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TREMBLING OF THE VEIL: THE FORMATION OF *CINÉMA DE L'ESPRIT* IN FRANCE

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For My Wife and Best Friend Jeanne

“There and back again…”

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Abstract

Title of the Dissertation: Trembling of the Veil: The Formation of *Cinéma de l'esprit* in France.

This dissertation offers a re-examination and reassessment of the French silent film movement that is commonly referred to as "French Impressionism" through a contextualized study of the formation of its theoretical discourse in the early twentieth century. I rename the movement *cinéma de l'esprit* and argue that it was driven by a hitherto ignored and misunderstood utopian aspiration to make cinema an instrument of spiritual revelation and a surrogate for religion. By reconceptualizing the movement's discursive formation from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, this dissertation makes a historiographical as well as a theoretical intervention in the study of French silent cinema and the debate around classical film theory. This dissertation aims to integrate *cinéma de l'esprit* into the Romantic-Symbolist tradition of revelationism, which sees art as the agent for renewing perception, preserving spiritual meaning, and bringing about social change. It also immerses the movement in the broader intellectual milieu of the early twentieth century, where key concepts which undergird the articulation of film theory were being forged in an open, hybrid, and productive interdisciplinary atmosphere of exchange and translation, in order to reconstruct the model of the subject operating in the movement's theoretical discourse.

Chapter One conceptualizes the influence of Symbolism on *cinéma de l'esprit* as the inheritance of an anti-Enlightenment worldview. Chapter Two discusses the translation of that worldview into a revelationist theory of cinema formed in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition that saw art as an instrument of ecstasy. *Cinéma de l'esprit* revitalized the notion of revelation by positioning cinema as an art of the crowd. Chapter Three sets up the parameters for the *fin-de-*

siècle intellectual milieu in France that enabled a new articulation of the subject by looking into the intersections of science, para-science, and the occult. Chapter Four tackles the incommunicability of ecstasy as a problem for Symbolist aesthetics and considers the theoretical positions of *cinéma de l'esprit* in light of its contemporary theories about the unconscious and the human sensorium. *Cinéma de l'esprit* considered its medium uniquely revelatory because it offered an embodied and unmediated path to ecstatic experience. Ultimately, I argue that *cinéma de l'esprit* should be considered part of the greater modernist aspiration to re-enchant modernity.

Introduction

"One should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs. The telos of movement and flux is not solely mastery, but also imagination."
- Richard Rorty[1]

In his novel, *The Man without Qualities*, the Austrian writer Robert Musil explored two ways of being in the modern world as one of the overarching themes of the work. The first one, which helps the individual navigate the "normal condition" of the world dominated by technology and capitalism, involves "a scientific attitude toward things, which amounts to seeing things without love."[2] In contrast to facts and business, however, there is an "other condition" which rises above the practical transactions of the mundane world; it is the realm of mysticism, love, and poetry. One cannot live solely in the "normal condition," for "the normal condition is keyed to what is useful, the other condition to what is enhancing." For Musil, the "other condition" had once given birth to religion as the venue for its expression, but religion had become ossified, "rigid, hard and corrupt."[3] Meanwhile, science and capitalism had suppressed this "other condition" in

[1] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), 34.
[2] David S. Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942* (Los Angeles, Berkeley, and London: University of California Press, 1980), 252.
[3] Ibid, 255.

the modern age. Therefore, it falls upon art, Musil believed, to take religion's place and regain this "other condition" because art, like love, "focuses attention … hypnotizes, and changes the state of being in an attempt to affect the world in magical ways."

Musil's idea of art can be read as an answer to Max Weber's sociological theory of modernity as the "disenchantment of the world." In a 1917 lecture, Weber argued that "the increasing rationalization and intellectualization … means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted."[4] Weber's dictum summarized a long-standing critique, initiated by the Romantics, of the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and science at the expense of other ways of apprehending and being in the world. According to Weber, disenchantment means the loss of meaning and the loss of an intuitive, emotional, and spiritual connection with the world due to the increasing rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization of modern society. As we gain more mastery of nature with the application of reason, which is increasingly instrumental, we risk losing the sense of wonder, awe, and surprise and the feeling of that intimate and irrevocable participation in a world we once had access to.

The desire to regain and preserve "the other condition," to re-enchant the world, to undo the negative effects of instrumental rationality on our sensibilities and way of life, is arguably one of the compelling metanarratives of modern art movements.[5] Caught between a dogmatic and declining religion and an increasingly hollow and materialistic secularism, art becomes the space in which the regimentation of our perception can be broken down and the "veil of ugliness and

[4] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 1946), 139. See also Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," in *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 692-716; Steven Shapin, "Science and the Modern World," in *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, ed. O Hackett, M. Lynch, and J. Wajcman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

[5] For example, see Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2015) and Peter Watson, *The Age of Atheists: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

insignificance" can be lifted so that we have a glimpse at an *other* world which is denied of us in our everyday lives. Art takes into its refuge those sensations and experiences previously channeled into religion and mysticism. Art becomes a surrogate religion.

Recently, in a slender volume entitled *A Replacement for Religion*, The School of Life, a secular educational organization founded by the British philosopher Alain de Botton, acknowledged that, in hindsight, culture has not in any way replaced scripture: "[o]ur museums are not our new cathedrals. They are smart filing cabinets for the art of the past. Our libraries are not our homes for the soul. They are architectural encyclopedias. … The intensity of need and emotional craving that religions once willingly engaged with have not been thought acceptable within the contemporary cultural realm."[6] In other words, the attempts to replace religion with art or culture at large, as stand-ins for "the other condition" that Musil had in mind, has been a series of incomplete revolutions.

However, these incomplete attempts are not just abortive failures; they have invented new cultural forms, constructed novel ways of adapting to the conditions of modernity, and imagined new avenues into which the sense of awe, wonder, and surprise could be redirected. Through these attempts, the disenchantment of the world, in certain domains, is still a suspended sentence.

This dissertation concerns one movement in the symphony of modern culture that has been often left out of the discussion - the role of cinema. More specifically, I attempt to excavate a hitherto ignored historical discourse about cinema as the modern replacement for religion and re-examine the intellectual resources brought together by a group of filmmakers and theorists who, to paraphrase Élie Faure, did see cinema as our modern cathedral and imagine a racially transformed future for humanity as a result.

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[6] The School of Life, *A Replacement for Religion* (London: The School of Life, 2019), 9-10. See also Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (London: Vintage, 2013).

More than any other cultural form, cinema appeared to be, in the early twentieth century, inextricably linked to the process of modernization. Many of its contemporary observers considered the course it was taking to be an indicator of the configuration and the fate of modernity. From roughly the 1910s to the 1920s, there emerged in the French context a movement that imagined cinema's role as more than just entertainment or technology; it could become, according to its participants, an instrument of revelation which would capture those sensations and experiences alienated by both religion and secularism in the modern world.

Predating Musil's idea of seeing with love, Jean Epstein saw in cinema a potential to bring together the fissures between reason and emotion, fact and affect, "connaissance par science" and "connaissance par amour" in a "lyrosophical" state of mind.[7] Cinema embodies modern mysticism. For this group of filmmakers and critics, cinema would rise to meet the challenge of disenchantment by teaching us to see again and anew the soul of things. I call this movement ***cinéma de l'esprit***, and the topic of this dissertation is the formation of this movement in its historical, cultural, and intellectual context.

The name *cinéma de l'esprit* was not one that the movement's participants gave themselves but a historiographic invention on my part. In fact, they did not give themselves a common label, nor did they sign up to an inaugurating manifesto with a clear agenda like many other avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. These filmmakers and theorists came from a variety of backgrounds and had different aesthetic sensibilities. But there was a coherence to their activities - a gravitational center and a common horizon - either in filmmaking or in theorizing, which made them recognizable to the historian as a movement distinguishable from their contemporaries.

[7] Jean Epstein, *La Lyrosophie* (Paris: La Sirène, 1922), 23-24.

In fact, this movement has been studied under other names. It has been recognized as the "French Impressionist movement" and the "narrative avant-garde," neither of which, as I shall explain shortly, is a good term with which to conceptualize the movement's provenance, contribution, and historical significance. By calling it *cinéma de l'esprit* instead, I am registering my dissent from these canonical accounts, which have focused too narrowly on the texture of film style and lost sight of the bigger picture. Although they will remain to be important and irreplaceable scholarly contributions, I argue that they have missed what was the real motor of the movement, which is the utopian aspiration contained in its theoretical speculations.

