false, demonic gold personifies the Prince of Darkness. One of the key episodes at the beginning of the text – Elsa’s dream or vision of a “huge, unbounded spirit” who informs her that her son is a fallen spirit who “fell because of love for humans” and who attacks Elsa demonically, offering her “the strength of angels” – is accompanied by a vision of a golden iconostasis with a shine which is not natural, but “made” (Guro RGALI, 4, 5). And here we directly touch upon one of the most important symbolic motifs in the text, the motif of light, which is central in Guro’s lexicon and in the alchemical code. Paracelsus’s mysterious radiation of natural energy, a natural light which is contained in all creation from the beginning, is the light of intuitive knowledge (Paracelsus 1995, 45, 225). In Guro’s text, rays emanate from a simple couple in love: when the youth looks at Elsa “from his eyes two rays passed through her”, “his love shone” (Guro RGALI, 1, 2).

The spirits of light oppose the spirits of darkness: “they leave wisps of gloom in the room”, says Elsa of the spirits of darkness from the chaos of the abyss; the tortured Knight of the Earth “turned like a lamb towards those lying in wait behind the heavy darkness”. “He who learns everything while alive will never see the hour of darkness and folly” (Guro RGALI, 32, 52). In Elsa’s vision in the episode about the Light Room in the first part of the

work ("The Last Supper"), an "empty, unpleasant chaos" exists outside the window. However, Guro's philosophy denies the dualism of Manicheanism: "It is incorrect to say that one's opposite is necessary in order to develop completely. No, those who think this way are not yet ready to find the connection. [...] A whole person is light with darkness" (Guro RGALI, 17). It is more likely that this is a manifestation of the alchemical concept of the synthesis of the whole through division, the principle of *alloying* primary elements: "Everything is beautiful in its difference and nothing is lost, although it is one" (Guro RGALI, 66).

The symbolism of light acquires particularly meaning in the second part of the work, "From the Precepts of the Light Room". Here light is a synonym for good ("good like the scent of the sun"), which is of equal value in Guro's understanding of the spirit and also embodies the end result of alchemical work, *fusible* gold, the quintessence of spiritual alchemy ("the ingot of sun melted and laughed"; "light and good are very fusible, they are embodied in sleep. [...] For this reason they are omnipotent" (Guro RGALI, 37, 28, 10). According to alchemical doctrine, on earth the heavenly flame acquired the cold, hard form of gold, and with the help of our personal flame we must melt it and make it liquid (Paracelsus 1995, 148). It is the theme of melting matter, the form of things, the melting of the flesh: Elsa "melted into herself and was transformed" (Guro RGALI, 17).

Guro's metaphors are, to a certain extent, decoded in a later text by Matiushin: his article "The New Way of the Picture" figuratively expresses the "alchemy" of constantly changing form, within the coordinates of time and space, a form which is not ossified but mobile: Form is Hercules and a clock organism. Artists, poets and all masters of art fight with Hercules. Clocks are a form of rhythm. Form is Hercules, but if it is victorious over the artist's grief. [...] If one overwinds a clock the spring breaks and the clock stops and constantly shows the same time, as if it and the form are still and become inert. [...] The form of representation of every moment changes and must be ready at the moment of casting. When form constantly changes it is mobile, and that which is constantly one and the same is hardened.<sup>1</sup>

In his work on the origin of the work of art, Martin Heidegger speaks of the "eternity" or "objectness" of artworks, conditioned by the essence of the thing, its matter, by that which lies at its base (see Heidegger 1960). The work of the artist (poet, thinker) on the thing is the second item in the creation of the artwork and consists of overcoming, the "transformation" of its essence. The theory of art of the early avant-garde is based on a similar idea of "transformation". Intuition is combined with exact calculation in the creation of form, this being the first step towards transformation, the submission of the material: "In putting their hands on the material, a person must express their internal concerns through visible forms" (Markov 1914, 32). The second step – the tendency to overcome form and reveal in the work the material itself as an essence – can be seen in conscious anti-constructivism,

<sup>1</sup> See Mikhail Matiushin, *Novy put' kartiny*, manuscript, Mayakovsky Museum Archive, Moscow.

“the refusal of form” in rayonism and futurism, and, of course, in Guro and Matiushin’s ideas of organic art (as the main “coordinate” here is time and not space, which dictates a completely different aesthetic, as occurred in the late avant-garde, in particular in Malevich’s suprematism with its domination by “colour-form”: We are not canonising forms and by coming into contact with eclecticism we have the possibility to constantly broaden our understanding of them (Shevchenko 1989, 68).

The complication of form is accompanied by dissonance. [...] The most dissonant form is that which has living cells, the human form. It is jelly-like, “colloidal” (Kulbin 1967, 16).

According to alchemical tradition, nothing in this world is created as completed. The aim of alchemical art, alchemical work is to bring the initial material, in all its fragmentary form, to completion, to spiritualisation in which “unity in diversity” will occur (Paracelsus 1995, 145).

This hermetic idea finds its logical continuation in the ancestral idea of art of any kind. Art (if it is not a mechanical imitation) transforms the essence of the thing, its foundation, and in this sense any creativity is in opposition to the thingly basis of the object (*opus contra naturam*), opening up space for expression of its hidden, immaterial essence or, to use the language of alchemy, its quintessence. In Russian futurism this ancestral symptom of art occurs in the theoretical principle. It implies the discourse of a change of epoch, a transformation, when words and actions show themselves in such a way that the appearance of their external interaction cannot be confined to any scheme.

This tendency of the early avant-garde is perhaps most clearly expressed in the concept of “art for life”, life “as it is” without the justification of an aim, “without why”: “We are in the power of new themes: unnecessariness, meaninglessness, the secret of authoritative insignificance which we celebrate” (Sadok sudei 1967, 52). With his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was the first to set the aim to look at “science from the point of view of the artist and at art from the point of view of life” (Nietzsche 1990, 1, 50). This idea was the *beginning* of the new art and had an enormous influence on the worldview of the early avant-garde. “And what else? To accept the world, to accept it humbly with all of its insignificant details which are going nowhere. [...] The procession of life. One needs to believe in life,” wrote Guro in one of her later diary entries (Guro, Diary). One can say without exaggeration that it is this, in Khlebnikov’s words, “Hafiz-like affirmation of life” or, to quote Guro, “lively creativity” which is the linchpin not only of Guro’s worldview, but of that entire line of the early avant-garde which was discussed above.

In 20th-century philosophy, a perception of the world based on the traditional division between practical experience and theoretical knowledge will become the main problem: the gap between doing and action and thinking and contemplation which exists in traditional Western philosophy will lead to a crisis in metaphysics. The Russian *budetlyane* intuitively sought to solve this problem by relying on the Russian tradition of “integral knowledge”, in which contemplation is equal to doing and the aim of existence is life itself



with its inbuilt potential for understanding the world.

The process of artistic creation, equated with the creative process of life, "spiritualised doing", would become the aim of art for the *budetlyane*: True creativity comes from a much deeper place than is usually thought in the everyday life of writers and artists. It does not happen at the moment of doing, but at the moment of doing nothing and of contemplation, and doing is only the embodiment of that which has been completed in the soul, the body necessary for its life. It is terribly easy, as a result of the prejudice of doing, to frighten off contemplation" (Guro, Letters).

When the completed work of art is like a finished product of labour, the accent shifts to the process of creation itself, including its contemplation. Thought and contemplation are equal to action ("We connect contemplation with action and throw ourselves into the crowd" – Zdanevich, Larionov 1967, 173–174), knowledge is equal to the process of cognition, to existence. Nikolai Berdyaev wrote in the article "The Crisis of Art", which expanded the purely aesthetic understanding of futurism to the sphere of a worldview: One must accept futurism, grasp its meaning and move on to new creativity. [...] Futurism must be passed through and surmounted, in life and in art. Surmounting is possible through immersion, through movement in another dimension, a dimension of depth not flatness, through knowledge, not abstract knowledge but vital knowledge, knowledge of existence (Berdyaev 1990 (1918), 26).

## SOURCES

Guro, Elena. *Nebesnye verblyuzhata* (St. Petersburg, 1914).

Ljunggren, A., and N.A. Nilsson, editors. *Elena Guro: Selected Prose and Poetry* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988).

## LITERATURE

Antiqui Philosophi Galli Delphinati anonymi Liber Secreti Maximi totius mundanae gloriae. Theatr. chem. III.

Antoshevsky, I. Bibliografiya okkultizma (St. Petersburg, 1911).

Berdyaev, Nikolai. "Krizis iskusstva", reprint (Moscow, 1990).

Bobrinskaya, Ekaterina. "Naturopilosophskie motivy v tvorchestve Eleny Guro", *Voprosy iskusstvovedeniya*, XI, 1997.

Eliade Mircea. *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origin and Structure of Alchemy* (New York: Harper, 1971).

Fabircius, Johannes. *Alchemy: The Medieval Alchemists and Their Royal Art* (London: Diamond Books, 1994).

Gourianova, Nina. "Introduction" in Gourianova, Nina and A. Ljunggren, editors, *Elena Guro: Selected Writings from the Archives* (Stockholm, 1995).

Gurjanova, Nina. "Tolstoi i Nitshe v 'tvorchestve dukha' Eleny Guro", *Europa Orientalis*, 13, 1, 1994, 63–76.

Ignatiev. I.V. "Ego-futurizm" in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, edited by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967).

Jung, C.G. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Bollingen series XXI (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 1989).

Kruchenykh, Aleksei. "Novye puti slova" in in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, edited by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967).

Kulbin, Nikolai. "Svobodnoe iskusstvo kak osnova zhizni" in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, edited by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967).

Lawton, Anna editor. *Russian Futurism Through its Manifestoes, 1912–1928* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

Markov, V. "Printsipy novogo iskusstva", *Soyuz Molodezhy*, 1, 2, 1912.

Markov, V. *Printsipy tvorchestva v plasticheskikh iskusstvakh* (St. Petersburg: Faktura, 1914).

Matiushin, Mikhail. "Ne iskusstvo, a zhizn'", *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 20, 22, 1923.

Mints, Zara. "Futurizm i neoromantizm. K problem genezisa i struktury 'Istorii Bednogo Rytsarya' Eleny Guro", *Uchenye zapiski TGU*, 822, 1988.

Mints, Zara. "Neopublikovannoe proizvedenie Eleny Guro – 'Bednyi rytsar'", *Russian Literature*, XXIX, 1991.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1990).

Paracelsus. *Selected Writings*, edited by Jolande Jacobi (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1995).

Rozanova, Olga. *Kubizm, futurism, suprematizm. Neizvestnyi russkii avangard* (Moscow, 1922).

"Sadok sudei" in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, edited by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967).

Ruggieri, Helen. "The Alchemists Wedding" in *The Alchemical Tradition in the Late Twentieth Century*, edited by R. Grossinger (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

Shevchenko, Alexander. "Neoprimitivizm" in Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova and Alexander Shevchenko, *Ob iskusstve* (Leningrad: Leningradskaya galereya, 1989).

Toporov, V.N. "Mif i voploshchenii yunoshi-syna, ego smerti i voskresenii v tvorchestve Eleny Guro" in *Serebryanyi vek v Rossii. Izbrannye stranitsy* (Moscow, Radiks, 1993), 221–260.

Zdanevich, Ilya, and Mikhail Larionov. "Pochemu my raskrashivaemysya" in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov*, edited by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967).

## ARCHIVE MATERIALS

Guro RGALI – Elena Guro. *Istoriya Bednogo rytsarya* [The Story of the Poor Knight], typescript.

Guro, Diary – Elena Guro. *Dnevnik poslednego perioda*, RGALI, ф. 134, оп. 1.

Guro, Letters – Elena Guro. Pis'ma k Matyushinu 1902–7 gg., RGALI, ф. 134, 011.1, ед. xp. 44.

Stepan Vaneyan

**JANTZEN AND SEDLMAYR OR THE MAGIC OF THE DIAPHANOUS.  
ON SEVERAL SOURCES FOR MODERN CONCEPTS  
OF LITURGICAL SPACE<sup>1</sup>**

I.

Hans Jantzen's 1927 paper 'On Gothic Church Space',<sup>2</sup> epoch-making in its conscious combination of gestalt psychology and phenomenology, continues to excite the imagination today, particularly since the text's history includes a by no means unimportant meeting with Hans Sedlmayr and his ambitious project to construct a new architectural history and theory, the monumental *The Origins of the Cathedral* (1951).<sup>3</sup> The logic behind the interaction of what seem to be but two versions of almost identical conceptual constructs reveals, among other things, the ability of a single word – in this case *diaphane* or *diaphany* – to indicate two different conceptual configurations that coincide almost nowhere. We shall seek to demonstrate that diaphany, in its applied form as used to describe the concept of 'diaphanous structure' (Hans Jantzen's own terminological invention), can be an almost universal aspect within a wide variety of contexts, a genuine and productive foundation for many modern theories and practices in the liturgical space.

One gets the impression that diaphany as a concept is permeable, open to any intellectual 'interpolations', even while its own true meaning is far from being transparent, as is evidenced by its very history, rooted deep within Aristotelian thought, where two key texts come to the fore, *De Anima* and *De Sensu*. The first of these (Chapter II) is particularly important for bringing the concept of 'transparency' (*diaphanes*), already familiar thanks to Pindar and Plato, into almost metaphysical circulation, moreover for doing

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Jantzen, 'Über den gotischen Kirchenraum', *Freiburger Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft*, Heft 15, Freiburg in Breisgau, 1928; re-issued in: Hans Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum und andere Aufsätze*, Berlin: Mann, 2000: 7–34.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Munich: Anlantis-Verlag, 1951; 3rd edn, Freiburg: Herder, 1976.

this through sight and optics. According to Aristotle, diaphany was a quality within things that made them visible. The question is, are there degrees of diaphany and should light be understood as a condition for sight? An even more specific question is the link between diaphany and colour, the only thing subject to sight. In the wake of a number of commentators (starting with Alexander of Aphrodisias, who clarified that diaphanous was by no means the same as 'transparent') we must recognise that diaphany is in part linked to surface (i.e. to the permeable or reflective potential of a substance with regard to light). This is already found in the writings of Aristotle (remember that famous place in *De Sensu* (439): 'colour is the limit [Gr. *eschaton*] of diaphany'), for whom it was important that diaphany makes possible the 'presence' of light in an object (light being above all fire and 'presence' the existence of some active quality, the famous *Parousia*, which meant that the mystical implications of diaphany became obligatory). And vice versa: 'Light is the actuality of diaphanousness' (*De Anima* II 418). Capital letter importance was the filled distance (the intermediary environment and, simultaneously, the medium, or *metaxu*), in which light can only be manifested: for if we place something coloured on the eye then, as the philosopher of Stagira rightly noted, you do not see the colour (*De Anima* II 419).

The Christian reception of diaphany immediately proved eschatological and architectonic, for the sole use of the word in the New Testament (rendered in standard English translations as 'transparent') is the celebrated description of the Heavenly Jerusalem (*Revelations*, xxi:21: 'And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass'). Bearing in mind that 'gold' in this passage indicates not material but colour, the optics of diaphany – both physical and metaphysical – becomes clear. The medieval reception of diaphany lies in its Latin morphological transposition, *transparentia* (used in the twelfth-century Latin translation of Aristotle by Burgundio da Pisa). Thomas Aquinas particularly emphasised that transparency was the equivalent of diaphany, moreover that it was mediality.<sup>1</sup>

If we add to diaphany's mediality its possible link not only with colour but with darkness (opacity or impenetrability to light does not mean lack of all visibility), we immediately start to understand the undoubtedly complementary nature of 'transparency/opacity' and their link with the perception of, among other things, artistic creation, something which in its substance (materiality) can be penetrated by the gaze (including the knowing gaze that looks through the object to the ideal) but can also insist on its own corporeality and madeness. Very early on transparency became the condition for all penetration, infiltration and mastery, which made it possible in the Renaissance period to identify it with *perspectiva* (the neologism of Boethius, as is well known), and that painted image with the 'open window' (Alberti) or with 'transparent glass' (Leonardo da Vinci).

<sup>1</sup> 'Huiusmodi corpora proprie dicuntur perspicua sive transparentia, vel diaphana. Phanon enim in Graeco idem est quod visibile...' Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia libri De Sensu et sensatur*, Lect. 6.

Thanks to Joyce and *Ulysses* (1922), the ‘diaphane’ mentioned by Stephen Dedalus becomes a concept that indicates either emblematics or the hieroglyphics of creation,<sup>1</sup> while in *Le Milieu Divin* (1926–1927; published 1957)<sup>2</sup> Teilhard de Chardin gave diaphany back its mystical-anagogical context.<sup>3</sup>

The most important thing we wish to convey through our remarks is the circumstance, not always remarked, that when strong concepts come into contact with no less forceful contra-concepts (particularly if their contradictory nature is unconscious), this can influence the discourse of which they

<sup>1</sup> ‘Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured... Limit of the diaphane in. Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane.’ The phrase ‘maestro di color che sanno’ in this section is also a reference to Aristotle, but as he appears in Dante’s *Inferno* (IV 131).

<sup>2</sup> We should note that although it was published considerably later, *Le Milieu Divin* was written at the same time as Jantzen’s text.

<sup>3</sup> XVII.4.3: ‘Like those translucent materials which a light within them can illuminate as a whole, the world appears to the Christian mystic bathed in an inward light which intensifies its relief, its structure and its depth. This light is not the superficial glimmer which can be realised in coarse enjoyment. Nor is it the violent flash which destroys objects and blinds our eyes. It is the calm and powerful radiance engendered by the synthesis of all the elements of the world in Jesus. The more fulfilled, according to their nature, are the beings in whom it comes to play, the closer and more sensible this radiance appears: and the more sensible it becomes, the more the objects which it bathes become distinct in contour and remote in substance. If we may slightly alter a hallowed expression, we could say that the great mystery of Christianity is not exactly the appearance, but the transparence, of God in the universe. Yes, Lord, not only the ray that strikes the surface, but the ray that penetrates, not only your Epiphany, Jesus, but your diaphany. Nothing is more consistent or more fleeting – more fused with things or at the same time more separable from them – than a ray of light. If the divine *milieu* reveals itself to us as an incandescence of the inward layers of being, who is to guarantee us the persistence of this vision? No-one other than the ray of light itself. The diaphany... No power in the world can prevent us from savouring its joys because it happens at a level deeper than any power; and no power in the world – for the same reason – can compel it to appear.’ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu. An Essay on the Interior Life*, ed. Bernard Wall, New York: Harper & Row, 1960, edn. 2001: 130–131. See the following commentary on this passage: ‘Für den geistlichen Menschen, der sich diese innere Quelle erschlossen hat, werden die Dinge transparent auf das Göttliche hin, der Kosmos wird durchlichtet vom Lichte des Logos, Welt wird zur “Diaphanie” Gottes. Zugleich breitet sich für den um die tiefere Erkenntnis und Liebe zu Gott ringenden Menschen in den Dingen immer mehr dieses durchdringende Licht Gottes aus; es entsteht geradezu eine neue Dimension in den Dingen und dem Menschen: das göttliche Milieu’; Adolf Haas SJ, ‘Darstellung und Deutung der geistlichen Lehre bei Teilhard de Chardin’, *Geist und Leben* 37, Munich, 1964: 284, 286. And Jantzen himself includes a quotation from Teilhard: Hans Jantzen, *Die Gotik des Abendlandes. Idee und Wandel*, Cologne: N. DuMont Schauberg, 1962; edn Cologne: DuMont, 1997: 40. But such diaphany is more typical of Neo-Platonism (particularly medieval) than of Aristotelianism. Compare, therefore: ‘...Luminosity can be described as a theophany of light (lux), which penetrates the world and moves hierarchically through the different levels of reality’; Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004: 116.

are, in theory, part. Such forceful and mutually reversible interactions, particularly if their participants – for instance their authors or begetters – are not aware of them, lead to serious distortions and transformations not only within one discourse or another relating to architecture (and indeed to everything else), but outside, in architecture itself, and not only in Gothic or even sacred (church) architecture. To put it very briefly, there are not only different diaphanies,<sup>1</sup> but different Gothics<sup>2</sup> linked with or resulting from them. All this presupposes different architectures, different spaces, and simply different worlds.<sup>3</sup>

We must sort out this situation, in which to discuss, and particularly to experience, diaphany, to have anything to do with it at all, is not the same thing as is encompassed by the words ‘transparency’,<sup>4</sup> or even

<sup>1</sup> There are many utterly trivial uses of the term ‘diaphanous’, particularly in the nineteenth century. For instance, it was (is) used for glass imitating stained glass (especially in Germany, where Grimme & Hempel of Leipzig called their products Diaphanies). We might recall ‘The Diaphane’ rice powder advertised by Sarah Bernhardt. Entomology also has its ‘diaphanies’ in the cucumber moth (*Diaphania Indica* etc.), and medicine too, which until very recently made use of diaphanosopes.

<sup>2</sup> Nille called Sedlmayr’s book ‘Panoptikum an verschiedenen Aspekten der Kathedrale’; Christian Nille, *Mittelalterliche Sakralarchitektur Interpretieren. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: WBG, 2013: 31. This definition is quite justified with regard to Gothic as a whole, if we look at it not optico-ontologically but existento-phenomenologically.

<sup>3</sup> A full and extremely precise history of the concept is set out in: Renate Maas, *Diaphan und gedichtet: Der künstlerische Raum bei Martin Heidegger und Hans Jantzen*, Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2015: 124ff. (particularly the relationship between Aristotle on one hand and Heidegger and Jantzen on the other, covering the various implications and individuals involved).

<sup>4</sup> We shall call the sight which is primarily and as a whole related to existence *transparency*. We choose this term to designate correctly understood “self-knowledge” in order to indicate that it is not a matter here of perceptually finding and gazing at a point which is the self, but of grasping and understanding the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world *throughout all* (durchsichtig) its essential constitutive factors’; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time. A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, tr. Joan Stambaugh, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1966: 137.

We should recall that the Latin *transparens*, equivalent to the Greek *to diaphanēs*, emerged in the twelfth century (1160). Later the term *transparentia* came to mean the negation of the sensual; *Metzler Lexikon der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Stuttgart–Weimar: J.B. Metzler Verlag, Stuttgart–Weimar, 2011: 446. Thus, for instance, the German translation of Aristotle’s concept, *Durchdringlichkeit* or ‘permeability’ (see following note) does not seem to be very suitable. The better term would be *das Durchscheinendes* or ‘translucency’; Maas, Op. cit.: 125 note 509.

It is telling that two whole pages of the German translation of von Simson’s book are devoted to the diaphanous – Otto von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale. Beiträge zu ihrer Entstehung und Bedeutung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968: 286–287 – but there is nothing about it in the original English version: *The Gothic Cathedral. Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 (original edition 1956): 204–205. There (and also on p. 50) we find ‘luminosity’, while in the German version there are two words, the first, *das Diaphanes*, the second *das Durchleuchtete*! One term in English, two in German, and when added together this means that the final effect is the product of two phenom-



'permeability'.<sup>1</sup> If, as we shall soon be convinced, these are not simply qualities but structural, even pre-structural, states of consciousness prompted by the impact of a particular space, then our states too – their form at least partially shaped by the two authors mentioned in the discourse on Gothic – also depend on such changes in our existence, which is in essence changeable.

Running a little ahead of ourselves, we note that diaphany presupposes transcendentalism, but with regard to what? Jantzen's answer is space, Sedlmayr proposes corporeality. Their differences are fundamental: for Jantzen the relationships of body / ground are immutable, while Sedlmayr seeks to reduce the figurative, replacing it with the baldachin (canopy), a not entirely comprehensible phenomenon if seen as something structural.

But nor is Jantzen that straightforward: in the middle of what he calls his *Zweischalensystem* (double shell system) is something that seems totally alien, *das kultische Geschehen* or 'liturgical event' (worship), that presupposes its own active and passive participants. But also transformation: for this is the transubstantiation – admittedly of that same flesh – of the Easter Lamb. In this regard we might say that Jantzen's concept describes spatial-corporeal states and relationships up to the moment of transubstantiation, while Sedlmayr is in this sense more eschatological: all relationships are radically altered. Now the vertical, the weightlessness (the baldachino enters the church space from above), the relationships are *not optical*, in which the *originale Bedingungen* or 'original conditions' are light (for Jantzen), but rather they are *hypnotic*, utterly kinesthetic, if not hallucinatory, since the baldachino's pointing to the Heavenly Jerusalem is not merely referential (this is, after all, what the church is all about) but structural: the architectonic facilitation and equipping of real, active processes, direct Revelation, directly and openly capturing the visual and specifically symbolic as the *Abbild*.

For Sedlmayr, moreover, there is nothing positive about the *Abbild* situation. It is sufficient to look at the situation in which 'diaphany' is used to mean permeability or penetration within, for instance, consciousness. Although the replication of diaphany entails reproduction, the representation of gestalt relationships: but then diaphany-I (Jantzen) becomes transparency

ena. And thus 'luminosity' is colour as such, as a borderline phenomenon, as what Aristotle called *to eschaton*. But that boundary is not simply a contour but a surface (or so von Simson has it). And then *das Raumlose* or 'spacelessness' as understood by Jantzen is something two-dimensional (i.e. not transparent, but opaque – *das Opake!*).

<sup>1</sup> Permeability means above all vision and thus 'perspectiva'. The perspectival type of vision implies 'ein bestimmtes Raumkonzept, das eine prinzipielle Kontinuität zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits des Bildträgers postuliert'; Metzler Lexikon, Op. cit.: 446. Thus such perspectival permeability means 'die Negierung der Materialität der Leinwand' (Ibid.) when applied to painting, or of the support or base when applied to a relief. Such permeability is thus not diaphanous in Jantzen's use of the word. It nonetheless seems to us that the transitional nature of the conceptual composition of the term 'diaphanous' is key: it is itself transparent and permeable, open to a whole complex of layers of meaning.

and transitivity. *Sedlmayr unavoidably unmasks the metaphorical nature of 'diaphanous structure'* (and thus we have diaphany-II). He was obliged to carry out a reduction of 'structure', which thus could not be the bearer of diaphany, that bearer being for him the wall, essentially deprived of its corporeality, and diaphany as a structural principle within Gothic disappears (according to 'the first wall system', i.e. according to Sedlmayer there is maximum diaphany in Justinian architecture).

In any case, the fate of 'diaphany', both its reception and its undoubted apperception, was determined by the meaningful, promising and multi-layered concluding formulations of Jantzen's text. As will be shown, that text is not entirely open to straightforward reading and, or so it seems to us, the semantic tendency and ambiguity it contains proved to be the very design task out of which Hans Sedlmayr's 'church' – both as building and as knowledge – emerged. This is Jantzen's text; this is how a new science (regardless of whether it really is new or a science) can come.

'Mit den bis hierher gegebenen Ausführungen ist die gotische Raumgrenze nur nach einem bestimmten *formalen* Prinzip analysiert, und es bleibt die Frage: Welche besondere Ausdrucksbedeutung für die Raumwirkung kommt der diaphanen Wandstruktur zu? Darauf wäre zu antworten, daß sie – neben andern hier nicht zu erörternden Momenten – das wirkungsvollste Mittel zu jener kultischen Verzauberung der Herzen darstellt, die das Erlebnis des gotischen Steilraumes charakterisiert. Ein Festes wird durch ein Unkörperliches der Wirkungsweise der natürlichen Umwelt entrückt, der Schwere entkleidet und zum Aufstieg gebracht. So schafft das christliche Mittelalter sich mit diesem Raum für das kultische Geschehen eine völlig neue Symbolform, die aus einer in ihren Quellen uns verborgenen Frömmigkeit erwächst. Eine Untersuchung aber, die das Prinzip des "Diaphanen" aus dem Kern des kultischen Vorgangs selbst zu deuten sucht, hätte die Überschrift zu tragen: Der Raum als Symbol eines Raumlosen.'<sup>2</sup>

The most important thing here is undoubtedly the promise of different perspectives, horizontality set by liberation from space, in which states connected with its disappearance or loss become possible: this is 'das Raumlose'.<sup>3</sup> But it is even more significant that these states are also achieved by overcoming the formal and, most importantly, they are linked to the enchanting effect on the heart exerted through worship, which is, we must recall, at the centre of all relationships within the church and which is the Mass.<sup>4</sup> This poetic 'sorcery' is like Sedlmayr's 'poetic roots of architecture' (on which more below),

<sup>2</sup> Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum*, Op. cit.: 32–33.

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: 'In der Polarisierung von Körpern und Licht wird der Raum zum Symbol des Raumlosen'; Willibald Sauerländer, 'Hans Jantzen als Deuter des gotischen Kirchenraumes. Versuch eines Nachworts', in: Jantzen, *Die Gotik des Abendlandes*, Op. cit.: 213. Moreover: 'Der horizontale Charakter der Grenze zeigt Parallelen zur horizontalen, lebensweltlichen Orientierung des Menschen'; Maas, Op. cit.: 152.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. von Simson: 'Diese Art der Vergegenwärtigung der heiligen Ereignisse... ist von der Religionsgeschichte mit recht an die Idee des Zaubers geknüpft werden'; Otto von Simson, *Von der Macht der Bilder im Mittelalters. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kunst des Mittelalters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1995: 15.

but most importantly *it is the indubitable reaction of one who read this formula as an instruction or even as an ostensive expression (whether mantra or incantation)*: one can get rid of space and material and one can rise up if one's heart is subject to and open to influence. Meanwhile space is allotted a symbolic function, capable of opening up conceptual perspectives of which Jantzen perhaps never even dreamed...

In other words, our hypothesis is that one of Jantzen's most attentive readers was responsible for carrying out his will. Though in this Jantzen himself was but a medium, for it is the Liturgy which is the source and simultaneously the object of the 'testament', if we are to believe (for instance) Otto von Simson in his text 'Das Abendländische Vermächtnis der Liturgie', published in around the same year as Sedlmayr's concept (1945).<sup>1</sup> The Mass itself, understood in the medieval synthetic-syncretic spirit (if we can call it that) as the most active kind of theophany, as a direct discovery of the Sacred, has that 'power of the image' which we ceased to feel and perceive in the modern age, or rather in the post-Tridentine age (and this, by the way, affects the writings of all three authors dealt with here: we should make clear their place in time, before the Second Vatican Council, with its extremely fundamental – but by no means fundamentalist – liturgical reforms).<sup>2</sup>

The subtitle of Sedlmayr's *The Origins of the Cathedral* could easily have been the formula cited with regard to *das Raumlose*. We should also note that the 'symbolic form' of the 'liturgical event' (worship) is a suitably constructed space. As an event it presupposes participation and the impossibility of evasion or detachment, hence the acceptance of this kind of space as its own state. And if it is a symbol then it is also a means of transcending and emerging from the given space, and if we take account of the fact that we are talking of symbolic form, i.e. of space as 'the experiencing of boundaries', then it becomes clear that the inevitable, surmounting and transforming interpretation-reaction to any such formula-formulation is that same overcoming of preset boundary-screens. Jantzen must have known that the expected *Raumlose* could also take on the form of the 'baldachin', like any tabernacle-canopy sheltering and preserving within all with which it comes into contact. Although there is of course a separate and important question, as to whether anything can have form outside space.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Otto von Simson, 'Das Abendländische Vermächtnis der Liturgie', in: *Ibid.*: 11–54.

<sup>2</sup> Of the almost endless literature on this subject see the following recent publications: Godfried Danneels, Paul F. Bradshaw, Patrick Prétot, *Nobile simplicità. Liturgia arte e architettura del Vaticano II*, Bose: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2014; Hans-Jürgen Feulner, Andreas Bieringer, Benjamin Leven, eds, *Erbe und Erneuerung. Die Liturgiekonstitution des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils und ihre Folge*, Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Sedlmayr's critical comments regarding the *Raumlose* in Anhang III ('Jantzens Theorie des gotischen Kirchenraums') of *Die Entstehung...*: 'Diese Auffassung scheint mir... teils doch romanisch... teils sozusagen schon protestantisch... Im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert ist der sichtbare Raum nicht Symbol eines Raumlosen, sondern Abbild eines objektiven unsichtbaren Raums, zu dem er im Verhältnis einer realen Analogie gedacht wird'; Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 526.

In any case, such super-formal and deformatising 'magic' requires means. And the arsenal of conceptual formulations such as 'baldachin', 'all-embracing structure', 'diaphanous walls' (not 'structures'!) etc. introduced by Sedlmayer under the heading, take note, of 'Die Phänomene der Kathedrale', *are like the instruments of the magus and sorcerer, the 'polymath' and enchanter*, taking up his stance fully armed to face a challenge, if not a threat, from a comrade-rival very like himself. Or are these simply cautionary measures? Is not Jantzen, who regularly refers to 'magic', 'sorcery' and such like, at once too mystical and magical for Sedlmayer?<sup>1</sup>

## II.

Before the answer – a set of key concepts – we shall look first at Jantzen, then at Sedlmayer. We are immediately struck by the bundling of *das Fest* – *das Festes*: festival and firmness, unshakably united in their determination, their aim for the heavens, which is, however, according to the nonetheless earthbound reference points and ideological findings of Jantzen, an upwards aim. Thus emerges Sedlmayer's baldachin;<sup>2</sup> it literally descends from the skies, as should any Celestial City (even Swift's Laputa).<sup>3</sup>

Such is Sedlmayer's conviction and postulate: *the cathedral is, on the phenomenal level, not merely the reproduction of a vision, seen and recorded, of the Celestial City, but in its very structure recreates each time the very situation of seeing and meeting*. The cathedral is this City, for both are, above all and in essence, a vision.

But this happens because the cathedral as gestalt is simultaneously the *Abbild* and leaves nothing else for its viewer and visitor. On one condition, however: that the viewer be not only viewer and not only visitor, but also a participant in that same festivity, that 'worship', the composition of which includes relevant theophany, in the form of the Bloodless Sacrifice, before which all kinds of visual mysticism recedes but does not disappear, being filled with bare reality, mysticism which is thus relieved of the burden

<sup>1</sup> Only von Simson does not lag behind him in this. But both of them, in their 'occult-paranormal' interpretation of Gothic, undoubtedly hark back to Rudolf Otto (*Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917) and thus to his direct source, Wilhelm Worringer (*Formprobleme der Gotik*, Munich: Piper, 1911).

<sup>2</sup> Obviously the relationship between the baldachin and the sky has both physical and metaphysical meaning: in *Peri psyches* Aristotle mentions the 'everlasting empyrean essence' and the 'upper substance of the heavens' (II, 7), which does not necessarily mean the ether, even if that is its traditional reading.

<sup>3</sup> Sedlmayer himself refers to G.K. Chesterton, who in his treatise on Thomas Aquinas compared the effect of the Gothic cathedral's original polychromy with the 'startling' effect on his own contemporaries of 'flying-ships'; Sedlmayer, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 28–29.

of verticalism: Christ is in the middle, amongst those who have gathered in His name.<sup>1</sup>

We should note that Sedlmayr himself sets this behavioural pattern for his reader, who, it is suggested, should accept the conceptual conditions of what we might call gestalt phenomenology, and should trust the author of the text on the emergence of the cathedral, in order to become co-author of, as it were, its co-emergence, if we can thus express it. For Sedlmayr takes seriously Jantzen's proposal-supposition as to those same charms in worship and expands the magic of the constitution of reality...

But how does it all begin? What are the postulates guiding Jantzen? These are they:

1. A phenomenological orientation on the analysis of experience itself, of the realisation of the set situation with all its semantic content, both factuality and eventfulness.