The first systematic treatment of the movement was David Bordwell's doctoral dissertation, "French Impressionist Cinema: Film Culture, Film theory, and Film Style," which was completed in 1974.[8] Although his dissertation remains unpublished for the wider public, Bordwell has consistently used the term "Impressionism" in his later publications. The success of his *Film History: An Introduction,* now in its fifth edition, as one of the most popular textbook choices for an American undergraduate introductory course to the subject of film history, has probably given the term the wide currency it has in both film-historical scholarship as well as in general film culture.

Bordwell's dissertation successfully demonstrated that "[Impressionism] defined itself not only by revolt against already existing norms but also, more positively, by the creation of a unified set of films, writings, and cultural institutions."[9] He argues that film culture, film theory, and film style are three inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing "strata" of the movement. Bordwell

[8] David Bordwell, "French Impressionist Cinema: Film Culture, Film Theory, and Film Style" (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1974).
[9] Bordwell, "French Impressionist Cinema," 1.

argues that the lively post-WWI cinephile culture in France, built around a plethora of film journals, specialized venues, and tendentious ciné-clubs, provided the space in which the "Impressionist" movement could promote its alternative practice and gain wider recognition. He constructs a "stylistic paradigm" of the movement based on the criteria of "family resemblance" and a functionalist reading of film devices. According to Bordwell, the conventions of the movement can be summarized as "decorative and subjective camerawork; rhythmic and glance/object editing pattern; and optical devices indicating optical and psychological subjectivity."[10] This paradigm distinguished the "Impressionist" movement from both abstract non-narrative films and mainstream narrative films.

Where I dissent from Bordwell's thesis is in relation to his generally dismissive treatment of the theoretical basis of the movement. According to Bordwell, "Impressionist" writings on film amounted to nothing more than "a rough-and-ready assemblage of unacknowledged assumptions, casual opinions, and fragmentary aesthetic claims."[11] Although the influence of Symbolism was acknowledged, it was only used as the justification for his claim that "Impressionist" theory did not rise to the standard of an objective, general, and systematic account of how film works as a medium, in other words, it did not qualify as "theory." If we see his assessment from the perspective of his subsequent trajectory as a film scholar, it is not difficult to understand that there was already an implicit bias as to what "theory" should look like in his treatment of "Impressionism." As a consequence, Bordwell's neglect of the general historical, cultural, and intellectual premises of the movement seems to me not only a built-in defect of this treatment of the movement's discourse on film but also an opportunity for redressing the issue from a different perspective.

[10] Ibid, 208.
[11] Ibid, 92.

Richard Abel's *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, first published in 1984, represents another milestone in the study of what he has called "the French narrative avant-garde."[12] His study was based on extensive, well-documented research of the French film industry - its structure, economy, and culture, as well as on the careful formal analysis of individual films. By eschewing the problematic term "Impressionism," whose shortcomings Bordwell was aware of, Abel avoided the possible historiographic and conceptual confusion associated with it. Simultaneously, by characterizing the movement as a *narrative* avant-garde, Abel shifts the discussion to a different set of stylistic criteria for assembling the movement's distinctness and coherence. For Abel, the movement was characterized by "a series of breaks with, additions to, and reconstitutions of the parameters of conventional narrative film discourse."[13] The narrative convention of the French commercial mainstream became the ground against which the figure of the avant-garde emerged, and ultimately, the movement is granted its avant-garde status by virtue of a set of alternative approaches to the "narrative articulation" of a story in film.

I have two reservations about Abel's study. One, it seems curious to me that narrative, or the ability of a film to tell a story, however it is structured and articulated, was the aspect on which the movement's participants spent the least amount of time discussing and were least attached to. For example, Jean Epstein once said that "the cinema is true, the story is false."[14] Germaine Dulac expressed the same sentiment when she said that "cinema can certainly tell a story, but we must not forget that the story is nothing. The story is but a surface."[15] The emphasis, for the movement, was not so much on the articulation of a story as a language-like signifying system than on the

[12] Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Pres, 1984).
[13] Ibid, 291.
[14] Jean Epstein, "The Senes I (b)," in French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology: 1907-1939, Volume 1, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 242.
[15] Dulac goes on to say, "The seventh art, the art of the screen, is the depth that extends beneath this surface made perceptible: the elusive musical [l'insaissable musical]." Quoted in Tami Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 144.

moving image itself - its (pre-rational, pre-linguistic) power, its consequence, and its relative indifference to the storyline.

Two, Abel's conception of the movement, as he admits, "does not depend on a comprehensive synthesis of the theoretical writings of the period."[16] He agrees with Bordwell that "the bewildering and contradictory variety of those writings makes difficult any attempt to turn them into a systematic account of film either as a medium or as an art."[17] Consequently, very little discussion of the film theory of the movement featured in his otherwise compelling analyses. This side-stepping of the question of theory, then, appears to me a conspicuous lacuna, especially considering Abel's subsequent work in anthologizing and commenting on a vast treasure trove of French film theoretical writings from 1907 to 1937, an intellectual debt I am obliged to acknowledge.

"That's all well and good in practice … but how does it work in theory?"
- University of Chicago's unofficial motto according to its students

With the help of these canonical accounts, we now have a very solid practical idea of what the cinematic output of the movement *looked* like from a technical perspective - students of *cinéma de l'esprit* can recognize their stylistic features, are familiar with their usual devices, and have a sense of the taxonomy of "functions" these devices are supposed to play in the articulation of a narrative.

[16] Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave*, 292.
[17] Ibid.

But I do not think this should be the culmination of our understanding of the movement. There is still not a compelling account of what makes *cinéma de l'esprit* a movement as such. Like a skilled birdwatcher who can identify the family or genus a bird belongs to by its "general impression, size, and shape," yet cannot articulate what makes a bird fly, we still do not have a good understanding of what gives *cinéma de l'esprit* the status of a movement (and an avant-garde one at that) as opposed to a school of film craft.

I am using the terms "movement" and "school" according to the way Renato Poggioli understood them. According to Poggioli, the term "school," in the context of art historical discourse, emphasizes the importance of "technique, training, and apprenticeship."[18] The notion presupposes "a master and a method, the criterion of tradition and the principle of authority." A school is "static" and "classical" because it has a predetermined end to its endeavor and a standard of quality almost always rhetorically positioned in the past. A movement, in contrast, is oriented toward the future and "must possess something which transcends the limits of art itself, beyond the notion of crafts and techniques, to extend to all spheres of cultural and civic life."[19] As Poggioli put it, "the passing beyond the limits of art, the aspiration towards what the Germans call *Weltanschauung*, is perhaps the principal characteristic by which to separate what we call movements from what we call schools."[20]

A movement, in other words, must have a horizon that is imaginatively positioned in the future, towards which the theoretical speculations and the practical innovations of a movement are directed. More than a set of techniques or a paradigm of style, it is the new world transformed by its theory and practice that is the *sine qua none* of an avant-garde movement.

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[18] Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 18.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

Moreover, I argue that by situating the identity of *cinéma de l'esprit* in its utopian aspirations rather than in its formal appearances, we will have a notion of movement which is not only coherent enough to explain the historical momentum of a cultural phenomenon but also plastic enough to tolerate the nuances of individual aesthetic differences. In effect, instead of arguing that theory determines form, this conception of movement returns to form its relative freedom, accommodates the risks and messiness of artistic practice - its unconformity to polemics and ideals, and releases form from any functionalist and determinist interpretations.

In order to understand *cinéma de l'esprit* as a movement, we have no other choice but to revisit its theoretical discourses. What is my approach then? In a retrospective on the recent revival of interest in what is conventionally called "classical film theory," i.e. film theoretical writings before the emergence of film studies as an academic discipline, Johannes von Moltke outline four different approaches adopted by film scholars.[21] He calls the first the historicist approach. This is typically adopted by film scholars towards theorists - André Bazin for example - who have already earned their canonical status. Although this approach duly acknowledges the historicity of past theories, it treats them largely as "classic" texts to be admired, and as "reminders of a close era."[22] Although this approach aims at producing a comprehensive account, it severs, however, "the relation between film theory's past and its embattled present."[23]

The second he calls the *presentist* approach, which takes historical theorists as unmediated interlocutors with current theoretical concerns and tries to see the value of past discourse as

[21] Johannes von Moltke, "Out of the Past: Classical Film Theory" *Screen* 55, no. 3 (2014): 398–403.
[22] Ibid, 399.
[23] Ibid.

applicable directly to present problems. The third is the *ahistorical* approach, exemplified by the works of Noël Carroll, Richard Allen, and Malcolm Turvey. This approach submits the theoretical positions of the past to philosophical critique, often via the protocols and procedures of Anglo-American analytical philosophy. The goal is to interrogate a historical theory to test its rigor, to see if it is indeed better than current theory in terms of the ability to "offer better explanations" or "account for data."[24] This approach is similar to the *presentist* approach in that the historicity of the discourse plays little to no part in its analytical procedure.

I share von Moltke's reservations about these three approaches listed above. Successive generations of film theories might be best understood as different paradigms in Thomas Kuhn's sense of the word, each operating with a set of axioms - assumed truths upon which the rest of the theoretical superstructure is built. Ideas and concepts do not jump from one paradigm to another without the danger of incommensurability. Without first trying to understand the foundation on which a past theoretical discourse was built, our exegesis and critique risk becoming at cross-purposes with their object. I sympathize with and adopt in this dissertation von Moltke's fourth approach, the *historicizing* one, exemplified in the work of Miriam Hansen. The first task of a scholar working in this vein, according to von Moltke, is to "steep these [historical] texts in their historical moments - to reimmerse them into their contexts where, like a strip of film in a chemical bath, they begin to reveal previously unseen contours. In this way the texts themselves become newly legible in terms of the historical discourse in which they participated."[25]

My research has shown me that the intellectual context of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s formation is indeed very unfamiliar to contemporary readers. The early twentieth century witnessed the

[24] Malcolm Turvey, "Epstein, Sound, and the Return to Classical Film Theory," *Mise au Point* 8 (2016), https://doi.org/10.4000/map.2039.
[25] Von Moltke, "Out of the Past," 401.

collapse of old societies and old certainties. Gone were the solidity and predictability of a rationally ordered physical universe obeying mechanical movements, now shot through with invisible forces. Gone were the security and autonomy of the bourgeois self-sufficient intellectual, whose fragmented self now buffeted on the tides of urbanization, war, and mass movements. Writing in 1919, Paul Valéry characterized the "crise de l'esprit" in Europe as a generalized disorder: "dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals; the three hundred ways of explaining the world, the thousand and one versions of Christianity, the two dozen kinds of positivism; the whole spectrum of intellectual light spread out its incompatible colors, illuminating with a strange and contradictory glow the death agony of the European soul."[26]

But this disorder, this collapse of old paradigms, was also an opportunity for new constructions. Reading the theoretical writings of *cinéma de l'esprit*, one is struck by the sense of openness, heterogeneity, and possibility conveyed by its élan. In this dissertation, I want to understand the utopian aspirations contained in its theoretical writings as a position that was negotiated out of a particular configuration of forces in the early twentieth century, as a positive response to the "crise de l'esprit" of modernity. What intellectual resources did the movement have to hold together in order to make its case for a revelatory cinema? What historical and contemporary pressures and momentums conditioned the formation of its key discursive positions?

To answer these questions, I try to present two complementary "views" of the movement - one diachronic and one synchronic; one along a temporal axis in the European Romantic-Symbolist tradition, the other across the contemporary plane of early twentieth century intellectual developments. The former tries to uncover the movement's relation to the past, and tries to understand its inheritances and influences through a genealogical historiographic method. The

[26] Paul Valéry, "The Crisis of the Mind," in *Paul Valéry: An Anthology*, ed. Jackson Mathews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 96.

latter positions the movement in relation to its contemporary milieu, and tries to understand its formation through a Foucauldian archeological mode of investigation.

I understand, therefore, the formation of *cinéma de l'esprit* as a synthesis of its historical inheritance and its contemporary resources. Here, I use the word synthesis in the same way *cinéma de l'esprit* understood it: not an unprincipled hodgepodge eclecticism, not a cancellation of opposites, not quite a sublation either, but first and foremost a deliberate act of creating something new.

Theory, for *cinéma de l'esprit*, was less characterized by the desire to uncover inherent laws, than by the willingness to see theory as what enables exploration, as what draws the arc between the status quo of an art and its imagined future. To borrow what Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan said about early German film theory, for *cinéma de l'esprit*, theory was a road map, "not in the sense of mathematical representation of organized space but rather in the sense of a creation of concepts that both liberates art and inspires its movement into unknown territories."[27] It is this speculative character of theory that I want to emphasis about *cinéma de l'esprit*: as a movement, its theory was not conceived as a comprehensive and neutral account of its medium or its own practice, but projected a horizon towards which cinema can move into *terra nova*.

In Chapter One, I revisit the question of the Symbolist influence on *cinéma de l'esprit*, which has been hitherto misunderstood. Although some film historians have noticed the affinity certain members of *cinéma de l'esprit* had with the aesthetics of Symbolism, there is still not a holistic conception of the relationship between the two movements. To what extent was *cinéma de*

[27] Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan, eds., *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907-1933*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 3.

l'esprit influenced by Symbolism? What were the nature and the effect of this influence? What is the condition that enabled the flow of ideas from Symbolism to its cinematic successors? To answer these questions, I construe influence not as the transmission of styles and techniques but rather as the transmission of a worldview as understood by Lucien Goldmann. This conception of influence releases me from the endless game of cataloging textual references and allusions, which accumulates knowledge but does not advance understanding. With the idea of worldview as a historically mobile, relatively stable, general orientation to the world, I am able to connect *cinéma de l'esprit* with its Romantic-Symbolist ancestry. In my account, *cinéma de l'esprit* inherited the worldview of its Romantic-Symbolist predecessors, which arose as a critique of the Enlightenment and a protest against the disenchantment of the world.

Chapter Two builds upon the premises of Chapter One and continues my genealogy of the idea of revelation. I engage with Malcolm Turvey's idea of a revelationist tradition in film theory and argue that the notion of revelationism, which has great heuristic value for the study of film theory, must be understood in the plural depending on different conceptions of revelation.[28] I propose that *cinéma de l'esprit* constituted a revelationist tradition in its own right: not as an offshoot of "visual skepticism," but as a consequence of what Pierre Hadot called the Orphic attitude to nature and a development of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition.[29] Restoring this original historical context allows me to understand that for *cinéma de l'esprit*, revelation does not pertain to visual perception in its ordinary modality but to its ecstatic transformation; it does not operate within the limit of the senses, but as the medium between the sensible and supra-sensible. It was precisely as a "technique of ecstasy" that *cinéma de l'esprit* understood its medium to actualize

[28] Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[29] Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

the equivalence of aesthetic and spiritual experience long sought after by the Romantics and the Symbolists. After identifying and analyzing the Wagnerian streak in *cinéma de l'esprit*, I turn to its notion of cinema as the art of the crowd. I argue that the movement's collective, universalist, and humanist understanding of the crowd as the subject of art reversed the individualist, sectarian, and elitist focus of Symbolism. What emerged from that turn was cinema's utopian aspiration to lift the veil of Isis for the masses and become the instrument of spiritual renewal in modernity. This, I argue, is how we should understand *cinéma de l'esprit* as a form of revelationism.

While the first half of the dissertation tries to understand *cinéma de l'esprit*'s relation to history, the second half of the dissertation tries to understand its relation to its milieu. In Chapters One and Two, I reconstruct a genealogy of the movement and develop the idea of revelationism by immersing it in the intellectual history of Romanticism and Symbolism. In Chapters Three and Four, I shift gear to an archeological mode of inquiry and look horizontally across the cultural and intellectual terrain in which the movement emerged. I want to understand the conditions of possibility for *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism as a particular constellation of intellectual resources that is negotiated out of its contemporary cultural matrix. Specifically, I take the cue from Elsaesser and Hagener that each film theory imagines an "ideal spectator and, as a result, postulates a certain relation between the (body of the) spectator and the (properties of the) image on screen," and argue that our understanding of *cinéma de l'esprit* must be anchored in the archaeology of its subject - the human sensorium as it was understood at the time.[30] The age of cinema coincided with the age of a modern understanding of the human mind, which is the result of an inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization process that tries to bring together physiology, the occult,

[30] Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2009), 4.

psychical research, experimental psychology, and physics. These simultaneous developments in multiple epistemological domains formed an enchanted common atmosphere in which the modern mind emerged as a hybrid object.