2. The indubitable use of gestalt methodology and frank modelling of the reality under study (the space of the Gothic cathedral) according to the body / ground principle. Jantzen's conceptual innovation lies in identifying ground with space deprived of its fundamental perceptive qualities, of accessibility and distance. Jantzen postulates such 'absence of space' as the nearest horizon of analysis and in a later text (1957) speaks not of the aspect of *das Raumlose*, but of a separate essence, a specific substance, something approaching *der Unraum*,<sup>2</sup> which is compared to the golden backgrounds of medieval painting ('diaphanous, intangible, luminous'). Drawing analogies with medieval philosophy, we can say that the definition of space in possession of the qualities necessary for the role of 'ground' makes it, in gestalt terms, into actual material, while everything which, by very definition, opposes it in the role of the other pole, i.e. as 'bodies', becomes form. If we were dealing with space as container, we could contrast with it the body (even a statue, which is what, partly in spite of himself, Jantzen does). But since it is something substantial – although flowing, streaming, more like a field (such is the 'ground' in gestalt philosophy, particularly in the writings of Kurt Lewin) – one wants

<sup>1</sup> Sedlmayr is relatively restrained in 'activating' the liturgical paradigm while Otto von Simson, for instance, sees the basis of his concept – not so much of Gothic as of all sacred architecture – in the drama of the liturgy, which acts (among other things) as an instrument of interpretation, since it is only within the ritual enacted, i.e. performatively, that one can master the meaning. And then the sacred structure will be 'a sacred stage' for the sacraments, and the liturgical space itself a means for the de facto constitution of meaning. See: 'The church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of Heaven' (von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, Op. cit.: 8). Compare that differentiation of terms in the German version of the text: '...mystisches Abbild des ewigen Tempels im himmlischen Jerusalem'; von Simson *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 22. It is notable that von Simson uses *Abbild* in its everyday sense, while for Sedlmayr it is something specific, just like diaphany (see below) when compared with Jantzen.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Hamburg: Rowohlt-Verlag, 1957: 69; Eng. edn: *High Gothic. The Classic Cathedral of Chartres, Reims, Amiens*, tr. James Palmes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984: 71.

to correlate it to subjectness and to wonder if such space is not replaced with something more like time? Further: are not binary relationships, all kind of subject–object relationships, abrogated inside the cathedral?<sup>1</sup>

3. Such a direct address to optical phenomena represents an unconditional assumption that Gothic, and the experiencing of architectural space in general, is a matter of visual experience, organised accordingly, in which the most important thing is the impact on the consciousness of those optical effects – above all light – that are being experienced. Although it is not only about optics, but about empathy, with a physical content (our own body – or rather its experience – is subject to projection). Thus diaphany is an optical effect linked to relief, or more simply to the plasticity of the wall, not projecting above the material mass as in classic reliefs since Antiquity, but hanging above the space. This is not yet fully sculpture in the round but it is no longer mere relief; it is plasticity squeezed between ‘spatial shells’, it is a spatial boundary, one that is forever intersecting itself, overcoming and transposing itself, seeking self-liquidation, as with Sedlmayr’s baldachin or, even more so, as with von Simson’s ‘diaphanous architecture’.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We should recall that for Hegel, space as ‘an impersonal multiplicity’ of points is abrogated through the interaction of points (i.e. movement) and through its negation of negation becomes time. Compare the relevant analysis in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (§ 82).

<sup>2</sup> Once again we must recall von Simson, since his broad, almost default use of ‘diaphanous’, although with some reference to Jantzen, in fact is utterly out of keeping with Jantzen’s own use (which he does not hide: von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 287; Eng.: 4). His diaphany (a most productive term; *Ibid.*) is transparency, a quality of the environment, a light quality. It is essentially a synonym for penetrability. If von Simson speaks of ‘diaphanous architecture’ (*Ibid.*) he means its transparency, since it consists of ‘membrane-thin surfaces’, which translate ‘tectonic functions... into a basically graphic system’ through a ‘cosmos of forces’; *Ibid.*: 7. The building is not an independent body but a system of partitions and screens, like a set for that same mysterial drama that remained operative in the Gothic. And von Simson’s criticism of Sedlmayr’s ‘illusionism’ (von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 23), understood as naturalism (according to Max Dvořák and not Sedlmayr) turns into something even more radical: if we take account of the thesis regarding the almost hypnotic effect of the mysterial drama, then true – authentic – illusionism will be something akin to hallucinations. But that is Sedlmayr, just as he is the one who see the intentional experience of the *Abbild.* To us it seems that von Simson has something more important and more original in mind: the simplification of the diaphanous concept and de facto elimination of the diaphanous phenomenon through the abolition of corporeality. For von Simson, Gothic is geometrical, graphic and flat. This is the Gothic not of construction but of design; not of the effect that arises when contemplating and experiencing the finished work (above all its space), but rather of the affect residing within the foundations of creativity itself, that which inspires and feeds the architect, that which underlies the act of birth. So, to continue the metaphor, we might say that the Gothic of Jantzen, and particularly of Sedlmayr, lies on the verge of rebirth within the interpreter’s own consciousness. ‘Beautiful patterns of lines ordered according to geometrical principles’ (*Ibid.*: 13:) as a means of presenting an idea, literally a sketch. And the graphic is diagrammatical. A question: what is the meaning of this need to rough out a sketch and visualise it? For suffice it to allow that this visualisation is at least in part unconscious, and the cathedral immediately



4. The cathedral is perceived as liturgical – or simply religious – reality: its essential semantic content is the ongoing mysterial happening, in which there can be no outside observers, since such is its specific nature that it embraces and encompasses all, claiming totality of the experience of life at this moment, in this place. We should point out immediately that the performance of the Eucharist (and again this is an extrapolation we owe to von Simson) is transformative on all levels, including the semantic, and is thus openly hermeneutic.

5. It is impossible to ignore the strategy that suffuses the whole of Jantzen's text, which aims to seek out 'original conditions', towards which he directs all his efforts to overcome everyday experience, including everyday space as a container. In Jantzen's text, space is limited and represents a place of interaction, which determines the text's key conceptual effect: 'diaphanous structure' is the relationship between permeability, accessibility not to the observer of optical and visual effects (then it would be a matter of transparency, like

becomes a couch... Hence it is so important for von Simson to repeatedly emphasise Gothic rationalism, which lies in the conscious articulation of components that are utterly irrational when viewed separately: the mysticism of light and aesthetic ascesis. But since both *Abbild* and symbol come together in the cathedral, the latter becomes an instrument – or rather a 'model' – 'designed in an attempt to reproduce the structure of the universe' (Ibid.: 35). Hence the importance that the cathedral be 'theologically transparent': this was the demand for reportability, verifiability, the ability to present some kind of precise documentation, intended in essence for the modern experimenter but de facto for the interpreter. Since essentially the cathedral is 'the intimation of ineffable truth' (Ibid.), with no need, strictly speaking, for precise conditions, whether stylistic or methodological, for its revelation. Essentially, i.e. liturgically, it is not a matter of creation as equivalent (analogous) to embodiment but of embodiment as equivalent to resurrection, i.e. salvation, and so more precisely to creation–erection of the cathedral as an image of mystical corporeality (von Simson emphasises that in the period in question – and not only then, we should add – the mystical Body of Christ was not a metaphor, unlike Its likeness, for instance a cornerstone). Gothic architecture is not only and not so much music in stone, however heavenly, as it is the Liturgy itself, with all its semantic structure, containing downright mysterial layers and memorative layers, but also indirectly exegetical layers. Most importantly, there are mimetic-symbolic layers, since the erection (or rather the design) of the cathedral is an imitation of the creation of the world, which is built according to laws of numerical and mystical harmony and consonance. This is the 'cosmos of forces' that makes the cathedral isomorphous with regard both to the universe as macrocosmos and to man as microcosmos (its construction is a repetition of both the act of creation and the act of salvation). As a monumental, all-embracing and universal liturgical vessel (monstrance), the Gothic cathedral is not only isomorphous but what we might call iso-logical with regard to 'the last things' in this world. And this is only because it is iso-graphic: again we repeat, it represents the opportunity, as during the liturgical drama, to give shape to all the semantic and generally affective potential it contains. Thus the cathedral, at once both liturgical instrument and hermeneutic instruction, is intended to be applied in successive structures, not only – and not so much – material structures. This is particularly noticeable and essential in Sedlmayr who, as we have said, built his own Gothic, his own cathedral, his own science, out of the concept-elements of his predecessors.

stained glass), but to these or some other states—affects within that same observer, who forms the corporeal equivalent of space, enclosed between ‘foils’ (*die Folie*) of light. Just as the wall is prefaced with spatial underpinning, not only in the form of light as shining but of light as darkness (as its own absence), so the observer finds himself in a forcefield of clearly manifested theophany, experiencing himself – as a figurative-plastic dimension of that same space – that same boundary. Jantzen speaks directly of ‘fantastisch-visionären Wirkungen in diesem Monumentalbau’,<sup>1</sup> indicating the whole range of aspects in which there is imagination, dream and monumentality, total impact on the mind. But if the wall is squeezed between spatial ‘shells’ and immersed in optical streams, the question arises – now for analytical purposes – as to what we might call the firmer corporeality of the interpreter. Probably in order to avoid ‘subjectivity’, Sedlmayer replaces that corporeality with something more reliable and objective, the baldachin, assembling all aspects of space as such. And it is within this space, utterly ‘authentic’ and reliable – since it is independent of the observer and housed in a monstrance – that any event (not only liturgical but hermeneutic) takes place.

6. The only thing that might disturb us in this scheme is the presence of tectonics and thus of the horizontal view (with which it all begins). Jantzen quite unobtrusively defines a purely phenomenological horizontality of perception, while Sedlmayer, fulfilling his desire to talk about that which is deprived of space (*das Raumlose*), or so it seems to him, in fact sets the vertical for the canopy-baldachin, for the ostensory, intended for the preservation and revelation of the Inconceivable. Incorporeality and spacelessness are understood as atectonicity, as the absence of mass, as irrationality.<sup>2</sup> But, we repeat, everything is described from the viewpoint of the impact effects from which no observer can ever be free. Moreover, according to Jantzen, it is towards this that the whole system of spacial impact is directed: as he was to put it in his later text, it was diaphanous structure that allowed for the creation of the effect of floating without completely dematerialising it.<sup>3</sup> But for Sedlmayer, the observer must be standing on the ground in order to

<sup>1</sup> Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum*, Op. cit.: 32.

<sup>2</sup> Thus von Simson, for whom diaphany is an almost universal quality of the universe (there is no way of getting away without a reference to Dante and his *Paradise*, where divine light suffuses the cosmos: von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 80 Eng: 52), so easily finds it even in the zone of the triforium (von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 287), which would be impossible for Jantzen, since this is a zone of pure optics, already freed of all somatics. Again: Jantzen’s diaphanous structure is a gestalt–structure, by very definition including the horizon of the viewer’s corporal experience, since his own corporeality is part of the structure, while for von Simson the essence of Gothic was the flat surface pierced by light and defined by supporting linear values; *Ibid.*: 288.

<sup>3</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 71–72; Eng. edn: 73. In this book so much space is devoted to diaphanous structure, so much is said about it in comparison with Jantzen’s 1927 paper, that it might be seen as a direct commentary on the earlier work. But more shall be said on this in the concluding remarks.

feel the transcendent impact of the atectonic and heavenly: in his fleshly embodiment, the observer is not a representative but a reproductive 'contrivance', something rather like a light-sensitive plate or even a pellicular screen, a 'film', to which early cinematography compared itself. He is a membrane and thus von Simson is not quite so far off in bringing the whole situation back to two-dimensional graphic qualities, although this can of course be directed (one might say) eschatologically, towards incipient generative forces, towards that which was lacking when the sacred structure was born, when it was built, even when it functioned.<sup>1</sup>

7. Lastly, the horizon of hermeneutics as such (according to Jantzen's terminology, particularly in his later texts, this is 'iconology'<sup>2</sup>) is set by the multidimensional and heteronomous 'layered' quality of the phenomenal picture that is the cathedral (predominantly in its internal arrangement). We can – and should – speak of semantic diaphany, of the semi-transparent layers of consciousness itself, with its potential emergence to the groundwaters (if not the intrauterine-primordial waters) of original conditions, something taken up with particular zeal by Sedlmayr, who with four-part figurative meaning made the connection between the typology (or modality) not only of images as such but of states and moods, from mystical-metaphysical to moral-methodological. We can hardly argue with this: if one postulates that the main function of space is its impact on the consciousness, it becomes clear that the consciousness, its internal architectonics, is formatted according to spatial structures that, at the same time, liquidate it each time a new interpretative force – based on unceasing, inalienable and irremovable historicity, and on a succession of deconstructions and amplification, simply reloading that very same consciousness – comes into play.

But before we dig deeper into the diaphany of meaning, we shall cite Sedlmayr, who provides us with a ready-made interpretation of Jantzen's theory: 'Diese "Gitterwand" des Hochschiffs ist nun in verschiedener Schichtung mit einem durchgehenden "optischen" Raumgrund – und zwar einem optischen Dunkelgrund oder einem farbigen Lichtgrund – unterlegt, wie es zuerst H. Jantzen in seiner bahnbrechenden schönen Arbeit über den gotischen Kirchenraum dargelegt hat. Er nennt diese Form der "raumunterfütterten" Wand die "*diaphane*" Wand. Im gotischen Triforium (dem Laufgang) haben wir das Prinzip dieser diaphanen Wand gleichsam in reiner Form vor uns. Aber ebenso wie in der Zone des Triforiums der flache Raum des Laufgangs als Raumfolie hinter der Wand wirkt, ebenso wirken in den klassischen Kathedralen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts (welche die Seitenschiff-kapellen noch

<sup>1</sup> And again, as the background, we come to von Simson, who saw the design activities behind Gothic structures as an experiment, in which the cathedral is a model in the broadest sense of the word, if not simply a three-dimensional 'construction-instruction', a handbook not only for the building itself but for the consciousness that is included and activated within. And at this point Panofsky comes into play, particularly as interpreted by Bourdieu (in the text of key interest to us, the foreword to *Architecture gothique et pensée scholastique*). See: Nille, Op. cit.: 65.

<sup>2</sup> We should point out that von Simson too 'evolves' towards 'iconology'. See: Nille, Op. cit.: 46.

nicht kennen) die Seitenschiffe. Sie werden zu schmalen Raumschalen für das Hochhaus. Sie laufen *deshalb* in der reifen Kathedral immer auch an den Querhausarmen entlang... Für die Wirkung der Diaphanie ist es gleich, ob der raumhafte Grund wie im Triforium als eine Schattenzone erscheint, oder ob dieser Grund wie in den Seitenschiffen und Emporen mit farbig glühendem Licht durch setzt wird. Die Fensterregion ordnet sich der diaphanen Wand mit verschiedenartigen Lösungen ein. Entweder fällt die optische Zone mit dem farbigen Lichtgrund der Fenster zusammen; das heißt: Tiefraum wird gleichsam in die Fläche gepreßt – wie es die Wahrnehmungslehre an den sogenannten “Verdichtungsflächen” beschreibt (Oberfläche des Schnees). Gerade das unterscheidet die tiefe Wirkung alter Fenster von der plattner Flächigkeit moderner, die “wie ein durchsichtiges Linoleum aussehen”. “Oder auch die Fensterregion wird zweischalig wie das Triforium gestaltet, eine Lösung wie sie für die gotischen Bauten der Normandie charakteristisch bleibt” (Beispiel Coutances, Bayeux).<sup>1</sup>

So which effects grow out of a different kind of eventfulness, not so much religious but far harsher, and how are they linked with the situation in which, as we showed earlier, Sedlmayr was left with the fruits of a very radical reduction? Jantzen’s diaphany – we shall say right off – turns into Sedlmayr’s diagrammatics,<sup>2</sup> although we might argue about who was the author, just as we can argue about Jantzen’s discovery of diaphany: we have before us the overt logic of reception and reproduction of a concept that was current throughout the nineteenth century, when it was used to indicate something quite uncomplicated and unpretentious.

The revelation of the optical depths of Jantzen’s diaphany was only the beginning; Sedlmayr’s kinesthetic play on the same diaphany is but a continuation, in which experiments with a tachistoscope, perhaps even with a tachyscope, were still very much in line with Baroque experiments in the context of Athanasius Kircher’s *magiae-naturalis*,<sup>3</sup> carried through in cinematography; a large, capacious *camera obscura* transformed into a theatre in which the viewer – within...

Such allusions are extremely close to Sedlmayr’s thought, in which they were linked to specific liturgics, filled with criticism of the medieval experience (such is the main spirit of the German ‘liturgical renaissance’).

<sup>1</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 52.

<sup>2</sup> On diagrammatics see: Matthias Bauer, Christoph Ernst, *Diagrammatik: Einführung in ein kultur- und medienwissenschaftliches Forschungsfeld*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010; Dietrich Boschung, Julian Jachmann, eds, *Diagrammatik der Architektur*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013; Birgit Schneider, Christoph Ernst, Jan Wöpking, eds, *Diagrammatik-Reader: Grundlegende Texte aus Theorie und Geschichte*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016; Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Die Kunst der Diagrammatik: Perspektiven eines neuen bildwissenschaftlichen Paradigmas*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017; Sybille Krämer, *Figuration, Anschauung, Erkenntnis: Grundlinien einer Diagrammatologie*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See: Nicole Gronemeyer, *Optische Magie. Zur Geschichte der visuellen Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004.

In the relevant chapters he speaks, without sacrilege, of the theatricalisation of the Mass, points out its choregetic nature, not without reference to Abbot Suger, who compared the service to a dance performance.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, these postulates were intended to play a fundamental role but these and many other (quite daring, unusual and emphatically provocative) observations on Gothic were set out in the very first chapter, frankly entitled 'Die ergänzte Kathedrale', which was conceived as a true Gesamtkunstwerk utterly in the spirit of Wagner. It deals with the main function of historical reconstruction: the latter can also be intended as straightforward construction, completion or development of something for which there was no time in the era itself, or which earlier scholarship dared not do.<sup>2</sup>

Such procedures are like the actions of an architect in giving graphic form to his concept using ideographical configurations, preparing his design like a scenario for subsequent actions to be performed by others playing the role of, perhaps, the 'builders' of the Gothic cathedral or, for instance, the 'priests' carrying out some religious ritual, or even 'interpreters' of relevant texts or relevant experiences, in accordance with particular spatial states.<sup>3</sup>

### III.

Our task is thus to trace carefully how the direct, clear desire to put into effect Jantzen's ideas about the symbolic aspects of diaphany *gave birth to Sedlmayr's radically new theory, pregnant with extreme consequences for scholarship*, Sedlmayer using Jantzen (but by no means him alone) for his own ends, which included – among other things – establishing architectural theory as an apparatus for permanent and real transcendence, built – which is undoubtedly substantial and essential – out of architecture's representative resources, that architecture containing an endless epiphany (if not a sequence of theophanies, in which diaphany is a complement to epiphany, as per Teilhard de Chardin) with its characteristic visual-mysterical implications (and the potential for departing from any kind of method – according to Gadamer).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sedlmayr assembled these and many other incisive, unusual and provocative observations on Gothic in the first chapter of his book, entitled 'Die ergänzte Kathedrale'.

<sup>2</sup> Recall the spirit of Sedlmayr's pre-war texts regarding 'strict science' in the arts, where the leitmotiv is 'non-Euclidian' methodology, although applied to Baroque material, which is nonetheless not so far removed from Gothic. See, for instance: Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Architektur Borrominis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Munich: Piper, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> On 'mystischer Konnotationen der Methode' (axonometric projection as a form of presence) see: Kari Jormakka, *Geschichte der Architekturtheorie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Vienna: Luftschacht, 2006: 205.

<sup>4</sup> Cf.: 'Gadamer will nicht eine Methodenlehre entwickeln, mit deren Hilfe wir eine "richtige" Interpretation oder Auslegung vornehmen können, sondern auf die – transzendentalen – Elemente hinweisen, die in jeder Interpretation vorausgesetzt sind, gleichgültig ob es uns gefällt oder nicht'; Anton Hügli, Paul Lübcke, *Philosophie im 20. Jahrhundert*, I, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002: 209.

For us there is a problem in the attempt to found such an important project on the phenomenology not of visual experience (as with Jantzen) but of design–constructive activity. Sedlmayer intended to resurrect *the very order and process of the architectonic and at the same time of, as it were, prophetic creativity*, with the viewer and user assigned the role of *performer of the sacramental act*, although we should not forget for a moment He Who is, was and shall be its Creator... The architect becomes something along the lines of a choregos and theurge.

In general, overall, the transformed concept of ‘diaphany’ becomes the definitive and decisive point in establishing that presence in the church is the same as presence at revelation, not only apocalyptical and eschatological but utterly without time, whether eternal or – most particularly – real. Thus revelation is founded, if we may be permitted to put it this way, on the *mysterical concept of the Abbild*: the church can itself be a monumental sacramental, like a monstrance–ostensory and baldachin–aedicule, housing within itself and being itself sacred and saved and illuminated and salvational.<sup>1</sup>

Sedlmayr starts by postulating the incontrovertible ‘depictive’ (*abbildende*) nature of the Gothic cathedral, which acts as an individual instance of ‘depictive architecture’ in general, to which is contrasted ‘symbolic’ architecture. The difference between them lies in the degree of realism of that which is represented by the architecture. Pictorial reality is present at the same level as architecture, while symbolic reality (as is right for an referential relationship) is present beyond the bounds of architecture. In this context the decisive moment is indubitably an understanding of the meaning of *Abbild*.

For Sedlmayr<sup>2</sup> *Abbild* is notable for its direct concordance, even accordance, of both signifier and signified: this is far from simply being *Bild* (which is too general a concept), nor is it a symbol; rather it is, to use the correct terms (which are not, alas, part of Sedlmayr’s repertoire), a direct signal. The sensory blends with the suprasensory. This is a revelatory situation not merely of Revelation but rather of visual hallucination: the role of faith in the wider (value-system) meaning of the word is important here, a recognition of the direct link between (even identity of) the senses and the suprasensory. Sedlmayr puts it quite elegantly:

‘Dazu verdient noch der Hinweis Beachtung, daß gerade dort, wo also Grenzfall das Bild mit dem Abgebildeten gleichgesetzt wird, solches Bild der äußeren “Ähnlichkeit” am wenigsten bedarf (Kurz und Kris<sup>3</sup>). Erst “wo jener Glaube an die Identität von Bild und Abgebildetem in Schwinden begriffen ist, tritt ein neues Band auf, um beide zu verbinden: die *Ähnlichkeit*.” Wenn

<sup>1</sup> A superb example of the universal reading of the aedicule motif (using Gothic as an example) is John Summerson’s essay ‘Heavenly Mansions’; John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 103.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to: Ernst Kris, Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler: Ein geschichtlicher Versuch*, Vienna: Krystall, 1934.



aber das Sinnbild als irgendwie ähnlich mit dem Übersinnlichen angenommen wird, gewinnt das "sinnliche" Bild außerordentlich an Wert.'

In the text cited we note firstly that mention of the 'borderline case' which for Jantzen, we recall, is in essence where diaphany makes its appearance: diaphany comes through at the spatial boundary, or rather, space itself is the boundary.<sup>1</sup> Thus, hidden within this quotation from Sedlmayr is reference to that same diaphany as transparency which makes the image and that which depicts it mutually penetrable.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, of course, we note the indication of places of similarity, something not required in the case of the *Abbild* which is reinforced, or more correctly arranged or constituted by faith. Thirdly and lastly, it is not difficult to see the attempt to identify (almost at the level of wordplay) meaning and sense: the sensory takes on the meaning or significance (and in effect value) of the manifested suprasensory, the sensory proves meaningful, and the ideogram (*Sinnbild*) becomes a true symbol.

Such reflections are important to Sedlmayr and become his *idée fixe* since his prime purpose is to show how the cathedral becomes and is experienced as the Celestial City, when looked at in a very specific way (we might describe it as assuring discretion and experience of the suprasensory as the sole unifying reality, on a sensual – not only visual – level). The cathedral is not the condition for or means of re-experiencing Revelation (both as

<sup>1</sup> One might say that the term 'diaphany' literally leads to a 'terminal' state. Diaphany can disappear (in 'lateinische Gotik' with its 'terminierter taktiler Raum'; see: Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 216. Even more importantly, diaphanous structure disappears in Sedlmayr's texts, the author persistently emphasising, for instance, that 'Diaphan im Sinne des Restes der Jantzenschen Definition sind auch manche justinianische und romanische Wandformen'; Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 525. In his opinion, 'Körper, die mitten im Raum stehen, wesentlich', is the balchachin; Ibid. But Jantzen has an asymmetrical response to this, later but not too late: 'Für die Raumanalyse der Hagia Sophia lässt sich gerade der Baldachinbegriff im Sinne Sedlmayrs nicht verwenden'; Hans Jantzen, *Die Hagia Sophia des Kaisers Justinian in Konstantinopel*, Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1967: 36. We might add that there is an analogous notional logic with regard to pre-Gothic sculpture. Terminological transference of this kind is undertaken by Wilhelm Messerer (a direct follower of Jantzen and direct heir to Sedlmayr in Salzburg!). According to Lorenz Dittmann, it was he who defined space (*Raum*) as 'Dimension des Transzendierens wie der Transzendenz' and stated that 'Raum in dieser Qualität ist für das Relief der "Grund"'. It is key that 'Mit der Durchdringung des Grundes (i.e. diaphany – SV), seiner Einbeziehung in die immanenten Zusammenhänge des Werks geht seine Aufspaltung Hand in Hand' and that 'eben aus dem Riß das Daseins aber traten... die göttlichen Kräfte unvergleichlich und bindend hervor'. Lorenz Dittman, 'Einführung', in: Wilhelm Messerer, *Von Anschaulichen Ausgehen. Schriften zu Fragen der Kunstgeschichte*, eds Stefan Koja et al, Vienna, Böhlau, 1992: 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Wittgenstein: '2.16 Die Tatsache muss um Bild zu sein, etwas mit dem Abgebildeten gemeinsam haben. 2.171 Das Bild kann jede Wirklichkeit abbilden, deren Form es hat. *Das räumliche Bild alles Räumliche, das farbige alles Farbige etc*' (2.16 In order to be a picture a fact must have something in common with what it pictures. 2.171 The picture, however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth'); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. by C.G. Ogden, pub. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1922.

apocalypse and as epiphany), but is itself the situation of epiphany–theophany. Suffice it to say that this situation is liturgical and eucharistic, presuming both Presence and communion with the Presence. Sedlmayr is quite open here (chapter 27 and after). It is important for him to apply maximum method and methodology to justify what we have already called religious–mysterious experience, to show that this is a matter not of metaphor but of reality. To be absolutely precise, Sedlmayr’s task is to resurrect the experience (both mystical and architectonic) of those responsible for creating the cathedrals, and having resurrected it perhaps to repeat it. Even though that experience does not seem to him to be entirely unquestioned (as becomes clear at the end of the book, after some five hundred pages of text, when he also allows for a negative experience of the cathedral as a need for visualisation, for the search for and acquisition of means of imitating or reproducing mysterial experience through the senses, i.e. sensorics etc).

We wish to demonstrate that his (Sedlmayr’s) conceptual equipment (phenomenology and gestalt theory) allowed him to do this: one can, again almost on a sensory level, make clear, comprehensible and acceptable the idea that the true *Abbild* is capable of many things, one of which is that it facilitates the unquestioned intentional unity of earthly and Heavenly, by very reason of architecture’s involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Such a conceptual form-factor is facilitated by diaphany in the sense given it by Jantzen. Architecture as such – or its space – is diaphanous, and its extremes and polar opposites come through. They come through, come together and unite for the sake of something new, something which might be that very same boundary, or it might be tensions, dissonance and disruption: *diaphany* can sound like diaphony, for Gestalt laws of grouping within the psyche also offers a group of pre-mimetic and pre-figurative states that are, essentially, moods (*Stimmungen*).<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand that the very relationships between these concepts and their authors are diaphanous: Jantzen is the ‘ground’ for Sedlmayr’s new figurativity but he also pervades it. Whole theoretical systems and books are capable of being symbolic form’, not only of the spaceless (most probably *das Unräumliches*) but also that deprived of space (which is Jantzen’s *das Raumlose*).

<sup>1</sup> And simply ‘Kathedrale als monumentale Mysterium’, which we find in Jantzen (see: Mass, Op. cit.: 151), who ‘hat... das Mysterium des gotischen Raumes phänomologisch erfaßt’; Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 213. The ‘revealed’ is also a mystery understood as ‘die Dauer in der unbeschränkten Zeit der Aion’; Luisa Paumann, *Vom Offenen in der Architektur*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2010: 111 (with reference to Deleuze). Compare further: ‘Was durch die Form hindurchleuchtet ist die inspirative, virtuelle Seite der Realität’; Ibid.: 112. But we must always recall the danger of fetishisation of architecture as such; Ibid.: 62–64.

<sup>2</sup> Once again the methodological poetics and metaphors of von Simson, who emphasised the role of music as the practice of harmony in the widest sense of the world; von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 38ff.; Eng: 15ff.

The question and (extremely productive) collision lie in that gestalt relationships of body / ground are for Jantzen like a relief, when figurativity – as a quality of its relations to that which is perceived – emerges and grows within uncertainty (this is both hidden space and – in diaphany – manifested space): if we perceive and experience diaphany then that which is incomprehensible but ready to manifest itself becomes the ground against which our rationality emerges, our likeness to our consciousness and its potentialities, our rash and transient identity.<sup>1</sup>

How can that deprived of space, that free of our sensory perception, become an object of representation? Perhaps new light needs to be thrown upon it, there needs to be a new sacramentalisation of the renewed mystery? Or we need to move into other spheres and discourses, notably epistemological? This is the tactic – unconsciously, it seems to us – chosen by Sedlmayr. For there was surely a good reason why the illumination of the church became such an obligatory element at a very particular point in liturgical development. Sedlmayr was forced to turn to this ritual, this religious action–ceremony, to explain his intuition regarding the means for, or rather the quality of, the presence of the Heavenly Jerusalem. That same logic lies within the desire to affirm ‘depictiveness’ through references to the word, to literacy, to poetic texts: these are not simply verifiable ‘written sources’, it is not a matter of documentalisation, but of textualisation and writing: it is not simply the recording of speech but its essential clarity, free of representation, something close to expression in its similarly essential import and significance as an unmediated stamp or trace, the *Abbild*, evident and physiognomical, as a reciprocal impulse, a reaction to impact and impression (*Eindruck–Ausdruck*). And the act of writing is that same gesticulation and ostensivity, although deprived of the precision of the dot: it is, rather, a spot (*macchia*) or *punctum*, a touch, whether of the gaze or the finger (the latter comes to our aid when the first comes across its own blind spot).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For Sauerländer, for instance, it was important to draw attention to the fact that ‘Jantzen hat so die dunkle Ahnung der Romantiker von der Überweltlichkeit des gotischen Kirchenraumes mit der modernen Optik der die Bauformen vergleichenden Kunstgeschichte verschmolzen’; Sauerländer, *Op. cit.*: 218. These ‘dunkle Ahnung’ (‘dark forebodings’) and ‘moderne Optik’ (‘modern optics’) are undoubtedly ground and body and thus also something diaphanous, which means they are ‘epistemological’, with ‘ground’ presupposing an implication such as ‘dark’ and an expansion (deepening!) such as ‘depth’, right through to the very ‘choir’. This is not a matter of space and boundary but of place, edge and hiatus (now following not Meister Eckhart and Heidegger but Kristeva and Derrida). And what then of body and gestalt, and particularly of depiction? This is no longer a living body, living flesh, but membrane and veil or fold (on the application of this to Gothic sculpture as *Gewändearchitektur*, as ‘column figures’ that were for Jantzen ‘closely and fundamentally related to architecture’ see: Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, *Op. cit.*: 116; Eng. edn: 118, 128). Thus ‘diaphanous structure’ is a multiple-layered, transitional structure that leads into the depths, into gloom, to existence, to nothingness. And to God!

<sup>2</sup> On ‘*macchia*’ as one of the fundamental concepts in Sedlmayr’s system of views (but not only his – see also, for instance, Joseph Gantner and his ‘prefiguration’) see: Stepan S. Vaneyan, ‘Брейгель–Зедльмайр–Имдаль: слепое пятно интерпретации’ [Brueghel–Sedlmayr–Imdahl:

## IV.

Proof of all that has been said, or a symptom of all not said, comes in a later (1976) afterword (simultaneously a foreword) by Sedlmayr himself to *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*. In this context 'diaphany' is mentioned and explained again and again, on a far greater scale than in the main text and, which is even more symptomatic, in far greater volume than 'baldachin', even though the latter was Sedlmayr's own invention. But we do need to dig further into the nature of 'diaphany' and, most importantly, to expand it.

First things first. Sedlmayr introduces the concept of the 'generative principle' (*erzeugende Prinzip*), intended to define the essence of this particular architectural phenomenon. Rejecting in turn all previous definitions of the cathedral, Sedlmayr becomes convinced that this generative principle or, more simply, generative grammar (in the terminology of Noam Chomsky and Pierre Bourdieu<sup>1</sup>), is 'a new attitude to light' ('ein neues Verhältnis zum Licht'). Sedlmayr reminds us that this was first mentioned by Panofsky and von Simson,<sup>2</sup> that he himself spoke about it almost at the same time, but at the beginning

The Blind Spot of Interpretation], in: Ekaterina A. Bobrinskaya, Anna S. Korndorf, eds, *Память как объект и инструмент искусствознания* [Memory as Object and Instrument in Understanding Art], Moscow: GII, 2016: 86–99. We should recall the fundamental and at the same monumental pre-history of 'spots', not just optical but haptic: Alois Riegl with his idea of 'haptic form' as the result of primal tactile experience (touching a surface 'with the tips of the fingers' and shaping our understanding of two-dimensionality, which thus unfolds in space as the sum of many dots), and August Schmarsow, with his key correction to Riegl's idea, asserting the impossibility of drawing tactile or bodily experience from 'dotted touch' alone, offering in place of it the experience of the whole kinesthetic experienced somatics, of the whole, complete and living body. See: August Schmarsow, *Die Kunstwissenschaftliche Grundbegriffe. Am Übergang vom Altertum zum Mittelalter* [1905], Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verl., 1998: 42.

<sup>1</sup> Cf.: Nille, Op. cit.: 65. We should note Bourdieu's extremely negative attitude to all kinds of German terminology: he put both 'the diaphanous wall' and 'floating' on the same level as 'the baldachin system', seeing them as absolutely equivalent 'intuitivist' 'phenomena' whose sole significance derives from the fact that different authors (Sedlmayr in particular) 'discovered' their meanings or simply 'gave them names'; see: Pierre Bourdieu, *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974: 126 (with reference to Louis Grodecki). An indisputable and characteristic example of the enforced competition between the French sociologist's 'structuralism' and the German art historian's 'structural analysis'.

<sup>2</sup> On this see: John Gage, 'Gothic Glass – Two Aspects of Dionysian Aesthetics', *Art History* 5, 1982: 36–85; Peter Kidson, 'Panofsky, Suger and St. Denis', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50, 1987: 1–17. These two texts set out an essential revision of the question of the metaphysics of light: 'die Ableitung des Lichts im gotischen Kirchenraum aus der Lichtspekulation des christlichen Neuplatonismus einer kritischen Überprüfung nicht standhält'; Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 214. And thus Jantzen's analysis of space 'hat auch im Abstand von sechzig Jahren ihre hermeneutische Bedeutung... bewahrt'; Ibid. We can move 'über Sedlmayr und Panofsky hinweg auf Jantzens'; Ulrich Kuder, 'Jantzens kunstgeschichtliche Begriffe', in: Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum*, Op. cit: 177 note 17.

there was of course Jantzen, although for him light was but the frame for the diaphanous wall,<sup>1</sup> while according to Sedlmayr the truth was that the diaphanous wall itself was a typical product of *Lichtdrang* – the urge towards light.