Chapter Four revisit the ideas of ecstasy and revelation, but this time within the parameters set up in Chapter Three. I argue that ecstasy had been traditionally understood as an experience which is strictly speaking incommunicable. This incommunicability results in a paradox for Romanticism and Symbolism, seeing that both were centered around the conveyance of the supra-sensible with only sensible means. I explain the Romantic-Symbolist idea of the symbol as a theoretical construct designed to grapple with the limitations of the medium of art. By surveying a range of "medium problems" in Symbolism, I summarize the strategies used to circumvent and transcend the limitations of its mediums as falling into two categories: de-concretization and de-anecdotalization. However, in the early twentieth century, a new discourse about mystical ecstasy emerged out of the scientific study of religious experience. This new science of religion construed ecstasy as a psychosomatic rather than a purely mental experience. Such a theory laid the foundations for *cinéma de l'esprit*'s understanding of film as providing an unmediated path to ecstatic experience by appealing directly to the subconscious. I then examine the two most crucial aspects of this theory of unmediated revelation. The first is the idea that the subconscious is a physiological, embodied, affective domain free from the intervention of the intellect. The second is the notion that interior and exterior movements are both vibratory phenomena, as are our sensory apparatuses. While the theory of the subconscious allowed for the conception of a pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual, and pre-logical mode of engaging with the moving image, the notion of rhythm enabled the understanding that the relationship between the moving image and the spectator is governed by sympathy, eschewing the need for mediation.

Chapter One

The View from Axel's Castle: The Symbolist Worldview and the *Cinéma de l'esprit*

1. THE WEIGHT OF TRADITION

The first two chapters of the dissertation offer an account of how the Symbolist legacy asserted itself in the formation of *cinema de l'esprit*'s conception of the art of cinema. Together, these two chapters constitute a new genealogy of the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement considered from a telephoto perspective of European cultural and intellectual developments, which tackles at once the question of historical continuity and originality. The first chapter reconstructs what I call the Symbolist worldview, while the second tackles the question of how the transmission of this worldview is translated into what I will call a revelationist theory of cinema.

Mythologies of invention often hide deeper continuities, and the irruption onto the historical scene of a new movement, volcanic though it often seems, can obscure the buildup of tension below the surface. With regard to the *cinéma de l'esprit* as a movement, the putative "first avant-garde" in French cinema, the idea of novelty, and it is new in many respects – not the least

in terms of its technological basis, has often led commentators to overlook or underestimate its deep connection with its intellectual past. However, in my view, an account of the continuity is indispensable in the articulation of the new: why did novelty express itself in the form it did? When faced with a terra nova, an open future, why did the first pioneers choose this direction over the others? Why, as in the case of many explorers, did this particular path *seem to them as if* it had been predestination all along?

In *the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx articulated brilliantly that it is precisely at those historical junctures when the opportunity to create something new presents itself that the compulsion to repeat the past is most keenly felt. At those moments, there is a tendency to "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language."[1] For Marx, the legacy of history has a weighty inertia, and the creation of novelty is not unlike the manner in which one learns a new language: the beginner "always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recalling the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new."[2]

This metaphor seems to apply equally well as a way of capturing the situation faced by the architects of the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement. Faced with the calls for "spiritual renewal" in the aftermath of the First World War, in the midst of what the poet Paul Valéry called the *crise de l'esprit*, the architects of *cinéma de l'esprit* invoked the ghosts of their Symbolist precursors.[3] Abel Gance argued that although "the true way has yet to be mapped out" for the nascent art of the

[1] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 15-16.
[2] Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire, 15-16.
[3] Paul Valéry, "Crisis of the Mind," in *Paul Valéry: An Anthology*, ed. Jackson Mathews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 94.

cinema, it has to be "symbolic," for it to be worthy of the name of "the sixth art."[4] Canudo, whose ideas loomed large over the the *cinéma de l'esprit* generation, said that if film was to be an art, it must penetrate beyond the exterior appearance of things and reach the invisible essence of life; it must not imitate, but evoke.[5] Émile Vuillermoz saw the value of cinema in its ability to "suggest, evoke, cast a spell,"[6]and produce a "deceptive 'surreality' more intense than the truth," while Marcel L'Herbier, in his typical florid language, urged cineastes to "lead [the cinema] out of the thick naturalism in which it still wallows and toward an initially elementary symbolism which will, through more and more suggestive means, yet achieve the inherited grace of art, and, what is especially significant, the tragic intention of things."[7] The writings of *cinéma de l'esprit* were shot through with the stock phrases, typical images, and acquired positions which circulated in Symbolist circles. The theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit* learned to speak the new language of cinema with the accents of Baudelaire and Mallarmé.

Was *cinéma de l'esprit* simply a regurgitated Symbolism? Should it be regarded as the continuation of Symbolism via other means – in another medium – after the movement had largely exhausted itself in literature? Or, did *cinéma de l'esprit* represent something new, having absorbed the legacy of its Symbolist predecessors? I think the answers to these questions depend on both how one understands Symbolism as a coherent movement and on how one understands the notion of influence. In other words, what was transmitted from Symbolism to *cinéma de l'esprit*? Was it forms, aesthetics, styles, ideas, or was it something more fundamental in the Symbolist legacy?

[4] Abel Gance, "A Sixth Art," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 66.
[5] Riccioto Canudo, "The Birth of a Sixth Art," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Richard Abel, 62.
[6] Émile Vuillermoz, "Before the Screen: Hermes and Silence," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 158.
[7] Marcel L'Herbier, "Hermes and Silence," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 152.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF SYMBOLISM – A LITERATURE REVIEW

What, then, does the Symbolist legacy consists of? Recently, there has been a revival of scholarly interest in Symbolism. Earlier studies of Symbolism tended to focus heavily on the literary component of the movement, emphasizing the intellectual origin and literary context of Symbolist poetics.[8] Scholars such as Anna Balakian and René Wellek have shed light on the inedible impact that a small coterie of French poets and critics had on what we now regard as the modernist canon.[9] While this line of inquiry continues to be illuminating to the present day, there is now a growing recognition that Symbolism should be best understood as an international and multi-media movement.[10] Symbolist visual art and theater were just as integral to the movement, and have contributed just as much as Symbolist literature in "modernizing" their respective disciplines.[11]

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[8] The earliest treatments are Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Constable & Company, Ltd, 1911). Representative works in this regard are: Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Random House, 1967), and Marcel Raymond, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism* (London: Methuen, 1970).

[9] Cite sources on symbolism's influence on modern art.

[10] Anna Balakian, eds. The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984). In this volume, especially relevant to my point here are György M Vajda, "The Structure of the Symbolist Movement," p. 29-42, Miklós Szabolcsi, "On the Spread of Symbolism," 183-190, and Hartmut Köhler, "Symbolist Theater," 413-424, Lajos Németh, "Contribution to a Typology of Symbolist Painting," 437-454, Marcel Schneider, "Symbolist Music," 471-482. The volume makes clear the international spread of Symbolism in Belgium, Spain, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Greece, Serbia, Poland, and Scandinavia. Symbolism seemed to be a feature of an entire historical period, as René Wellek claims.

[11] Poggioli called Symbolism "the richest source of modernism in the field of literature," and went on to say that "[f]uturism and surrealism, which stemmed directly from it, are only the continuation or vulgarization of its teaching, even when they delude themselves into believing they negate or transcend it." See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 198. Anna Balakian's treatment of Surrealism supports the idea that it sprang from Symbolist roots, see Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). Patrick McGuinness has written a monograph on Maurice Maeterlinck, and made the claim that it was the Symbolist innovations, whose chief contribution was from Maeterlinck, were the source of theatrical modernism. See Patrick McGuinness, Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For Symbolism's impact on modern art, see Michelle Facos and Thor J. Mednick, eds., *The Symbolist Roots of Modern Art* (London: Routledge, 2017). That Symbolism should be considered the forerunner of the modernist cannon seems to be a relatively late recognition outside the field of literature. Daniel Gerould wrote indicatively, "Symbolism was rediscovered and popularized in the 1970s, in large part because of major revisionism in the art-historical appraisal of the fin-de-siècle painters such as Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, Ferdinand Khnopff, and Jean Delville, who had always been regarded as of questionable taste and artistry when

On the other hand, there are many new studies that have re-inscribed the Symbolist movement in its *fin-de-siècle* milieu, by bringing the social, economic, and political context of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century to bear on our understanding of the Symbolist legacy.[12] They have shifted scholarly understanding further away from the stereotype of Symbolism as an insulated, nostalgic, "archaic" "backward looking" "negative" avant-garde towards a more nuanced appreciation of the movement as one that is deeply invested in the competing definitions of the modern.

When these new studies are considered together, what they demonstrate clearly is that not only is Symbolism deeply connected with its modern milieu, but also had pervasive, profound, and prolonged impacts on the culture of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in shaping what we understand as "modernist" culture.