For Sedlmayr, we begin to understand, the diaphanous wall is a disappearing wall, reduced and replaced by the window, not simply transparent and intended to let in ‘daylight’ (*alltägliche Licht*) as in ‘our modern glass buildings’,<sup>2</sup> but seeming as though it is itself the source of light (*Es scheint gleichsam nicht von außen zu kommen, sondern von den Fenstern selbst auszustrahlen...*), which allows for the bringing out of its anagogical nature (*seine anagogische Qualität mit einzubeziehen*).<sup>3</sup> A wall of this kind is literally a ‘most sacred window’ as described by Suger (for him this *sacratissime vitrae* was the true – unearthly – altar or communion table). Behind this is a new fullness of light, a new filling of the building with light. Sedlmayr gladly uses Panofsky’s expression, ‘an orgy of neo-Platonic light metaphysics’ (*eine wahre Orgie neuplatonischer Lichtmetaphysik*), emphasising that it is the anagogical quality, *the involvement in the transformative process of all presence within the building*, that is the true root of the cathedral (and it is not particularly important, or even particularly productive, to note that Suger had an incorrect, simplified understanding of the Areopagite). The building is the *Vehikel*, that same *materialia* that acts as the *Abbild (imago)*, which takes the observer into an ‘intermediate land’ (*Zwischenreich*), where there is no longer any Earth but there is as yet no Heaven. This is a world of some sort of *artistic purgatory* and an obligatory – because it is purifying – delay on the road towards true light and its source.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 598. But Jantzen is dealing with structure and not the wall! Thus this incorrect correction on the part of Sedlmayr is symptomatic of the whole idea and intention behind *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*.

<sup>2</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 599. Cf.: ‘Die gotische Kathedrale ist kein Skelettbau wie die Glaseisenarchitektur des 19. Jahrhunderts’; Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 213. Cf. Scheerbar and Bruno Taut: ‘Die Idee der Transparenz, Transformation und Bewegung sollet durch Glasbauten... verwirklicht werden’; Jormakka, Op. cit.: 206. More ‘diaphanisch’ indicates ‘der fundamentale Grundsatz der Funktionalismus’. These are the words of Le Corbusier, who had in mind that the architectural design indicates ‘from the inside out’; Ibid.: 204. See also the ‘essentialistische Ontologie, die dem Aristotelismus und Thomismus nahe kommt...’; Ibid.: 203.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rudolf Steiner (1923): ‘Wenn die lebendige Wand sich aufhebt, wird sie durchsichtig’; cited in: Mike Shuyt, Joost Elffers, Peter Ferger, *Rudolf Steiner und seine Architektur*, Cologne: DuMont, 1980: 47. Further: ‘Es muss... die bloße Lichthelligkeit transparent werden lassen für die Geistigkeit, die sich in ihr verbirgt. Sie zeichnet sich ein wie in Lichtspuren in den farbigen Grund. Hülle-Bilden und Enthüllen, diese Urpolarität im Gestalten und Erkennen, die aller menschlichen Existenz zugrunde liegt, wenn man an das Leib-Bilden und Leib-Auflösen denkt, über die Grenzen von Geburt und Tod hinausführt, wird hier künstlerisch zum Verhältnis von Wand und Fenster’; Ibid.: 48. For Jantzen himself, in his later writings, the ‘diaphanous structure’ is transformed into a stained-glass *Antiponderose* (the rose window in the cathedral’s west wall), an essential concept for all things transcendental, on which see: Kuder, Op. cit.: 176.

<sup>4</sup> See: Paumann, Op. cit.: 107ff.

But behind this almost orgiastic experience of light is the need to visualise the Mystery, to see It, to approach It through 'the mediality of the eye'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, however, that approach is distancing, for vision requires distance, when the 'communion' of the consecrated Host *in visu* is like contemplating, for instance, the Holy Grail, when it is enough simply to feel at a distance how the *Wunderkraft* flows forth from the chalice.<sup>2</sup>

It is this optics of translucence, of transparency, of allowing transmission through oneself, that characterises, according to Sedlmayr, the western part of Suger's building and it is here that the 'very traces' of true diaphany are missing, for the meaning of true diaphany is not in translucence but in radiance, not in peering through – in one's mind – at what is behind, what is hidden, but in the direct perception and intentional experience, at a corporeal level, of the oncoming unity of earthly and heavenly, i.e. the material and the immaterial.

Diaphany is an instrument for the achievement of a genuine state of 'trance', the essence of which is in the 'transportation' (that same *Vehikel*<sup>3</sup>) of the observer into that same 'intermediate land' (*Zwischenreich*).<sup>4</sup> This is achieved firstly because the observed is a very particular substance, 'the material of light', and secondly through the involvement in the process of the viewer

<sup>1</sup> Cf: von Simson on how the window represents 'translucent membranes'; von Simson, *Die Gotische Kathedrale*, Op. cit.: 284 note 60; Eng.p. 205 note 62. We might recall, among others, an author from the Bauhaus circle, Siegfried Ebeling, and his *Der Raum als Membran* (1926), in which space itself is conceived of as a membrane between flesh and 'atmosphere'; see: Stephan Günzel, *Lexikon der Raumphilosophie*, Darmstadt: WBG, 2012: 252–253. In general, if diaphany – now according to Aristotle – is *metaxu* (a substantial medium) then it is both active and a medium (which is how Thomas Aquinas translated *metaxu*). For Descartes this medium is the ether, on which see further: Günzel, Op. cit.: 250–251, and Maas, Op. cit.: 126–128 (which deals with a 'unmaterielles medium'). So diaphany is an almost magical and mysterial instrument for all kinds of transformative processes (see below and the following note). In Jantzen's late works we find such ideas, particularly that of architecture's transition, through the means of light, into a different overall state; Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 68; Eng. edn: 69–70. And this new state implies new (other) kinds of visual art – sculpture and painting, which present innately more primary links and unities, but which nonetheless prove close to colour; on which see the penultimate section here. We find absolutely the same thing in Aristotle, for whom colour was something 'primarily visible'. And in the very broadest of views, see: 'Les choses créées ont pour essence d'être des intermédiaires... Elles sont des intermédiaires vers Dieu'; Simone Weil, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris: Plon, 1948, p. 166 (in the chapter 'Metaxu').

<sup>2</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 602.

<sup>3</sup> We should remember that in German this word was first used in the realms of pharmacology and medicine, to describe a liquid which ensures the medicine reaches and is absorbed by the organism.

<sup>4</sup> Sedlmayr speaks most clearly of the viewer, that he is 'beim Anschauen dieser Lichtmaterien in eine Art Trance versetzt wird'; Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 603. But compare Sauerländer's observations: 'Darin gründet sich die immer noch anhaltende Suggestivität seiner Sicht der Gotik wie ihre verführerische Einseitigkeit und ihre spiritualisierende Mystifikation'; Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 218.



as a whole, since the instrument of this transformation is the cathedral itself, experienced as a particular kind of artefact–vessel, in truth as a tabernacle–monstrance, ‘through the eyes of its builders’. We should mention in passing that we have before us a whole series of transgressions, including the trans-temporal, notably historical transitions: after all, Sedlmayr stipulates that the point of view he offers us is not modern but an aspect of the consciousness of the age in which the cathedral emerged.<sup>1</sup> This is not epoch but epoché, not a reduction but an abduction as understood by Charles Peirce, an abduction which involves not the viewer of the building but the reader of the text, not only Suger but Sedlmayr himself...

Behind such a new attitude to light is a new – previously unseen and unheard of – closeness between the sensory and suprasensory, or even something else: closeness, almost accordance, ‘between verbal meaning, the sensual visible shape of light and the spiritual meaning that lies behind it, the *lux vera*’ (*Es ist ein neues Verhältnis zwischen dem wörtlichen Sinn, der sinnlich schaubaren Lichtgestalt, und dem dahinter liegenden geistigen Sinn, der lux vera*). This is, to us, the most important formulation: ‘the spiritual light reveals itself quite directly through the sensual light (*im sinnlichen Licht offenbart sich ganz unmittelbar das geistige Licht*).’<sup>2</sup> This presupposes that there is no longer any symbol, only the *Abbild*–depiction (*imago*). And that presupposes ‘a new materiality’ (not *Sachlichkeit* but *Stofflichkeit*), a new level of perfection in the material: from lack of transparency (*Undurchsichtigkeit*) to luminosity (*Lichthaftigkeit*), with, in the middle, transparency or permeability (*Durchsichtigkeit*). The latter is ‘a feature of intermediary bodies’ (*eine Eigenschaft intermediärer Körper*; i.e. fire, the ether, crystal, glass), which ‘*partim lucida, partim diaphana*’ (the words of Suger). In effect, diaphany is, ‘in a different meaning than that given it by Jantzen’, a property of an ‘intermediate zone’ (*Zwischenbereich*). Moreover, ‘the Gothic cathedral itself is, thanks to its new materiality, just such an intermediate land’ (*Die gotische Kathedrale selbst ist schon durch ihre neue Stofflichkeit ein solches Zwischenreich*).

But just how far does Jantzen’s meaning differ to that of Sedlmayr? For if intermediality is diaphany, then it is a medium for, among other things, ‘the magic of worship’, that which is most important for Jantzen. Transparency is only part of diaphany. Its other component is its medial instrumentality. Sedlmayr simply expands Jantzen, perhaps in part even despite himself, and he does it not so much through light as through the *Abbild*, which is not a symbol in the sense that it is not a reference but a direct stimulus, an index in the meaning given it by Peirce,<sup>3</sup> an impression of the situation, filled

<sup>1</sup> We should undoubtedly mention here that this mode of temporality reduces the question itself to historical reconstruction: this is plucking out of past time, it is time set within the very discourse on the cathedral...

<sup>2</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 604.

<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, and following Charles Peirce, ‘the real existing building’ can be defined as a ‘disci-indexical-sensual symbol’, a judgment, situationally addressed to the recipient’s sensorics; Winfried Nöth, *Handbuch der Semiotik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Stuttgart–Weimar; Metzler-Verlag, 2000: 446.

with 'mood' (*Stimmung*) and thus open to experience. In effect, in Sedlmayr's writing the whole structural phenomenology of the cathedral is directed towards exposition of the thesis that the cathedral is 'the image (*Abbild*) of the Heavenly Jerusalem'. Whole chapters of the book (27–48) are devoted to this, the subject passing through all possible semantic registers, from the theme of direct visual theophany (the Book of Revelation of John the Divine) to the exhaustion, fading and loss of the theme and the phenomenon itself (Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages*).

Thus the 'symbolism of the church building' is 'not just something retrospectively added in by theologians but something operating within the builders of the cathedral themselves' (*nicht nur etwas nachträglich von Theologen Hinzugedachtes, sondern in den Erbauern der Kathedrale selbst Wirkendes gewesen ist*).<sup>1</sup> The very act of erection is itself symbolic and operative, it is a symbolic act and and active ('live' in Jungian terminology) symbol. It is printed on the consciousness, although it is from the consciousness that it emerges. To be more precise, it leaves its mark on the consciousness, being what we might call a transcending stigma.

And so, to its builders the church building is beautiful in as far as it makes them participants in a higher reality which is 'superessential light', the higher it is the more light within. It is a substance, the nature of which is to penetrate and suffuse, giving of itself and communicating itself, through itself transposing, transcending and simply transubstantiating the believers gathered

Moreover, in situational language use the representation of space is always indexical, which is also manifested in spatial perspective; *Ibid.*: 284. But for Sedlmayr's theory of depiction the following propositions from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are of no less fundamental importance: '2.141 Das Bild ist eine Tatsache. 2.15 ... Die Zusammenhang der Elemente des Bildes heie seine Struktur und ihre Mglichkeit seine Form der Abbildung... 2.1514 Die Abbildende Beziehung besteht aus den Zuordnungen der Elemente, mit denen das Bild die Wirklichkeit berhrt' ('2.141 The Picture is a fact. 2.15 That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. 2.1514 The representing relation consists of the co-ordination of the elements of the picture and the things'). And most importantly here: '2.172 Seine Form der Abbildung aber, kann das Bild nicht abbilden; es weist sie auf' ('The picture, however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth'); Wittgenstein, *Op. cit.* In other words, the form of the depiction does not itself depict the image, simply indicating it through gesture, by its own presence, as it were, its even-tiveness and factual nature. It is clear what the consequences are for architecture: entering the architectural picture (*Bild*), we cannot leave it since it exists and functions as an image or depiction (*Abbild*), itself setting the rules, i.e. the form of any activity – including sensory and thereafter cognitive activity. In the case of architecture, such consequences are radical solely because it is itself an openly indicative (ostensive) means of symbolisation. We might then say that that which is the prototype for the image becomes the same as the image at the moment it is perceived and absorbed. Architecture finds itself, as it were, a purified, free, liberated depiction literally by virtue of its existence as a material phenomenon! This is pure magical instrumentalism in the form of 'depiction'.

<sup>1</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, *Op. cit.*: 605.

in the earthly church. And this happens in direct proportion to (*im Maße*) the holding of the Mass (*die Messe*)! The baldachin itself creates a specific corporeality, taking into itself transcendently, creating the conditions for the eucharistic meeting of the flesh of the Lamb and the flesh of the Liturgy's participants. It is no longer light but corporeality itself that is the foil (*die Folie*) for worship.<sup>1</sup> Therefore such an unambiguous instrumentalisation – liturgicisation of diaphany as an aspect of the church building and space makes that diaphany an aspect of the observer of / participant in the action taking place with and within it, if we take into account the observer-participant's fleshly corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*), which cannot be diaphanous in any of the kinesthetic acts innate to the flesh. This is the immanent diaphany of the Mass observed from within, where there is not only the 'intermediate land' (*Zwischenreich*) but the very 'Kingdom of God' (*Gottesreich*).<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, when Sedlmayr says that 'from Chartres flowed a stream of light metaphysics' (*ein Strom der Lichtmetaphysik*),<sup>3</sup> we can go on: this was an outflow of all possible frames and paradigms, not only of styles or forms of piety, but also of cognitivism, including the scientific.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, when Sedlmayr asserts that his task is relatively modest, to reconstruct the meaning of the cathedral as it was 'in the eyes of its builders',<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> But compare: 'Das Licht der Kathedrale "umkreiste" dabei wie die Lichtung als eine lichtende Mitte... Im architektonischen Raum wären die Gläubigen auf das "Raumlose" bezogen wie die Körper der diaphanen Wandstruktur'; Maas, Op. cit.: 151. We might say that such a 'Mitte' was not enough for Sedlmayr... Even more important for an understanding of what we might call corporeal diaphany might be Jantzen's concept of 'style entelechy'. For Jantzen, 'so ist es nicht die Linie... sondern ein imaginäres Sphäroid mit Zentrum und Peripherie, in das die Zeit als Achse eingeht'; Jantzen, *Die Gotik des Abendlandes*, Op. cit.: 40. 'In diesem Sphäroid herrscht Zielstrebigkeit im Sinne der Entfaltung einer geschichtlich neuen Formidee von der Peripherie her zum Erfüllungszentrum'; Ibid. But this temporal axis is also important for optical perception and for all following experiences, but approaching the centre which is the mystery of the act of creation. But where time is, there is space, and thus body and flesh with all their boundaries... For a totally eschatological transition of light and flesh see Messerer: 'wie die Apokalypse sagt: die Stadt, das Himmlische Jerusalem, bedarf weder der Sonne noch es Mondes, denn ihre Leuchte ist das Lamm'; Wilhelm Messerer, 'Sakralbauten' [1984], in: Messerer, Op. cit.: 279.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: 'Der Mensch wird in der Liturgie und in der inneren Liturgie der Seele zum wahren Priester der Welt'; Messerer, Op. cit.: 276 (with direct reference to Hans Urs von Balthasar!).

<sup>3</sup> Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 609.

<sup>4</sup> The transparency of a work of art, like its visibility, is reduced to simple readability and in the end to straightforward impenetrability of its 'objective existence as such'. Although this opposition – semiotic transparency / objective opacity – is also the object of criticism from the position of mediality theory (Nöth, Op. cit.: 448), and so – we add – from the position of diaphany!

<sup>5</sup> Jantzen himself has something similar in mind when he speaks of how 'das Ergebnis unablässiger Bemühung einer Reihe genialer Meister des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts, die unsere Ahnung von erlebbarer Überweltlichkeit durch Architektur eine Form gegeben haben. ES IST DIE Baukunst, die solche Macht ausJantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 156; Eng edn: 181.

we are obliged to see in this expression a very ambitious programme for the construction of an adequate, renewed discipline, in the context of which the author looks at builders not only of the cathedral but, for instance, of method and science, underpinning which is the '*principe générateur*', at work in that same cathedral which is understood above all as a 'work' (*Werk*). This is the principle of the act which gives birth to meaning, of constructing and constituting significance.

And this is a task of *reconstructing* the architectonic structures of the (artistic) consciousness, the consciousness that produces meaning, that determines the means, forms and methods both of its apprehension and, therefore, interpretation within the *construction* of the interpreter's consciousness. Behind such a consciousness lie not technical or aesthetic but purely wilful acts, creating out of the church building an 'instrument for the soul'. In any case the architecture is transformed, it is built as a vehicle that is purely spiritual, activating and acting in all spheres of reality and activity, as is the way of the spirit. At the same time this is an emphatically visual activity, although the 'eyes' may be those not only of the cathedral's builders but of those who look upon it, those who describe it or write about it, even its poets, since the roots of the cathedral are 'poetic', since the consciousness is poetic.

Thus Sedlmayr's almost-expressed idea is that science and learning, not only the cathedral, have 'poetic roots',<sup>1</sup> that science has its own poetics for it is the creation of meaning when it is free of space as container overall and as container, for instance, of natural light, and equally of space as the locus and condition for that same 'natural setting', and when it is directed towards 'supernatural' light and to the transcendentality of the world.

<sup>1</sup> See: Stepan Vaneyan, 'Искусствознание – наука и поэзия' [Art History – Science and Poetry], *Российский исторический вестник* [Russian Historical Bulletin], vol. 3, 2000: 9–27. of fundamental relevance here is Baumgarten's idea, set out in his proposal of 'aesthetics' as a new science, in which the method would be equivalent to its subject, that subject being depicted nature which is, in turn, also an active instance, depicting and imagining. No less clear is the link with Schelling's ideas on 'the philosophy of unity'. See: Regine Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte. Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft*, Cologne Deubner-Verlag, 2004: 37–70. Lastly we should note that the unbroken cognitive-metaphorical path from Sedlmayr's 'poetic roots' (defining a 'neue Sphäre der dichtenden und erdichtenden Phantasie' – Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung*, Op. cit.: 477), through his 'endothymen Grund' (Hans Sedlmayr, *Epochen und Werke. Gesammelte Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte*, vol. I, Munich, Mäander, 1985: 324) of artistic creation (with the non-objective visual form called *macchia* – the patch or spot of colour imbued with emotion; Ibid.: 275) straight on to Gantner's *l'immagini del cuor* (i.e. 'internal' artistic practice: 'die Zone der prefiguralen Phantasie', Joseph Gantner, "*Das Bild des Herzens.*" *Über Vollendung und Un-Vollendung in der Kunst*, Berlin, Gebr. Mann, 1979: 111, 117, 119). We should also mention Bättschmann's pitiless criticism of all these ideas: Oskar Bättschmann, *Einführung in die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn, Darmstadt: WBG, 2009: 27–30.