However, cinema studies have by and large not benefited from or contributed to this emergent revision of the influence of Symbolism. In comparison with the situation in other disciplines, there have not been any sustained engagements with the Symbolist legacy in the study

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compared to the impressionists: Renoir, Monet, Manet, and Lautrec, whose work set the standards for modernism in art." See Daniel Gerould, "The Symbolist Legacy," in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance Art*, vol. 31, no. 1 (January, 2009), 87. Such a revision is still on-going. The most recent retrospective on the Salon de la Rose + Croix, headed by the occult magus Joséphin Péladan, was organized by the Guggenheim in 2017. See Vivien Greene, eds., Mystical Symbolism: The Salon de la Rose + Croix in Paris, 1892-1897 (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017).

[12] Sharon Hirsh has written a book-length treatment of Symbolism considered in the context of late-nineteenth century urbanism, and described how Symbolism can be seen as a response to the problems posed by urban life. Patricia Mathews considers Symbolism in the context of the changing gender relations in the *fin-de-siècle*. Barbara Larson's book, although focused on Odilon Redon's work, sheds light on the importance of considering the scientific advances of the late nineteenth century as important background for Symbolism. Filiz Eda Burhan's dissertation, unpublished and undeservedly forgotten, contextualizes the formation of Symbolist aesthetic theory as a product of Symbolists' interaction with nineteenth century psychological theory and occult revival. Michelle Facos' work is also an indispensable resource, documenting many aspects of the intellectual and social milieu of the Symbolist movement. Sharon Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Barbara Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the Work of Odilon Redon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Eliz Eda Burhan, *Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth Century Psychological Theory, the Occult Sciences, and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France* (Princeton University: 1979). Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009).

of French silent cinema. This should come across as especially puzzling given the fact that France was the epicenter of Symbolism, where its chief architects continued to have a powerful hold on the French cultural imagination well into the early twentieth century. David Bordwell's dissertation put forward the idea that "Impressionist" film theory "resembles the Symbolist poetics of Mallarmé" in his dissertation, but his treatment of that connection was limited by a rather summary discussion of Symbolist theory only to discount its influence based on what Bordwell considers to be the criteria for solid film theory.[13] Although Richard Abel's compendious anthology of French film theory and criticism makes it abundantly clear that traces of Symbolist ideas were almost ubiquitous in the earliest discourses on cinema in France, constituting a *lingua franca* among the participants of the cinéma de l'esprit, Symbolism was rarely mentioned in his *French Cinema: The First Wave*.[14]

Fortunately, a growing number of scholars have begun to fill this curious lacuna and have begun to take seriously the influence of Symbolism on individual filmmakers who were part of the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement. Notably, Tami Williams's biographical study of Germain Dulac's career emphasized the formative role Dulac's participation in the culture of Symbolist theater played in her education as a filmmaker.[15] Tom Gunning's study of Dulac's fascination with Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance also brought into focus the legacy of Symbolism as their common denominator.[16] Christophe Wall-Romana's monograph on Jean Epstein takes up the concept of photogénie in relation to Symbolist ideas and makes a convincing case for Epstein's prescience in

[13] David Bordwell, "French Impressionist Cinema: Film Culture, Film Theory, and Film Style," PhD Dissertation (University of Iowa, 1974). 96-98.
[14] Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology*, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
[15] Tami Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).
[16] Tom Gunning, "Light, Motion, Cinema!: The Heritage of Loïe Fuller and Germaine Dulac," in *Framework* 46, (2005): 106-129.

understanding "the continuity at play between Symbolist aesthetics and film [17] Recent retrospectives in French on Abel Gance and Marcel L'Herbier conducted from cultural and historical rather than auteurist perspectives have all re-excavated these two filmmakers' indebtedness to Symbolism in the development of their theory and practice.[18] Tom Gunning, in this introduction to Sarah Keller and Jason Paul's collection of essays on Jean Epstein, even expressed his preference for calling the first movement in French cinema as "Symbolist" rather than "Impressionist," on the grounds of "its closer ties to the allegories and abstraction of the post-impressionist generation and its particular strong ties to poetry."[19]

The larger picture which emerges from the mosaic of these recent studies is that the reception of Symbolism among the participants of *cinéma de l'esprit* was clearly not a case of isolated incidents but pertains to the structure and identity of the entire movement: there is a Symbolist underpinning to the movement. It is clear that *cinéma de l'esprit* was influenced by Symbolism. What needs to be explained, however, is the nature, the significance, and the effects of that influence.

However, most existing studies that have attended to the Symbolist roots of *cinéma de l'esprit* tend to do so on the basis of aesthetics and have not moved much beyond a comparison of the two movements in terms of formal affinities: the typical procedure is to compare the works of individual filmmakers with what is assumed to be the Symbolist aesthetic norm, or the style of a

[17] Christophe Wall-Romana, *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Cinema and Film Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester Universtiy Press, 2013).
[18] See Paul Cuff, Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema: Sounding out Utopia (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Laurent Véray, ed., *Abel Gance: Nouveaux Regards* (Paris: AFRHC, 2000), especially Christophe Gauthier, "Mensonge romantique et vérité cinématographique: Abel Gance et le "langage du silence", 5-18; Laurent Véray, ed., *Marcel L'Herbier: L'Art du cinéma* (Paris: AFRHC, 2008), especially Laurent Véray, "Rose France (1918): de l'influence symboliste aux prémices du modernisme cinématographique," in Laurent Véray, ed., *Marcel L'Herbier: L'Art du cinéma* (Paris: AFRHC, 2008), 17-20.
[19] Tom Gunning, "Introduction," in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 15.

particular Symbolist artist, and then consider whatever similarity might exist between them in terms of form to be a self-sufficient account of a case of Symbolist influence.

As a result, the most fundamental aspects of the connection between these two movements remain obscure: why did the emergence of the putative first avant-garde movement in French cinema look to Symbolism for inspiration? Why not Naturalism or Realism? What aspects of Symbolist aesthetics, theory, or ideology helped the architects of *cinéma de l'esprit* articulate a theory of film that is specific to the medium? What does the sympathetic uptake of the Symbolist legacy say about the historical and ideological situation of *cinéma de l'esprit*? Clearly, a purely formalist approach, however comprehensive it might be, is not best suited to answer these questions satisfactorily. What is needed in order to ground these formal comparisons in a proper context is a cultural-historical perspective on the Symbolist legacy.

I argue that the Symbolist influence on *cinéma de l'esprit* ought to be articulated at a more fundamental level than surface aesthetic affinity or formal similarity. *Cinéma de l'esprit* was not just a regurgitated Symbolism, and the connections between these two movements cannot be sufficiently understood by cataloging the recycling of stock images, *idées reçues*, and tried-and-true techniques or by schematizing "family resemblances" between styles. Textual references and allusions and formal, stylistic similarities between the two movements only signal a much more profound ideological alliance. I argue that the influence of Symbolism consisted, first and foremost, in the **transmission of a certain worldview**, which is the core and the *sine qua none* of the Symbolist legacy for *cinéma de l'esprit*.

3. WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

To put the transmission of worldview at the center of my notion of influence is to adopt a certain perspective on history and a certain explanatory model for cultural change. It is to see cultural form as inextricably linked to and ultimately conditioned by something more fundamental itself – how human beings relate to each other and to the world around them.

In this regard, a work of film history I find particularly illuminating from a methodological point of view is the way in which Lotte Eisner articulated the origins of German expressionist cinema in *The Haunted Screen*.[20] On the one hand, Eisner did not follow any prescribed disciplinary boundaries, and drew connections with film everywhere – theater, art, literature, and philosophy. Culture, in Eisner's account, is an intricately woven web with which the historian catches her subject matter in the center. German culture was conceived as an interconnected living organism. On the other hand, Eisner offered a telephoto perspective on the origin of Expressionist film – through her lens, there is a multitude of threads connecting Murnau and Lang to Tieck, Geothe, and Novalis. In her narrative, the legacy of the dead generations of German Romantics "weighs like a nightmare upon the soul of the living," and found fertile soil in the devastating aftermath of the First World War for its final metamorphosis in film form, when it was melded together with the stage experiments of Max Reinhardt and the tormented psychology and jagged style of expressionist art and literature.

According to Eisner, what was transmitted over the course of two hundred odd years and found expression in a variety of media, was not simply certain styles or forms, but an intrinsically German attitude to life, a German proclivity towards metaphysical thinking, tortured spirituality,

[20] Lotte Eisner, The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

longing for infinitude and sublimity, and innate affinity with darkness and terror. In a word, it was the German soul.[21] Critics of Eisner's work have justifiably critiqued aspects of cultural essentialism in her work, and have pointed out that her cultural imaginations of "Germanness," which owes a great deal more to German Romanticism than Eisner was willing to divulge, were nothing more than stereotypes.[22] However, what I find much salvageable and potentially instructive is the idea of a cultural predisposition, which does not, of course, need to be articulated through such essentializing categories as the "national soul."[23] For Eisner, what motivates the adoption of a certain form is often not the form itself, and aesthetics is often the epiphenomenon of some fundamental orientation – a way of relating to the world, a perspective on reality, which, I argue, can be conceptualized as a *worldview*.

The French philosopher and sociologist Lucien Goldmann offered another model for situating the idea of worldview in the center of artistic criticism. Goldmann argued, in *The Hidden God*, that the tragedies of Racine and the philosophy of Pascal, taken collectively, should be read as the consequence of a new conception of the world that arose on the heels of the Enlightenment.[24] According to Goldmann, the idea of a "hidden god" is the key to Racine and Pascal's works. This *deus absconditus* is simultaneously always present and always absent: he does not intervene in mundane human affairs since the Enlightenment's mechanical conception of the world designates God as the "prime mover," one who designed and set off the universal clockwork mechanism and then left it to its own devices; yet he remains the omniscient spectator and the ultimate judge of

[21] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 9-15.
[22] See a recent summary retrospective on Lotte Eisner's work in Erica Carter, "Lotte Eisner: A Reappraisal Introduction," in *Screen* 62, no. 3 (2021): 375-381, 376.
[23] Eisner argues, in the first chapter of *The Haunted Screen*, that the German mind, the "race of poets and thinkers," has a *predisposition* towards expressionism.
[24] Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine, trans. Philip Thody (London & New York: Routledge, 2013).

the worth of human lives.[25] For Goldmann, Racine's dramas and Pascal's *Pensées* are only wholly intelligible when such tectonic shifts in the conception of God and of the world were illuminated and analyzed as what he calls a "vision du monde." He wrote,

> any great literary or artistic work is the expression of a world vision. This vision is the product of a collective group consciousness which reaches its highest expression in the mind of a poet or a thinker. The expression his work provides is then studied by the historian who uses the idea of world vision as a tool which will help him to deduce two things from the text: the essential meaning of the work he is studying and the meaning which the individual and the partial elements take on when the work is looked at as a whole.[26]

Goldmann defines the term "vision du monde," which I decided to translate as worldview to be consistent with the existing English idiom, as "the whole complex of ideas, aspirations, and feelings which links together the members of a social group (a group which in most cases assumes the existence of a social class) and which opposes them to members of other social groups."[27]

Goldmann's conception of worldview can be applied more generally, and it is especially useful in terms of organizing our knowledge about artistic movements, which are broad enough to encompass a variety of forms and styles. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre applied Goldmann's concept of worldview to the study of Romanticism, a movement that once prompted scholars such as Arthur Lovejoy to urge scholars to stop using the term "Romanticism" altogether since it seems to cover such a diversity of forms.[28] Lovejoy's complaint typifies the scholarly approach which

[25] Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, 35-36.
[26] Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, 19.
[27] Goldman, *The Hidden God*, 17.
[28] Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas," *in Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, no. 3 (1941): 257-278; Arthur O. Lovejoy, ''The Need to Distinguish Romanticisms,'' in *Romanticism: Problems of Definition, Explanation, and Evaluation*, ed. John B. Halsted (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1965), p. 39. The entire book is useful as a background to these debates: see, for comparison, René Wellek, "The Unity of the Romantic Movement," 45-52, in the same collection. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

seeks to define a movement by producing a list of common denominators among its participants. The problem, however, as Löwy and Sayre point out, is that such an inventory of features, although useful for its empiricism, is also limited in its cognitive value: it does not go below the surface of the phenomenon. Löwy and Sayre wrote:

> Composite lists of elements leave the principal questions unanswered. What holds everything together? Why are these particular elements associated? What is the unifying force behind them? What gives internal coherence to all these *membra disiecta*? In other words, what is the concept, the *Begriff* (in the Hegelian-Marxist sense of the term) of Romanticism that can explain the innumerable forms in which it appears, its various empirical features, its multiple and tumultuous colors?[29]

Instead of approaching the question formally, Löwy and Sayre propose an approach that goes "back to Romanticism's worldview to account for many of the formal strategies of the Romantic texts, to demonstrate how form embodies a Romantic vision."[30] Such a move, they point out, "does not contradict our recognition of the diversity of forms, since a given problematic or overall intellectual structure can find adequate representation in different and even contradictory forms."[31]

This scholarly strategy, which refers back to worldview as the cohering agent over a spectrum of diverse forms, is also consistent with the view expressed by Renato Poggioli in the theoretical study of the avant-garde art movements of the twentieth century. Poggioli considers the

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[29] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 5. They acknowledge Abrams, Wellek, and Morse Peckham as their precursors to their ideas, each of which did not use the overarching concept of worldview, but still organized their conception of the Romantic movement under some umbrella term or idea. For Abrams, this is the conception of the mind, or the "natural supernaturalism" of Romantic affinity towards nature. For Wellek, it is imagination, nature, symbol and myth. For Peckham, it is revolt against mechanism. Löwy and Sayre are the synthesizers of these ideas, and put the Romantic program directly on a collision course with capitalism. See René Wellek, "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History," in *Romanticism: Points of View*, eds. R Gleckner and G Enscoe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 286-301. Abrams' ideas are developed in two indispensable books on Romanticism: *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973). Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," in *Romanticism: Points of View*, eds. R.F. Gleckner and G.E. Enscoe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

[30] Löwy and Sayre, op. cit., 27.

[31] Ibid.

possession of a unifying worldview to be the *sine qua none* of a movement: "[t]he passing beyond the limits of art, the aspiration toward what the Germans call *Weltanschauung* [worldview], is perhaps the principle characteristic by which to separate what we call movements from what we call schools."[32]

Using the worldview as the commanding idea also helps me avoid what A.G. Lehmann called "the virtually unending game of 'sources' – an approach which amounts to, or at least aspires to, an encyclopedia of references, borrowings, "influences," without elucidating what conditioned such a relationship.[33] Conceptualizing the connection between Symbolism and *cinéma de l'esprit* as the transmission of a worldview helps me account for the vital connection between these two movements without relying on the duplication of form or aesthetics as the *sole* basis for that connection, or the compilation of references as the only approach.

For form itself is never ideologically neutral, nor is its adoption self-motivated. Privileging the sympathetic transmission of worldview across these two movements over formal similarity helps me get to the most fundamental affinity between them. For a worldview is simultaneously plastic enough to absorb new sources and adapt to new conditions and durable enough to maintain its intelligibility over time. It can move across history and media.

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[32] Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, 18.

[33] Lehmann pointed out that the Symbolist period was "in its interest one of the most heterogenous that is known to the student of literature," and that compiling its sources comprehensively might end up in a zero-sum game. Lehmann quotes from R.G. Collingwood, who characterized such an approach in the following way: "these methods of description are characteristic of that frivolous and superficial type of history which speaks of "influences" and "borrowings" and so forth, and when it says that A is influenced by B or that A borrows from B *never asks itself what there was in A which laid it open to B's influence, or what there was in A which made it capable of borrowing from B*." (emphasis my own) Lehmann then goes on to say, "[i]n examining what there was in the symbolist attitude which laid it open to such a diversity of allegiances, we shall be dealing strictly with an aesthetic problem; to go into too detailed enumeration of these influences would take us off the line of our inquiry." I differ from Lehmann's approach as I do not see "the aesthetic problem" as what might sum up the diverse sources Symbolism drew from, but something more fundamental than that. However, I do sympathize with his view that the "compilation" method will not be intellectually satisfying. See A.G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1895* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950), 19.

4. WHAT WAS THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT?

In the narrowest sense of the term, Symbolism was the name given to a small coterie of French poets who were active at the end of the nineteenth century. On September 18, 1886, the poet Jean Moréas, who was born in Greece but worked in French in Paris, published an article in the literary supplement of the widely circulated daily newspaper *Le Figaro* titled "Le Symbolisme."[34] Moréas' article had the objective of clarifying the provenance, the aim, and the literary merit of a group of poets who had been, according to Moréas, inappropriately called "decadents."[35] Moréas did not subscribe to the label of being a "decadent," a term which had been associated with degeneracy, moral decline, and sexual excess, and used by conservatives to discredit any new literary, artistic phenomena as symptoms of fin-de-siècle decline. Moréas felt that the term "decadent," although it had been circulated for two years by 1886, was a distraction from the real literary significance of the work of this new trend. He would inaugurate this new school of poetry as "Symbolisme." To serve as the organ and rally point of the newly minted school of poetry, Moréas ran, for two years, a short-lived niche journal called *Le Symboliste* with the help of the critic Gustave Kahn and the poet Paul Adam until he abandoned the "Symboliste" designation himself in 1891, opting instead, for the name "école romane."[36]

[34] Jean Moréas, "Le Symbolisme," *Le Figaro*, September 18, 1886, 150. English translation is available as Jean Moréas, "A Literary Manifesto – Symbolism," in *Symbolist Art Theories: An Anthology*, ed. Henry Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 150-152. See aslo Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 9.
[35] See René Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History," in *New Literary History* 1, no. 2 (1970): 251-252.
[36] Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism," 252. Moréas' "école romane" turned out to be nationalistic, right-wing, and reactionary. See Patrick McGuinness, "The Ecole romane: an Arrière-garde Within the Avant-garde," in *Poetry and Radical Politics in fin de siècle France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 182-232.