V.

In conclusion – or rather, emphasising the most important point, which is the hermeneutic aspect of the transition from diaphany-I to diaphany-II, in which Sedlmayr's twice-repeated phrase 'Ich komme zum Schluss' ('I am coming to the end') is of the essence. Temporality is perhaps the most decisive – eschatological – instrument in interpreting diaphany. This ending or conclusion is like some exclusion–enclosure, exhaustion and completion of the world's structurality, being the same transition from picture (*Bild*) to depiction (*Abbild*), from sight (*Sehen*) to hearing (*Hören*) and from diaphany (*Diaphanie*) to diaphony (*Diaphonie*). This forces us to listen to the voice (*Stimme*), and through mood (*Stimmung*) move on to definition (*Bestimmung*).<sup>1</sup>

And thus as conclusion we have some very rapid observations on yet another, almost mirror-image version of depictiveness, in the late texts of Jantzen, where a reverse 'optics' is at work, in the form of direct impressions of Sedlmayr, but also of von Simson and Frankl. Just how far does Jantzen remain true to his own diaphany when he comes up against a not entirely transparent reading of himself?

Jantzen's response was self-commentary: he adhered strictly to his own version of diaphany, which is natural, since he was its author. But the way he defends it makes clear that he was in fact defending phenomenological diaphany, of which we should speak separately. The most important thing here, as has been said, is the underlying identification with corporeality and thus with subjectivity which, as we shall see, allows us most directly to bring together the structural and semantic aspects of a phenomenon such as Gothic, and to be more precise, the specifically Gothic kinesthetic experience.

It is absolutely key that Jantzen always talks of the 'spatial boundary', for only thus does space manifest itself in phenomenal terms. Here we have, undoubtedly, an echo of the tactile, haptic underpinning of space, particularly when space is not container but substance (on which see above).<sup>2</sup> It still remains space, it does not turn into 'unspace' (*Unraum*), because it 'remains a space through which one can pass'.<sup>3</sup> This kinesthetic space

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for instance: 'Die Stimme... ist nämlich die Artikulation leiblicher Anwesenheit'; Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* 7, Berlin: Aufl. Suhrkamp, 1995: 146. And, undoubtedly, Jacques Derrida, who in *Speech and Phenomenon* spoke, among other things, of (here citing the German translation) 'Instanz der Stimme und ihrer befremdlichen Autoirrität'; Jaques Derrida, *Die Stimme und das Phänomen. Einführung in das Problem des Zeichens in der Phänomenologie Husserls*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2015, Chapter 'Die Stimme, die das Schweigen wahrht: 95–96; English edn: *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, tr. David B. Allison, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, in the chapter 'The Voice that Keeps Silence'.

<sup>2</sup> But compare the boundless and somewhat alternative question of 'optical and haptic form' (Alois Riegl), of 'close and distance vision' (Adolf von Hildebrand), that derives from Konrad Fiedler and August Schmarsow: Prange, Op. cit.: 190ff.

<sup>3</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 69; Eng. edn: 71 (where *Unraum* is rendered as 'spacelessness').

is constituted – we repeat – corporeally and once again is experienced an impact. All the more important therefore is a quality such as verticality (not proportion!): it performs the function, literally before our eyes, i.e. visually, of ‘removing any impression of heaviness’,<sup>1</sup> any sense of weight and so on. We should take into consideration that these effects are due not to space overall but to the wall, once again a ‘boundary’ spirit or essence, the unreality of which us supported by this very effect of the absence of internal buttresses. Visually, the ‘technical means of support’ remains unseen.

And all such paradoxical phenomenology comes to its climax in ‘diaphanous structure’, for the understanding of which that concept and phenomenon of ‘spatial boundary’ is vital. For Gothic, it is key that spatial effect is wrought by the whole of the central nave: in terms of ‘dissemination’ it acts like one large – mobile – body, one which cannot be without surface borders. Most importantly, that disseminating body – a *Kernraum* or ‘cardinal space’ surrounded by another space, the *Anraum* or ‘subsidiary spaces’ – is in another ‘aggregate state’ with other qualities, the main one of which is the ability to ‘envelop the upper nave wall in a mantle of space’.<sup>2</sup> It is the relationships the result of which is called ‘diaphanous structure’.

‘In the “diaphanous structure” of the Gothic system of enclosing space we are concerned with a visual relationship between the plastically modelled wall and the “subsidiary spaces” behind it. We must recognise as well that this relationship does not apply to every kind of wall opening and that it does not depend on the fortuitous size of the opening... The Gothic nave wall is not distinguished from its Romanesque counterpart by having more openings, but by a visually different relationship to the “subsidiary spaces”. It rejects the characteristic of continuous mass, to the extent that it is entirely composed of plastically modelled, cylindrical elements... In short, the architecture of the Gothic wall cannot be understood as continuous mass, but as plastic modelling.’<sup>3</sup>

We should here clarify an important point: these are not just the relationships with the ‘subsidiary spaces’ but with the ‘multifarious layers of space lying behind’.<sup>4</sup> The concept of diaphanous structure emphasises that ‘the modelling of the wall’ becomes ‘a form of architectural relief projecting from a background of space’, which only serves to determine ‘the Gothic character of this method of space-containment’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Gothic wall simply cannot be perceived without a spatial background acting as a foil, and only thus does it take on its impactive significance for the whole of the cathedral space. ‘The wall becomes Gothic as soon as the “round” modelling of the wall framework creates the character of a foil in the spatial elements lying behind it.’<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: 70; Eng. edn: 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 72; Eng. edn: 74.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 73; Eng. edn: 74–75.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: Eng. edn: 76.



Again: the presence beyond not simply of a ground but of ‘different degrees of significance and relationship’ (*Bedeutung- und Beziehungsschichten*), the importance of which lies in their significance, which in turn lies in the ability not only to affect the ‘perceiver’ but to shape some kind of image of action. So diaphanous structure determines ‘the character of the space’, of specifically Gothic space. And where we have space and character we find the relevant processes: both perception and behaviour, along with all kinds of other forms of activity, including those that are meaning-formative (filling with meaning and performing meaning). But all such habituality – against the background or on the basis of these layers and degrees, degrees that are directly and primarily set, that form the ‘modelling basis’, since the wall itself is both already a modelled form and those very layers – hide and envelop the body of the central nave, along with everything and everyone inside it or simply with it.

And the main impact of the ‘diaphanous structural principle’ lies in the reduction of the earth’s heaviness, to which is added the departure from stability and permanence, from fixed relationships, when there are not only many background layers but those layers are varied and contrasting in their alternation (from darkness into light zones and back again). Projected vertically, which is to say purely optically, such layers become levels, now marked by the precision and definition of increasing light effects.<sup>1</sup> Jantzen particularly emphasised – rebutting the ideas of Paul Frankl – that Gothic space cannot by any means be perceived or interpreted as ‘an endeavour to achieve a merging of very element of space’, nor can the Gothic structural principle be understood as combining all the separate original elements into a monotonous mass, uniting them into something indivisible. According to Jantzen, the wall, as something unified and continuous, dissolves and the spatial boundary of the central nave is a ‘self-contained and self-complete lattice screen’, which can be understood almost in technical photographic terms as a kind of ‘raster’. Those things that lie beyond never become part of the same space, being ‘mere shells’, an ‘optical foil’, always articulated in layers, creating ‘a layer of space acting as a foil to the nave wall’. This and this alone is the diaphanous structure or principle, which – we repeat once more – is a principle that creates, models and acts, including in the space of, for instance, the experiencing consciousness, which is in turn not without its own layers, with levels and transitions between them.

It is important to see how the universalism of ‘diaphanous structure’ continues and is confirmed in the analysis of, above all, Gothic sculpture, and secondly and most importantly, of painting, or rather of stained glass images. The latter (as understood by Jantzen) can be of particular use to us since, as we recall, diaphany is tied to colour: the latter, one might say, owes its existence to the former (colour is evidence of *diaphanes*, even if unseen). For Jantzen, coloured glass windows were ‘not only... a means of translating the architecture into luminous space’ but were the decisive aspect, supplying ‘a

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: 75; Eng. edn: 77.

decisive share of that sublime majesty characteristic of Gothic interior design'.<sup>1</sup> The reason lies in the figurative element of the glass. It was those figures depicted that brought 'into direct experience the feeling of transcendence'.<sup>2</sup>

So why stained glass figures (Gestalt) and not three-dimensional figures? Why is it that they manifest themselves as 'immaterial creatures of light, set like magically glowing symbols in the frontiers of space?'<sup>3</sup> In fact, similar characteristics mark Gothic sculpture, the key quality of which ('bearing visible witness') is that of 'silent corporeality' since what we have before us is *Gewändearchitektur*.<sup>4</sup> These sculptures lack their own existential centre and exist within architecture, belonging to its surfaces, but most importantly 'they have an air of belonging to another world'. They are participants in the drama of the divine epiphany, showing 'evident humanity of expression': 'in their faces shines the magic of personality.'<sup>5</sup>

But the power of diaphanous structure manifests itself 'within bounds' (almost literally 'terminally'). And this is the sphere of stained glass, for since that boundary is coloured, its action is 'more embracing', including and transforming not only corporeal but visual experience, accompanying the cathedral in its continuous spread, as an integral sacred space that draws in all corporeality, not only that of the statues. Particularly since the glass figures form part of narratives. So that those looking upon the whole are engaged not only purely visually and purely kinesthetically but hermeneutically. For the subject does not only reveal him/herself within the spatial layer, he/she exists not only on the border of the seen and the unseen, he/she experiences not only the de-materialisation of his/her earthly flesh under the influence of light energy, but he/she perceives and experiences, he/she reads, following the figurative (and figural) sequences, and thus interprets. If the cathedral 'as a work of art' is a system of layers – both meanings and relationships (of which Jantzen speaks in that very part of his book where he introduces the concept of diaphany) – it becomes clear that these layers are absolutely and determinedly significant to the perceiver, who experiences their impact as a method of behaviour,<sup>6</sup> as his/her habitus,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 139.; Eng. edn: 156.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Eng. edn: 157.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 116; Eng. edn: 128. *Gewändearchitektur* – rendered in the English translation simply as 'column figures' – might be understood as the architectonics of drapery folds or as architecture itself, which in its very essence can be seen as the plastic draping of space (according first to Semper and then to Schmarsow). With Gothic, the accent on graphism is important (this is the path taken by von Simson), but Jantzen also speaks of the 'drawing' common to sculpture and architecture, which unites the two.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations: Ibid.: 112–114; Eng. edn: 125. Another example of phenomenological metaphors is the description of the sculptures at Chartres as 'free of earthly limitations, a brotherhood present in body, but born of the spirit'; Ibid.: 117; Eng. edn: 128.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 73; Eng. edn: 75.

touching on mental and thus cognitive layers.<sup>1</sup> And diaphany acts as a continuous principle, penetrating the layer of wall (surface) and the layer of volume (sculpture) and indeed space itself, culminating in a meeting with those light-emitting essences which then enter on communicative (and more specifically narrative) relations with those making contact. And the role of colour here, as both purely optical effect and sensory affect (i.e. as percept), lies in a kind of 'desomatisation' of the subject being perceived. This is the condition for its subsequent semanticisation.<sup>2</sup>

So, colour is the crown of the built cathedral (*ecclesia materialis*), this part of the book ending with stained glass; the author then goes on to deal with the conceived, or rather 'interpreted' *ecclesia spiritualis*, but the interpretation is the result of constructive and arranging efforts that then transition into efforts which are symbolic, inevitably and directly diaphanous.

This chapter, 'Ecclesia spiritualis' (unlike the previous chapter, 'Ecclesia materialis') is modest in length but its size – above all conceptually – is both telling and precise. We must remember that Jantzen's text was a rounding up of all the great Gothic-interpretation texts that went before, from Panofsky through Sedlmayr to von Simson. If we exclude Frankl,<sup>3</sup> then Jantzen was the last in this series. And this short chapter is a fundamentally diaphanous and emphatically semantic synthesis, although, as we are seeking to show, at its basis lies gestalt analysis constructed according to the universal dichotomous principle of the interaction of opposites.

The borderline nature of the diaphanous is manifested not only on the level of built space: in the sphere of conceived space (which is, as we shall see,

<sup>1</sup> According to Jantzen, it was Gothic that 'discovered and brought to light the whole emotional range of the human soul'; Ibid.: 118; Eng. edn: 30. The end of the phrase looks on one hand like a phraseological turn of speech but on the other like an epistemological or even phenomenological turn of thought, constituting optics or the rhetoric of affect, of an 'expression of the soul' (*Regung der Seele*), including of a transcendendising kind. Once more we note the complex conceptual fate of 'habitus' (or *modus operandi*), in which an inherently phenomenological term is transformed in part into a Neo-Kantian one (an operation conducted by Panofsky, who saw in it *Denkschemata* or thinking patterns that then transitioned into creative patterns), and then – thanks to Bourdieu – into a structural invariant, homologically and iconologically present at all levels of human existence, from the inner recesses of the individual consciousness, through the collective consciousness to purely socio-symbolic institutions with an important accent on a variety of canonical-schematic regulator-catalysers, of reading and writing (the celebrated lectio/meditatio/contemplatio, multiplied by Chomsky's same generative grammar). And this all determines the essential means of producing meaning (even further, the 'systematic construction of facts', beyond which lies the production of culture itself). See: Bourdieu, Op. cit.: 132, 137, 139, 141–143, 151–153.

<sup>2</sup> As one commentator on Jantzen rightly put it, 'Der sichtbare Raum ist das Gefäß einer Spezifischen Spitalität'; Sauerländer, Op. cit.: 217: just as the perceiving subject is the content of that same vessel, which is utterly transparent and thus (because of the absence of any border walls) connected to the cathedral itself and everything that takes place there. But there is further movement – see the text of Jantzen himself and all other similar and potential texts...

<sup>3</sup> Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture. Pelican History of Art*, Penguin Books: Baltimore, 1963.

also built, although by different means) the boundary passes between the two states of the Church. “The visibility of the “ecclesia materialis” was a token of the invisibility of the “ecclesia spiritualis””.<sup>1</sup> Thus the act of indicating and interpreting is responsible for forming the symbol, or rather, the symbolic situation, a situation of symbolisation or symbolism. Just as the act of looking reveals the transitive nature of and correlation between the spatial background–skin and the plastic and corporeal ‘grille’ (over time the ‘raster’ becomes ‘text’), so, firstly, the discrepancy between the material and the spiritual and, secondly, the lack of correlation between stylistic changes in the material, i.e. in the ‘church building’ with persistence in the very fact of Revelation (above all in the Gospels!), gives us on the next (historical) level a discrepancy between the permanent and changing ‘layers’ (!) in the *ecclesia spiritualis* itself. ‘The mysteries of the faith can be received in a variety of forms which reflect historical changes in the requirements of church services.’<sup>2</sup> In this liturgical functionality the Christian religious building (which is what the Gothic cathedral is by nature) can be understood as ‘the framework for worship’.<sup>3</sup> The cathedral performs the role of framework, forming a boundary–facet, proving to be one of the layers, revealed as such only in correlation with another pole: this is not just the eventfulness of the Liturgy but of Revelation itself – in Christ, the meeting with Whom is of permanent magnitude for faith but of changing magnitude for piety as ‘religious requirement’ where, amidst the wealth of ‘truths’, different aspects are differently emphasised or revealed at different moments in ‘the flowing of history’.

In the end, the most important thing in this succession of historical changes, advancing with time (Jantzen starts with Early Christianity and ends with the Baroque), is the meeting of God and Man in Christ: ‘Divine Truths in Visible Proximity’ – in this lies the meaning behind the very existence of Western religious art. Christ the individual is but one more boundary–facet within the Church and the church building: this is his ‘theandric nature’.<sup>4</sup> The brevity

<sup>1</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 147; Eng. edn: 169.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.: 148; Eng. edn: 170.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 148; Eng. edn. 171. This idea runs through the whole, not just through Jantzen’s concept but indeed through the history of art: on this see the concluding sections of a small text on Mantegna, whose greatness lay in that ‘aus der die Erscheinung subjektivisierenden Darstellung heraus neue Ausdruckswerte für das Passionsthema schöpft’; Hans Jantzen, ‘Mantegnas Cristo in scurto’ [1927]), *Stephaniskop, Ernst Fabricius zum 6.9.1927*, Freiburg, 1927: 11 ff; reprinted in: Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum*, Op. cit.: 79. For according to Jantzen: ‘Denn was der Christus durch Aufhebung der “Distanz” an repräsentativem Wert einbüßt, gewinnt er dadurch, daß er menschlicher Erlebnissphäre “nahegebracht” wird. Er rückt in die nächste Umgebung des Betrachters, dorthin, wo der Tod und der Ausdruck überstandener Qual am intensivsten erlebt wird. Gerade diese Erlebbarekeit des Erlösertodes unmittelbar unter den Augen des Zuschauers ist ein Wert, den hier der Renaissance künstler der mittelalterlichen Auffassung positiv entgegenzusetzen hatte. Der Transzendentalismus des Mittelalters wird aufgegeben zu Gunsten einer den Sinnen greifbareren Auffassung des Erlösertodes.’ Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Kirchenraum*, Op. cit.: 79.

and succinctness – and restraint in the use of terms – in this brief section devoted to the christological dimension of the ‘conceived and understood’ cathedral forces us to see this subject as the true heart of Hans Jantzen’s whole conceptual construct.