However, Moréas did not invent the term, nor did he start the movement. By the time he published the article in *Le Figaro*, there was already a much broader literary movement underway for some time, of which Moréas' "clique" was a part. But it was Moréas' aptly chosen term that stuck as the name of the larger movement. When the British poet and critic Arthur Symons introduced the French literary phenomenon to Anglo-American circles, the name "Symbolist" had become accepted as the term denoting a French movement that could trace its parentage to Baudelaire and Gérard de Nerval, flourishing with Mallarmé, and culminating with Valéry and Claudel – it also included not just poets, but also prose writers, dramatists, theorists, critics, and artists.[37]

Although my focus is on its French-Parisian center, the Symbolist movement was not restricted to France; it inspired counterparts in many other European countries, forming an international movement. Anna Balakian compared the morphology of the internal Symbolist movement to that of a tree. The truck represents the French cenacle around Mallarmé, and the sap that fed into that truck came from a proliferation of roots that drew intellectual nutrients from rich and diverse sources of influence.[38] The branches are analogous to the "variances and transformation of the Symbolist imprint" in various other national contexts. To emphasize its trans-national character, Balakian even went as far as claiming that the Symbolist movement was the first movement for which "art ceased in truth to be national and assumed the collective premises of Western culture. Its overwhelming concern was the non-temporal, non-sectarian, non-geographic, and non-national problems of the human condition."[39]

[37] Anna Balakian, "Introduction," in The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages, 9-14; René Wellek, "What is Symbolism," in The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages, 17-28.
[38] Anna Balakina, "Introduction," 12.
[39] Anna Balakina, The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal, 10.

Symbolism was a broad church whose members wrote in a variety of languages, in a range of styles, and worked in a diversity of media. As a result, it is very difficult to define the movement based on aesthetic criteria alone, for there is no coherent set of forms, styles, or aesthetic sensibilities that would unite its members. The critic Paul Bourget called Baudelaire's style "decadent," and argued that the literature inspired by Baudelaire's sensibilities had a style "in which the unity of the book falls apart, replaced by the independence of the page, where the page decomposes to make way for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence makes way for the word."[40] This kind of maximal attentiveness to the intricacies of form and the minutiae of style means that stylistic idiosyncrasy was the rule, rather than the exception. Baudelaire's "gangrenous" style contrasts starkly with the sparse, gemlike, and crystalline language of Mallarmé; the sumptuous, claustrophobic, and vegetative hothouses of Maeterlinck throw into sharp relief the hypnotic Bruges-la-Morte of Rodenbach; Odilon Redon's cyclopean dreamscapes haunted by nightmarish creatures contrast strongly with Fernand Khnopff's androgynous angelic faces and ethereal draperies.

Although it would be difficult and even counterproductive to conceptualize the Symbolist movement as united by a single coherent aesthetics, it was nevertheless held together by a number of shared principles. As Rudolphe Rapetti puts it, "a Symbolist conception of art truly existed," and the first element of that Symbolist conception of art is its radical and resolute "rejection of all realism."[41]

[40] Paul Bourget, "Essai de psychologie contemporaine: Charles Baudelaire," in *La Nouvelle Revue* 13, (1881): 398-417. Also see Alex Murray, "Introduction: Decadent Histories," in Decadence: A Literary History, ed. Alex Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4.
[41] Rodolphe Rapetti, *Symbolism*, trans. Deke Dusinberre, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2005), 145-146.

As a result, in every artistic discipline the Symbolists worked in, with every medium, they rebelled consciously against the formal conventions of their contemporaries. In the visual arts, Symbolists were resolutely deviant from the rules and tastes of academic art, vehemently opposed to the pictorial languages of Naturalism and Realism, and indifferent to the Impressionist desire to capture the ephemeral world of appearances as it appears to the eye. Symbolist art experimented with "unnatural" colors, paradoxical spaces, cloisonné contours, and exaggerated forms and eventually gravitated towards abstraction.[42] In literature, Symbolists were more concerned with tonality, mood, atmosphere, and mental associations than with coherent narration and clear meaning; they prized the musical, magical power of words to evoke a state of mind over language's basic function of denotation. In theater, while mainstream theater valued the impression of solidity and three-dimensionality, the "here-and-nowness" of the set, Symbolists eschewed the illusionist tromp-l'oeil designs popular at the time and experimented with flat, minimal, decorative spaces designed to convey atmosphere and feeling and set the audience in a contemplative mood.[43]

This Symbolist rejection of all realism was not just a matter of taste or of style, but more fundamentally, it was a rejection of the basic impulse and the ultimate aim of realism – to reproduce, to represent, to imitate nature. For this reason, Symbolism situated itself as the polar opposite of Naturalism, heralded by the positivist, scientific, materialist aesthetic philosophy of Émile Zola. Whereas Naturalism represented the ultimate priority given to objectivity in art, Symbolism wished for maximal subjectivity. As Filiz Eda Burhan summed up:

> while the artistic activity of the Naturalist was confined to recording the image of the objective world which had been imprinted on his passive and malleable mind by his

[42] Edward Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985); Michael Gibson, *Symbolism* (Cologne: Taschen, 1995).
[43] Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

> sensory apparatus, the Symbolist tried to express his ideas and emotions by using the analogues which he had found for his subjective state in the objective world. In Symbolism, then, the images of the natural world were simply the means by which the artist's "états d'âme" could be projected in art, whereas in Naturalism, the inverse had been true; the imagery of the artist's mind functioned as the simple intermediary in a process which began with the perception of the natural phenomena, and which ended with their representation in art.[44]

Symbolists rejected, therefore, the mimetic theory of art. They did not see the function of art as the imitation of nature but rather inherited the Romantic notion that art should first and foremost be the expression of the soul of the artist, the inner world of its creator. The Symbolist artist is no longer nature's pupil but rises above it, or improves upon it – to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, and create forms that did not exist in nature. That amounts to saying that for Symbolists, the relation between nature and art has been reversed. Art is no longer, *pace* Zola, "nature seen through a temperament," but is its own autonomous reality independent from nature.

The artist Odilon Redon characterized his art as "a mode of drawing that the imagination has liberated from the cumbersome particularity of the real and devoted freely to the representation of conception."[45] For Redon, the originality of his art, and this point applies equally well to Symbolist art in general, is that it "[places] the logic of the visible, in so far as it is possible, at the service of the invisible."[46] As Moréas wrote in his Symbolist Manifesto, "symbolist poetry endeavors to clothe the Idea in a form perceptible to the senses that nevertheless does not constitute an ultimate goal in itself, but, while helping to convey the Idea, remains subordinate."[47]

[44] Burhan, "Visions and Visionaries," 13-14.
[45] Odilon Redon, "Excerpts from To Oneself," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 56.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Moréas, "A Literary Manifesto – Symbolism," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 151.

It would seem that in every domain, the anti-realist stance of Symbolism manifested itself in a form much more radical than simply putting some decorative flourishes on physical reality; it was more than just, to paraphrase Mallarmé, to put some smoke between the world and oneself.[48] It culminates in a radical turning from the world of the here and now, away from the realm of material things, tangible objects, and visible perception. The Symbolists seemed content to be wrapped up in a fantastic world of their own creation – from the lush, over-decorated drawing room of Huysmans' des Esseintes to the haunted dead city of Rodenbach – either the world of fantasy or the world of the unconscious, these worlds are negations of the "real world," seemingly out of touch with the nitty-gritty of the real business of living in a modern, urban world.[49] For some, this anti-realist tendency culminates in the worship of artifice, in an art unmoored from the concerns of the "real world" and even "against nature": "Art for art's sake," as the slogan goes. Oscar Wilde, opined through Vivian in *The Decay of Lying*, that "[a]rt is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place."[50] Mallarmé famously declared that "everything in the world exists in order to end up in a book."[51] Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whose Symbolist drama *Axël* was so filled to the brim with world-denying pessimism that it had its suicidal titular character utter the famous line: "living, the servants will do that for us."[52] Arthur Symons wrote that the Symbolist movement represented an attempt to "spiritualize literature," to "evade the old bondage

[48] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 18.
[49] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*, trans. Mike Mitchell and Will Stone (London: Dedalus, 2019). See a treatment of the Symbolist "dead city" trope in Donald Flanell Friedman, *The Symbolist Dead City: A Landscape of Poesis* (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1985).
[50] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Stories, Plays, Poems & Essays* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 970.
[51] Mallarmé made the remark to Jules Huret in answer to his *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* in 1891. See F.C.St. Aubyn, *Stéphane Mallarmé* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 13.
[52] The line in French is "Accepter, désormais, de vivre ne serait plus qu'un sacrilège envers nous-mêmes. Vivre? Les serviteurs feront cela pour nous." August Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Axël* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1890), 283.

of exteriority"; it was a revolt "against a materialistic tradition."[53] The Symbolist gaze is fixated on the invisible realm of eternal ideas; it is turned "against nature" towards an *other* world.