In effect the text tells us that Christ’s theandric nature contains the potential for change in believers’ spiritual attitude to the next world, that it is possible – from one era to the next – to pick out the Divine or the Human. Gothic is the age and the cathedral the stage for an event that might be characterised as when ‘Christ’s... human side began to emerge for the first time’,<sup>1</sup> when He was benign, when He suffered for mankind, when He was visibly and sensibly recognisable and near, when He was ‘a man amongst men’.<sup>2</sup> The result was the expansion of the language of the fine arts itself, when symbolism and allegory were added to the existing familiar imagery that was readily and directly accessible to the senses, opening up a far greater field of action or application, opening up yet more relationships beyond each relationship of meaning. And at the same time this is the language of Holy Writ itself, particularly the Gospels, where the parables come from the mouth of Christ.

Thus it becomes possible to significantly expand the application of depiction: to create visual equivalents in nearly all fields, including – as Jantzen points out separately – in the sphere of theological speculation. Thus was born a system of semantic interweavings, including (for instance) those in the sequence of events – past, present, future, beginning and end, in which the existence of the world is understood as a path towards Christ, connected with the accumulation of new truths, with the very potential for varied, variational and (we should add) generative interpretation, when exegesis is bound up in the very method, in the allegorical and symbolical presentation of meaning. The very ‘multiplicity of exegetic possibilities’ proves key, assuming the system of multiplicity of meanings which had been traditional since Antiquity and which – and this is essential for Jantzen, who refers directly to Sauer – does not belong to any specific architectural style. In its ‘general nature’ this multiplicity of layers is a common quality, not so much of the church building itself but of Church exegesis as part of the same tradition. The same is true of methods of meaning personification, and equally of all kinds of anthropomorphism.

This is where the main question of the ‘conceived church’ arises: can one pick out a specifically Gothic type of meaning-formation, as we identify Gothic form-formation? Jantzen’s answer is in the spirit of ‘the iconography of architecture’, by this time worked out and worked up at the very least on a conceptual level: meaning takes on historic specificity if we can tie it to a specific individual responsible for that meaning (as is the case with architectural invention, which always has an ‘author’).<sup>3</sup> In the case of Gothic such

<sup>1</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 149; Eng. edn: 171.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See: Stepan S. Vaneyan, *Архитектура и иконография. ‘Тело символа’ в зеркале классической методологии* [Architecture and Iconography. ‘The Body of the Symbol’ in the Mirror of Classic Methodology], Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2010.

a possibility exists: Gothic is doubly fortunate in that we can tie both its form and its meaning to a specific individual. Incredibly, to one and the same individual, Suger, who, unlike Durandus – whose experience of layers of meaning was ‘limited to the level of his desk’ – truly ‘saw something’. In the identity of Suger, and those builders and architects with whom he was in some accord, we can sense ‘the survival of symbolism’.<sup>1</sup>

And then this living experience should be expressed through relevant forms, which does not exclude – indeed, on the contrary, it only exacerbates – the question of the logic and structure underpinning this accordance of form and meaning. A question that is, on the one hand, as old as that same philosophy, and on the other, one that takes on more concrete shape if we formulate it (in the wake of Bandmann) as a question of ‘bearers of meaning’, of the potential situation in which, to repeat Bandmann’s own question, ‘Can the allegorical interpretation have consequences to form?’<sup>2</sup> Put even more specifically it looks like this: is allegory capable or not both of emphasising or uttering individual architectural form-elements, and of picking out only those things which should be reproduced? That would be, according to Bandmann, ‘consequences to/for form’, both expressive and depictive.

Jantzen sets out a similar, apparently utterly acceptable, scheme in a quite unequivocal tone: on the one hand he accepts as indubitable truth that medieval theologians applied some meaning to the church building *post factum*, on the other he emphasises that original meaning (not additional or symbolic, but primary and literal, and quite definitely architectural) should be sought in the process and structure of concept and planning. As a creative and intuitive process, this latter always responds to numerous preconditions, not one of which in the period in question was ever declared directly and clearly. No one ever said anything explicitly to explain the origins of the desire to erect just such a building in just such a fashion.

‘In the formulation of a great plan, an architectural and spatial conception linked with tradition, and the symbolic reasoning behind it, may combine and complement one another in the architect and the client, without our being able to separate the individual factors.’<sup>3</sup>

Bandmann, quoted directly by Jantzen, expresses himself carefully and cautiously: he says that while meaning itself may be incapable of having an impact on form, this does not deprive form of the potential to transform itself (*umgestalten*) into a depiction (*Abbild*) of meaning, which is used as a kind of base (*unterschobene Bedeutung*). This is something like semantic diaphany: the elements do not subordinate each other but leave a place – ‘a spatial boundary’ – of mutual freedom and lack of definition, they can be seen through each other, almost in the meaning of Wittkower (and at the same

<sup>1</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 153; Eng. edn: 175–176.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Eng. edn: 176.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: Eng. edn: 177.



time of Karl Bühler).<sup>1</sup> But this is now an exegetic situation: this is how a meaning starts to behave when it has just been subject to the interpreter's gaze (the latter in effect converts it, literally transforming its gestalt).

This position requires its own interpretation, one that is also multilayered, although its literal meaning indicates that we can only speak of the equivalence of any particular architectural form if we can assert that the very structure of the meaning already contains indications of architecture, if the meaning is clearly constructed, for instance set into a base, underpinned, or on the contrary imposed upon, set up against, united to; if it contains frame, ground, characterising itself plastically, as grille, wing etc. In other words, if we can point to the cognitive and building activity of the consciousness, particularly if we can describe it in plastic and spatial (corporeal!) terms, then acts that are obviously meaning-creating, will automatically be – at the depictive level, at the level of a print or stamp or direct concordance – form-creating acts; the form of such cognitive activity will be architecture. It is important that this activity, this equivalency, can be shown from the start and not proved subsequently. So that the interpreter – in the wake of Suger and any creator–originator of interpretive creations – can see something specific, so that one can with clear conscience set out to interpret something that is truly seen, since it is isomorphic and isological to the thing itself.

This, it seems to us, is the epistemological core of that pairing, 'the built church and the conceived church'. Such totality of accordance is possible, to Jantzen's mind, under very specific circumstances: there must be a common environment, a mutually reversible space of forms and their meanings, as is the case with architecture, since the urban environment is communicative. Hence 'The Whole Building seen as the City of Heaven'.<sup>2</sup> And this meaning will be anagogical, leading onwards, up to a new level. And here – now with reference to Sauer, contemporary theologian and interpreter of interpreters – Jantzen comes close to the very essence of what proves to be his carefully conceived programme. It is not only the situation of vision that is key, but of apocalyptic vision, and thus this situation is unique, for it is final, completed and finished, and its reproduction-representation only reinforces the level of reality, just as happens in the Liturgy. In this sense, as Sauer quite rightly points out, the ceremony of consecration of a newly-built church makes it – through the reproduction of those same parts of Revelation – not a copy, not an image and even less an illustration, but a coinciding depiction, or rather a manifestation of the one true church of the New Testament as revealed in John's vision. The essence of this church lies in what happens there: the full and thus authentic Presence of God amidst His people, mankind, the saved.

In this state of vision and presence the ideal and material interact without absorbing each other, yet absorbing the very statics of contradistinction, the potential for one to exclude the other.

<sup>1</sup> See: Rudolf Wittkower, 'The Interpretation of Visual Symbols [1954]', in: Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1977: 173–188.

<sup>2</sup> Jantzen, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, Op. cit.: 154; Eng. edn: 178.

And purely logically it becomes necessary to point out the situation in which the co-presence of the different, the diverse, the disparate, of variety itself, proves to be the original source moment, even though it is also that which is sought. It is the *Abbild*, to use Sedlmayr's term, or the *Kunstwerk*, if we follow Jantzen himself. A play on both the use and rejection of *Abbild* by Jantzen makes up the last 'scenes' of this whole conceptual drama we have just reproduced. We shall linger on this, as the inevitable retardation that prepares for and ensures our perception of the final apotheosis (never forget that for Jantzen true Western religious art culminates in the Baroque).

From Jantzen's point of view, 'in pursuing the symbolic meaning of the church as a building' it was Sedlmayr who went furthest, seeing it not as an anagogical image but as 'a visible, tangible image of the City of God'... for the purpose of transplanting the visitor... "really" into the City of God'.<sup>1</sup> Whilst admitting that 'the majestic floating space of the interior produced by its weightlessness, towering verticality and diaphanous structure' makes a truly 'overwhelming' impression, that the 'poetical conception' is 'exquisitely contrived', Jantzen nonetheless states – and this is probably what we should highlight as his most important theme – that 'the Gothic cathedral as a work of art... cannot have derived from the mind of a poet the wonderful structural logic with which it was erected...' We have to 'lay aside the "imagery"' in the face of art in order to nonetheless recognise the 'high symbolic power' that 'gave material form to our conception of a supramundane world which could be seen and felt'.<sup>2</sup> And this was the sole responsibility of 'the art of building': it is this that brings out the very power that mysteriously makes the master, the author of the architectural design, into something like the Creator of all being.

Jantzen does not see in 'depiction' the equivalent of presence, although he recognises the experience of the closeness of the Divine as being the Gothic cathedral's main quality. He sees the total creative nature of Gothic, but at the same time wishes to identify only construction as that organising and realising authority which has an effect, including an effect on consciousness. That which happens to those within the cathedral happens thanks to architectonic creativity. And that which actually happens is an alteration in the state of mind and heart. A question: how does that alteration take place and what does it consist of? How is this effect of transition from the everyday state to the sublime created? To say that our master-architect 'gives form to our presentiments' is undoubtedly insufficient, since this reference to the creative act must be literal: it 'mysteriously' touches on changes in state and mood. It is no matter of chance that in his programmatic text on Brueghel Sedlmayr speaks of the *Abbild* after the anagogical level: this is tropology, tropism of the senses, tied to the topology of space. But for Jantzen the *Abbild* is replaced by the 'work of art', thereby emphasising the moment of creation and thus of irrationality, a moment in which the interpreter is 'complicit'.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.: 156; Eng. edn: 180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Eng. edn: 181.

In fact this is the leitmotiv of Jantzen's whole book, his whole concept, and because of the great closeness in their intentions, it is important to draw the lines separating him from Sedlmayr. If we compare the Gothic designer with the author of the biblical Wisdom of Solomon, which in its turn compared the Creator with an architect-builder; if in Jantzen's wake we allow that both of them might have thought in a similar manner, one in design, the other in text; if we believe Jantzen that it is sufficient for us to recall (*vergegenwärtigen*) in order for us to feel Gothic's 'symbolic force'; then what prevents us from admitting that any text on 'creative activity' has the same potential for activating a similar force? When Sedlmayr read Jantzen's text it was evoked in him вмести it evoked it in him; and when Jantzen read Sedlmayr's text (inspired by him, Jantzen), it activated in the author the concept of 'diaphanous structure'.

But the main problem, the specific nature of this state of affairs, lies in that in writing our own texts and in reading theirs we find ourselves in the same situation.

Ekaterina Andreeva

### THE MAGIC OF THE HORIZON: THE ART OF LENINGRAD AND ST. PETERSBURG FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1980S<sup>1</sup>

On 16 October 1930, Daniil Kharms wrote a parody of a mathematical treatise titled “Cisfinitum. A Letter to Leonid Savelievich Lipavsky. The Falling of a Stem”. Lipavsky was the author of “A Theory of Words”, about those words which appear when the Russian letters Ъ and Ы are combined with consonants and vowels and letters are then removed. Kharms’s concept *cisfinitum* is related to the process of creating forms. He places the division between creative and non-creative sciences: creative science is art; non-creative science is logical reasoning. Kharms writes: “If in creative science once has to contend with concepts of quantity... I modestly note that the new numerical system will be zero-based and its field of research will be *cisfinitum*”.<sup>2</sup> In 1931, Kharms included this treatise as the sixth item in his hand-written compendium of prose and poetry of the period 1927–1931, which was dedicated to the “zero of form,” to quote Malevich. The concept of *cisfinitum*, as I hope to demonstrate, defines the space around zero in a more concrete way than Malevich’s suprematist works. For now, we note the connection of the art of creating forms with the knowledge of zero and with alogical thinking.

Jean-Philippe Jaccard, author of the book *Daniil Kharms and the End of the Russian Avant-Garde*, finds in “*cisfinite* emptiness” the original or “zero level of creation” and notes the “convergence” of Malevich and Kharms. He suggests that “Kharms’s work should be considered not as a failed attempt to express the inexpressible, [...] but as a successful attempt to express the limitations and impossibility of this enterprise”.<sup>3</sup> If *cisfinitum* is the field of research of the “zero of form” then Kharms and Malevich really do converge, and this begs the question of why Kharms needed to invent his own word to designate passing through zero, why he multiplied the entities?

<sup>1</sup> The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

<sup>2</sup> Daniil Kharms, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [Complete Collected Works], vol. 2, compiled and edited by Valery Sazhin (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1997), 312.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Philippe Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms i konets russkogo avangarda* [Daniil Kharms and the End of the Russian Avant-Garde (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1995), 256.



Mark Petrov, *Torso in a Black Dress*, 1955  
Oil on cardboard,  
23 × 24. Family  
of the artist

Also, in the 1930s, Kharms wrote the poems “Third *cisfinite* logic of infinite nonexistence” and “To ring to fly (third *cisfinite* logic)”. In the former he speaks of the steady passage of time (“The hour was always just there, and now / it’s only a half-hour... No, all parts of the hour were always just there, and now they’re not”). At the end of the poem there is an oscillating shift of two regimes: “The hour was always just there. / The hour is always just to be”. The first regime leads to an absolute end, the second – the alogical – allows for an exit from the steady passage of time to the regime of infinity – “is always just to be”. We note that Kharms uses the infinitive to designate the regime of infinity, but is the meaning of the word *cisfinite* exhausted by concepts of the original? It is obvious that the *cisfinite* is a paired term with transfinite. The word “transfinite”, or infinite, goes back to Georg Cantor’s transfinite multiplicity. And Kharms no doubt remembered the Latin lessons of his schooldays, with Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul: everyone learned Latin through reading Julius Caesar’s *The Gallic Wars*. In this case, the meaning of the word *cisfinitum* is clarified topologically: it is not about the “primordial” but about that which is located on this (our) side of the limit-horizon, beyond which is the infinite-transfinite. Then too the convergence of the transfinite and the *cisfinite* acquires a particular meaning of transfiguration: the infinite or transfinite space of Malevich may turn into the *cisfinite* space of Kharms and this process is not only the reverse but also reversible. The second poem noted above is about this process. It contains open perspectives on the free movement of people, animals, objects, fractions of time and the sound connection between MBI [WE] and TAM [THERE] where we perform an action here and the sound is heard THERE. Extermination or resetting to *cisfinitum* can be a broadening of our space and time into the “netherworld”.

With the help of the concept of *cisfinitum*, Kharms creates an event horizon, a transformation of our finite space into the infinite of past and future. These transformations are possible thanks to the alogism of the *cisfinite*. It is comparable to meaning- and world-forming in human logic and in the gibberish of the text which precedes “Cisfinitum”, the in the compendium, which is titled “Whirled” and dated 30 May 1930: “I would say: – I am also a bit of a triple turn.

The bits would reply: – We are but tiny dots.

And suddenly I stopped seeing them, and the other bits as well. And I got scared that the world would collapse. But at this point I realised that I didn’t see separate bits, but I saw the whole caboodle. At first I thought that this was NOTHING. But then I realised that this was the world, and that what I used to see before was NOT the world. And I had always known what the world is, but what I had seen before I do not know even now. [...]

Then I realised that while there had been somewhere to look – then the world was around me. But now it wasn't. There was only me.

And then I realised that I actually am the world.

But the world, it is not me.

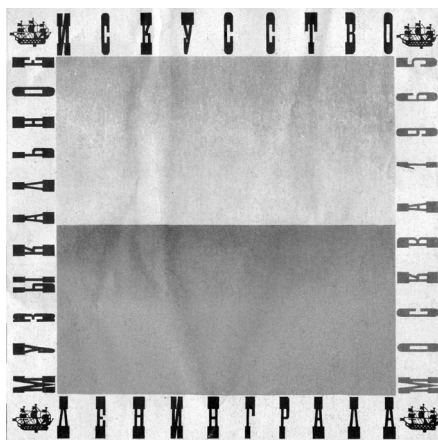
Although, at the same time, I am the world. [...]

And beyond that I didn't think anything.<sup>1</sup>

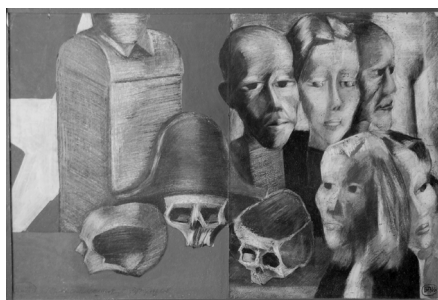
The path of nonsense brings the world to points (according to Deleuze, singularities are points where no laws apply) from which “Everything” is gathered in the world of “Nothing”. I note that the technique of contemplation, when you see “the whole caboodle”, literally coincides with the description of “expanded seeing” practised by Mikhail Matiushin, who tried to shift from vision of separate objects to the perception of the environment as a whole. Commenting on “Whirled”, Valery Sazhin point to “Kharms’s interest in Gnosticism”, “as such a duality of the gaze ‘into truth’ and ‘into the world’ was typical of Gnostics: when one sees in the world that the world and I are different; and one sees in the truth that I am the world and the world is me”.<sup>2</sup>

A day before “Whirled” Kharms wrote the poem “Notnow”, which can be seen as the topology of “Whirled” situated in the time of “Notnow”. In the last line of the poem, Kharms creates an eight-pointed figure (Vvedensky’s “star of absurdity” comes to mind): “But where is now? / Now is here, and now there, and now here, and now here and there. / This be that. / Here be there. / This, that, here, there, be, I, We, God.”<sup>3</sup> Kharms appears to be testing the space of the poem – as if knocking on the walls of his cell – with pronouns, the meaning of which is variable. The temporal and spatial regimes of “Notnow” and “Whirled” correspond to “Third *cisfinite* logic of infinite nonexistence” and “To ring to fly” with their oscillating regimes of moving from the transfinite to the *cisfinite* and back, through the zero of form.

Kharms’s concept involved opening up the idea of perfection in *cisfinite* emptiness. It materialises in the seventh text, “Null and nil”, written 9–10 July 1931. Here he establishes the difference between null



Mark Petrov, Cover for the record “Musical Art of Leningrad”, 1965. Offset print on paper, 19 × 19. Family of the artist



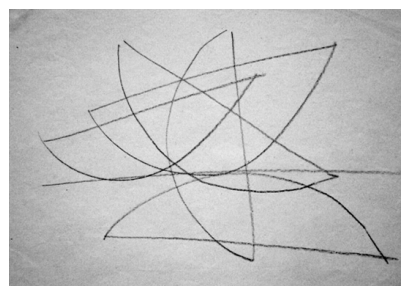
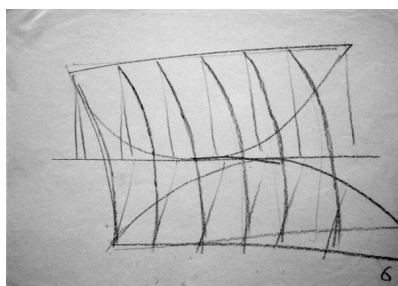
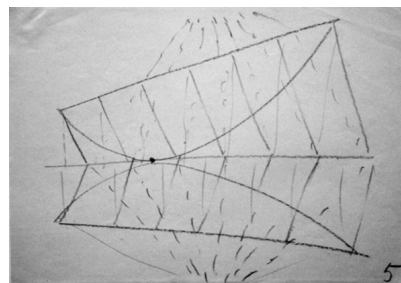
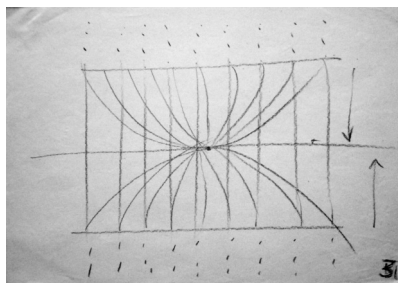
Mark Petrov, *Memories of the Future*, 1968–1969. Mixed media on hardboard, 40 × 70. Family of the artist

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 308–309. English translation by Neil Cornwell, <https://www.litencyc.com/php/anthology.php?UID=167>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 472. Here Sazhin refers to Marianna Kazimirovna Trofimova’s research *Gnostitsizm kak istoriko-kul’turnaya problema v svete koptskikh tekstov iz Nag-Khammadi* [Gnosticism as a Historical and Cultural Problem in the Light of the Coptic Texts from Nag Hammadi] (Moscow: Aequinox, 1993), 184 and others.

<sup>3</sup> Daniil Kharms, op. cit., vol. 1, 127–128. English translation by Matvei Yankelevich in *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (London: Ardis, 2009), n.p.





Vladimir Sterligov,  
From the series  
*Explanatory Drawings*,  
1962. Elena Spitsyna  
collection

and nil, where the symbol of nil is the circle. "I suggest and even dare to assert that learning about the infinite will be learning about nil. [...] I should say that even our imaginary solar sequence (i.e. the sequence of simple numbers – *E.A.*), if it wishes to answer reality, must cease being straight and should curve. The ideal curve will be even and constant and with the infinite continuation of the sun sequence it will become a circle".<sup>1</sup> In the last text of the series, titled "On the circle" (17 July 1931), Kharms apophatically defines the perfection of the circle as the ideal form. For him it is not the meaning of the ambiguity of perfection (as in Jaccard) that is important but its inexhaustibility: "Nature is such that the less noticeable the laws of creation, the more perfect the thing. And in nature it also the case that the less accessible the extent of a thing, the more perfect it is. [...] If there was such a thing that had been studied to the end, it would cease to be perfect, because only that which has no end, the infinite, is perfect".<sup>2</sup> In order to understand Kharms's words on the alogical movement towards truth, it is simplest to consider how he transforms the straight line into a curve and then a circle: "The straight line, broken at one point, forms an angle. But a straight line which breaks at each of its point simultaneously is called curved. An infinite number of changes in a straight line makes it perfect. A curved line does not have to be infinitely large. It can be such that we can easily capture it with our gaze, yet it remains incomprehensible and infinite".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daniil Kharms, op. cit., vol. 2, 313.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 315.



By analysing the meaning of Kharm's philosophical compendium and poems we can distil two pairs of oppositions: Kharm's is for the qualitative numbers nil and one and against quantitative multiples, he is for the curve and circle and against the straight line. The latter makes a total convergence with Malevich very unlikely. Furthermore, his apologia for the circle and nil allow us to contrast Kharm's with the Soviet avant-gardists and technocrats. Kharm's closeness to Matiushin's ideas of the permanent free movement of form and colour is obvious (in particular the idea that the square has a tendency in the viewer's perception to become a circle through a concave form and the circle is transformed into a rhombus with straight angles, as Maria Ender explained in her lecture "On Supplementary Form" on 15 December, 1927). It is obvious that Kharm's alogism is similar to the organic concept of the avant-garde and it is no accident that it is thanks to Kharm's, probably in Yakov Druskin's retelling, that the metaphysics of the organic opened up in the 1960s in the work of Vladimir Sterligov, in his re-discovery of the alogical event horizon.

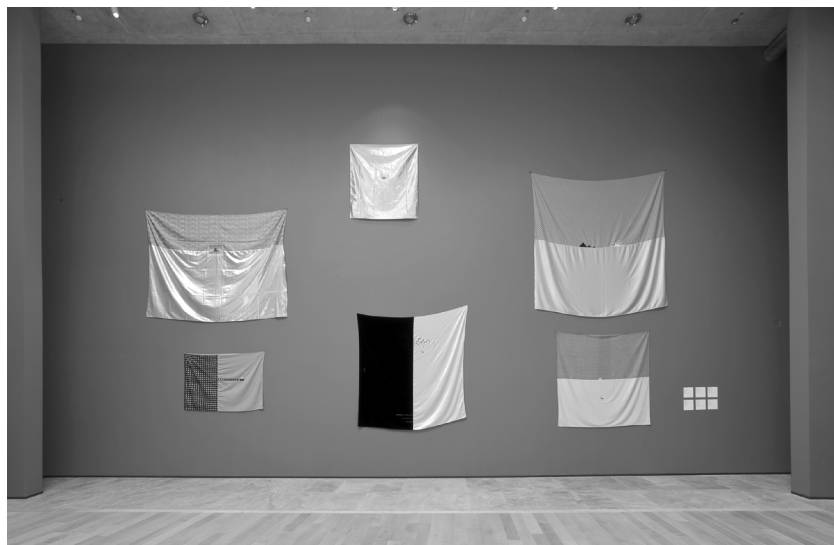
In his writings of 1964 and 1965, Sterligov describes the process of creation of his chalice-like, dome-like space: "When I drew a straight line which coincided with the horizon, the following occurred within me: the need to choose one of two possibilities. [...] As the line of the horizon in the chalice world is not the line of the horizon, but the Divine Straight-Curve, like the Divine Separation. It presents the possibility to compare the most distant contrasts. I decided to do that, to place on top something from another world. And then I continued with the bushes and they turned out to be from another world. It was if the old world returned but had become something completely different. [...] Conclusion: A, B, A or the return of A through some kind of contrast, where the second A is no longer the first but via B it is still A. [...] Daniil Kharm's labelled this merry-go-round 'Watermelon, melon, watermelon,

Vadim Ovchinnikov,  
*Symbols*, 1991  
Oil on hardboard,  
50.5 × 77.5. Gennady  
Pliskin collection

melon, watermelon...’ and so on”.<sup>1</sup> Sterligov not only indicates receiving impetus from Kharms’s crazy mantra “watermelon, melon” but also once more convinces us of the correctness of the understanding of Kharms’s *cisfinite* in dynamic connection with the transfinite, in the launch of the interaction of both worlds through the horizon.

In Leningrad, unofficial art of the post-war period, this symbolic tradition produces a chain of significant images, although the artists who made them did not form a sequence of teachers and students. Here we see an objective occurrence of *genius loci*. Graphic designer Mark Petrov, one of the founders of the Leningrad style of the 1960s, minimally leaves the horizon empty like a reserve of free space, which is particularly tangible for the producer of ideological design. His 1965 record sleeve for the record “Musical Art of Leningrad” brings back Malevich’s geometry to the Leningrad seascape. At the end of the 1960s, Petrov became a follower of the Buddhist teacher Bidia Dandaron. In 1968, he painted the political picture *Memories of the Future*, an image of vertical division. On the right side of the composition a red Soviet sunset fades and an icy glow appears, the male and female faces of a crowd of victim, among whom is the face of Petrov’s wife, the artist Ioanna Kuney. The same people can be found in Petrov’s painting *Zoo* (1968), where alongside the artist’s wife and friends there are a rhinoceros, a giraffe and an elephant, exotic creatures for the North. These animals (with the rhinoceros replaced by a unicorn) which appear on the left part of Bosch’s triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, in the scene of the divine union of Adam and Eve. In Petrov’s work there is no formal boundary between abstraction and figuration, as with Sterligov. But Petrov, in contrast to the perpetually heavenly Sterligov, places an accent on the presence of the human – male and female – within the divine. Love and death are embodied in the world of his horizons, becoming known through each other. The artist tries to adhere to the abstract austerity of the line, to ascetic detachment, in order to maintain the phenomenon: the flying body of the event. One of his strongest works is on this theme, his 1955 portrait of Ioanna Kuney entitled *Torso in a Black Dress*. The viewer feels themselves in the presence of eternal transitivity. We witness the unrelenting transformation of the torso into a landscape of Lethean waters and an eternal sky, changing with the rebirth of the body from inanimate black and white paint on a piece of cardboard 23 by 24 centimetres. The great Leningrad abstractionist Evgeny Mikhnov-Voitenko also imagined “the Boundary where the Sky touches the Earth” as both speculative and bodily, i.e. sacrificially. The self-generation of the world originates from an initial horizontal and humans dissolve in the glow of creation: *Untitled* (1972), *Hands*

<sup>1</sup> See E.S. Spitsyna’s essay reproducing Sterligov’s notes of 1964–1965, “Shestnadtsat’ pyatnits. Vtoraya volna russkogo avangarda [Sixteen Fridays: The Second Wave of the Russian Avant-Garde]”, *Experiment*, 16 (2), 2010, 87–88. For more detail on Kharms’s understanding of Malevich see Ekaterina Andreeva, *Vse i Nichto: Simvolicheskie figury v isskustve vtoroi poloviny XX veka* [All and Nothing: Symbolic Figures in the Art of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’sstvo Ivana Limbakha, 2011), 3–70.



(1974), *Horizontals* (1970s). As we can see, for Mikhnov the horizontal is the same type of sacred, personal symbol of death and eternal life.

Vadim Ovchinnikov (b. 1951) is an artist of the trans-avant-garde generation, who arrived in Leningrad from the steppe of Kazakhstan. He also made an easy transition from abstraction to figuration. In the painting *Symbols* (1991) he creates a score, an acoustic map of the depths and heights of creation, where the silhouettes of sharks and plants, symbols of nomadic dwellings, churches and tombs, and sun signs are located as if on the horizon lines of the stave. This compositional scheme goes back to the images on shamans' tambourines, which symbolically represented a journey through three worlds. Timur Novikov, Ovchinnikov's friend and the leader of art of the 1980s and 1990s, rethought the basic concept of postmodernist aesthetics, appropriation, turning material of mass production into the matter of the transfinite image. In the composition *Don Quixote Meets the Red Sun* from the series *Horizons*, the landscape of La Mancha is a striped kitchen oilcloth. The main active element in *Horizons*, like Matiushin's linked colours, is a "symbolic perspective" which brings together the stencilled icons with the ornament and texture of the fabric in a picture of the world along the horizon of the stitch. Novikov transforms the symbol of the horizon into a universal image of the newest universe, combining the dynamics of variability and the completeness of existence. Like Ovchinnikov, Novikov begins with the alphabet of symbols. But if for Ovchinnikov symbols and pictograms are introduced in the layers of half-abstract painting and appear to us like signs of an ancient palimpsest – "signs of concealment", as Matiushin would have it – Novikov, with his clear compositional geometry removes the dramatism of the temporal and spatial confrontation. Novikov's *Horizons* represent modernity (*Red Crossing*) and antiquity (*Odyssey*), the basic areas of human activity (the exhibition *Manifesta: Aral Sea, Swans*, the wall on technology, the wall on the

Timur Novikov's  
exhibition *Horizons*  
at Manifesta 10,  
General Staff Building,  
State Hermitage  
Museum, 2014  
Curated by Ekaterina  
Andreeva

points of the compass). Novikov anticipates the universal language of the latest computer graphics, taking as the basis of his visual symbol-horizons road signs and those from railway stations and airports. But to the neutral style of international animated transliteration he returns the nature of archaic and children's languages. Sensing the inevitable technogenic revolution, in which language will automatically be simplified to the sign and the main role of re-translators and communicators will be taken by various types of screen, Novikov made the language of painting formulaic and its flatness almost weightless, portable, in order to send the "organic" picture of the world with its fundamental meanings and harmonious dimensions into the otherworldly technogenic reality.

Artistic practice on horizons from the 1950s to the 1980s allowed artists to live outside the limiting rules of Soviet society, alogically being in universal contact with world culture and the avant-garde. Works by artists of different generations, which appear to answer each other, bear witness to the existence of the objective life of artistic tradition and artistic form itself. And this life emerges in the unrelenting move from the *cisfinite* to the transfinite and back again, in line with Daniil Kharms.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **Ovanes Akopyan** (Russia)

Doctor of Historical Sciences, specialist in the history of Renaissance magic, science and philosophy.

### **Ekaterina Andreeva** (Russia)

Candidate of Sciences in Art History, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Head Researcher in the Department of Contemporary Art at the State Russian Museum. Curator of numerous exhibitions of contemporary art. Member of the New Academy of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

### **Tessel N. Bauduin** (The Netherlands)

PhD in Art History, researcher and teacher in the Department of Art History at the University of Amsterdam.

### **Ekaterina Bobrinskaya** (Russia)

Doctor of Sciences in Art History, Head of the Sector of Art of the New and Newest Times at the State Institute for Art Studies

### **John Ellis Bowlt** (USA)

PhD in Art History, Professor of the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Southern California, Director of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture, Los Angeles.

### **Fae Brauer** (UK)

PhD in Art History, Professor of Art and Visual Culture at the Centre for Cultural Studies Research of the University of East London, Adjunct Professor of Art History and Honorary Adjunct Professor of Art History and Cultural Theory at the University of New South Wales (Australia).

### **Monica Centanni** (Italy)

PhD in Art History, Professor at IUAV University of Venice and Chief Editor of the journal *Engramma. La tradizione classica nella memoria occidentale*.

### **Maria Demidova** (Russia)

Candidate of Sciences in Art History, Senior Researcher in the Sector of Classical Western Art at the State Institute for Art Studies, Docent in the Department of History and Theory of Christian Art at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University, Moscow.

### **Nina Gurjanova** (USA)

Professor of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at Northwestern University, Chicago.



**Wouter Hanegraaff** (The Netherlands)

PhD in Philosophy, religious studies expert and art historian, specialist in the history of esotericism and hermetic philosophy. Professor at Utrecht and Amsterdam Universities.

**Linda Henderson** (USA)

PhD in Art History, Professor of Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. Expert in the field of researching the art of modernism through the prism of natural-scientific concepts, exact sciences and mystical and occult traditions.

**Olga Kleshchevich** (Russia)

Independent researcher, cultural studies specialist.

**Elena Klyushina** (Russia)

Art historian, Senior Teacher in the Department of the History of Western European Art at St. Petersburg State University.

**Anna Korndorf** (Russia)

Doctor of Sciences in Art History, Senior Researcher in the Sector of Art of the New and Newest Times at the State Institute for Art Studies

**Nicoletta Misler** (Italy)

PhD in Art History, Professor at Naples Eastern University (Italy). Researcher of the Russian avant-garde, specialist in the contemporary art of Russia, eastern Europe and Italy.

**Nikolai Molok** (Russia)

Candidate of Sciences in Art History, Senior Researcher in the Sector of Art of the New and Newest Times at the State Institute for Art Studies, Chief Editor of *Art Studies Magazine*, Moscow.

**Pavel Nosachev** (Russia)

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Docent in the School of Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Humanities at the Higher School of Economics.

**Yuri Rodichenkov** (Russia)

Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Docent in the Department of Humanitarian, Social and Economic Sciences at Moscow State University of Technologies and Management (Vyazma campus).

**Daniela Sacco** (Italy)

PhD in Art History, Researcher at the University of Milan and in the Centre for Classical Research at IUAV University of Venice. Author of books, essays and articles on the history of theatre and iconology.

**Andrew Simsky** (Belgium)

Candidate of Sciences in Physics and Mathematics, Researcher at Research Centre for Eastern Christian Studies. Author of research and publications on the theme of iconology and hierotopy.

**Ilona Svetlikova** (Russia)

Doctor of Philology, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Basic Research at the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and Linguistics at the Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg.

**Vasily Uspensky** (Russia)

Art historian, Senior Researcher in the Etchings Department of the State Hermitage Museum. Curator of exhibitions, author of articles and catalogues, St. Petersburg.

**Stepan Vaneyan** (Russia)

Doctor of Sciences in Art History, Professor of the History Faculty (Department of Art History) at Moscow State University.

---

Research publication

**HISTORY OF ART  
AND REJECTED KNOWLEDGE:  
FROM THE HERMETIC  
TRADITION TO THE 21ST  
CENTURY**

Collected articles

Ed. by *Ekaterina Bobrinskaya* and *Anna Korndorf*

Translated from Russian by Catherine Phillips,  
*Ruth Addison* and *Ludmila Lezhneva*

Design: *I.B. Trofimov*

Computer layout: *N.V. Melkova*

Original layout made at the State Institute for Art Studies  
5 Kozitsky Pereulok Moscow 125009