What are we to make of this anti-realist tendency? For some commentators, the Symbolist attitude embodies the "mal du siècle." Max Nordau, whose medico-sociological gaze was honed in the physiognomic criminology of Cesare Lombroso, argued in his highly influential book *Degeneration* that Symbolism a "degenerate" art, an illness. Nordau wrote, "the Symbolists, so far as they are honestly degenerate and imbecile, can think only in a mystical, i.e. in a confused way. The unknown is to them more powerful than the known; the activity of the organic nerves preponderates over that of the cerebral cortex; their emotions overrule their ideas. When persons of this kind have poetic and artistic instincts, they naturally want to give expression to their own mental state."[54] For Nordau and the conservative critics he typifies, Symbolism was created by the weakness of nerves that was pervasive among the neurotic, neurasthenic, and hysterical invalids of the *fin-de-siècle*. It was a sign of cultural refinement pushed to its decadent limit.

Nordau's attempt to diagnose Symbolism as a medical condition was of course ridiculous, but the vehemence and venom of his attack signals that much more is at stake in his clash with symbolism than a matter of good taste or proper form. Of course, he did find Symbolist aesthetics disagreeable and even morally objectionable, but more fundamentally, his accusations were based on his perception that the Symbolists had the wrong idea of reality, and that, according to him, was the symptom of a diseased mind.[55]

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[53] Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, 8.
[54] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 118.
[55] Max Nordau wrote, in the "Diagnosis" section of the book: "In the fin-de-siècle disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of men who write mystic, symbolic and 'decadent' works and the attitude taken by their admirers in the tastes and aesthetic instincts of fashionable society, the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease, with which he [the physician] is quite familiar, viz. degeneration and hysteria, of which the minor stages are designated as neurasthenia." Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 15.

Although Nordau's conclusions were wrong, he did sense that it was something in the Zeitgeist, something which passed beyond the limits of art, that united this international coalition of artists. It was not form, nor aesthetics, or style but a shared orientation towards reality, one which Nordau and the conservatives find so contrary to their own as to medicalize it, which made these artists cohere as a movement. Arthur Symons put it beautifully when he said that for Symbolists, "the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream."[56] In other words, Symbolism should be identified first and foremost by its worldview. It is to this worldview that we will turn next.

5. THE SYMBOLIST WORLDVIEW – SWEDENBORG AND THE DOCTRINE OF CORRESPONDENCE

We can translate the question of the Symbolist worldview as: how is the world apprehended, how is reality conceived, from a Symbolist point of view? To answer this question comprehensively would require a very large survey, perhaps a whole book, over a vast terrain of sources that Symbolists drew on, ranging from Neoplatonism to nineteenth-century esoteric revival. This is neither my intention nor within my scope. However, in order to identify what I think are its essential features, distill its key axioms, and articulate those aspects that are most pertinent to my purpose, a very good way place to start is with Emmanuel Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondence, which, through Baudelaire's enthusiastic adoption as the basis for his aesthetic

[56] Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, 6.

theory, became the accepted common intellectual origin of French Symbolists and their international counterparts. [57]

Emanuel Swedenborg was an eighteenth-century Swedish scientific polymath turned spiritual guru. He studied the natural world for over thirty years of his adult life and wrote prolifically on natural-scientific and engineering subjects - mathematics, geometry, chemistry, mineralogy, and metallurgy. He was appointed by the Swedish King Charles XII as an assessor on the Swedish board of mines and devoted much of his time to improving the Swedish mining industry. In 1744, when Swedenborg was over fifty years of age, he started having strange dreams and recorded them in his journals. He interpreted these dreams as spiritual visions, divine inspirations from the angels about the nature of the heavenly realm. Swedenborg soon abandoned his scientific preoccupations and devoted the last three decades of his life, until his death at the age of eighty-four in 1772, to studying theology, writing treatises on his spiritual revelations, and expounding his idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible. Among his prolific theological writings, over thirty volumes in total, *Arcana Cœlestia* (1749) and *Heaven and Hell* (1758) were the most well-known and influential.

Although Swedenborg coined the term, he did not claim that the "science of correspondence" was his invention. In a manner typical of revivalist movements, he declared correspondence a lost science, known and practiced by "celestial men" in some Edenic golden age when it was the means through which "the ancients" communicated with angels and God himself.[58] We moderns, the fallen ones, it follows, have forgotten this science because of our long

[57] Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement*, 11.
[58] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, trans. John C. Ager (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), 72.

estrangement from the heavenly realms. Our obsessions with our narrow self-interests and our inability to concern ourselves with anything that does not belong to the material world have made us lost sight of the fact that the universe was created by a benevolent, providential God who ordered his creation so that "the natural world exists and subsists from the spiritual world, just as the effect exists from its efficient cause." We have, in other words, forgotten the fundamentals.

In Swedenborg's cosmology, all of creation forms a divinely ordered hierarchy. God the creator sits at the top, and each level below, from the heavenly realms populated by angels, to the world of good as well as evil spirits, to the natural world of physical existence, represents a gradually diminishing manifestation of the divine emanation and constitutes a less perfect reflection of the level above.

What Swedenborg set out to revive, by calling it the science of correspondence, is the notion that "the whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world; and not only the natural world collectively, but also in its individual parts: wherefore every object in the natural world existing from something in the spiritual world, is called its correspondent."[59] For Swedenborg, man occupies a special place in the ordered creation of God, he is "both a heaven and a world in miniature, formed after the image of heaven and the world at large."[60]

The hierarchical duality of Swedenborg's worldview, in which the spiritual world is the cause and the superior form of the material world, goes all the way down to his conception of human nature, of the faculties of the mind. On the one hand, we have what he calls the "external senses" of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste, which allow us to know and find our way in the ephemeral, material, and natural world. On the other hand, we are also endowed with the ability to intuit the spiritual significance of creation that is hidden behind the veil of appearances because

[59] Swedenborg, Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell, 73.
[60] Ibid.

phenomena in the physical world have dual meanings, one observable by ordinary sensory perception, another grasped only by what Swedenborg dubbed the "internal senses," spiritual intuitions, which goes beyond the sensible.[61] Needless to say, the external senses "correspond" with the internal ones, and such correspondence is a form of indirect communication through symbols.

It would not be a great leap to extrapolate the basic parameters of an aesthetic theory from Swedenborg's theology. While sensory perceptions give us the knowledge of the appearance of the material things in the natural world, they do not tell us their spiritual essence, their final cause or *telos*, which can be gleaned only through the use of the "internal senses," our supra-sensory faculty of spiritual intuition. The artist, just like the theologian or the mystic, employs the use of the symbol in order to bring together external and internal senses and reveal the hidden correspondences between the spiritual and the material worlds, the sensible and the supra-sensible realities. Charles Baudelaire, who was among the first artists to pick up on these ideas, dedicated his famous poem "Correspondances" to Swedenborg's doctrine. The poem is simultaneously an experiment based on Swedenborg's ideas and a "preliminary manifesto" for the French Symbolist movement to come.[62]

However, such a simple extrapolation could give the false impression that it was Swedenborg's theological thought – or Baudelaire's adoption of the Swedenborgian system - was the singular source or the "cause" of the Symbolist movement. That would be an over-simplification. What is not explained is how and why Swedenborg's doctrine, which to most modern, secular ears sounds idiosyncratic, eccentric, or even nonsensical, could have been so

[61] Swedenborg, Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell, 72.
[62] Henry Dorra, Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology, 10.

influential and enduring as to become emblematic of an international artistic movement a century after his death. The more plausible explanation is that Swedenborg's doctrine should in fact be seen as part of a much larger worldview – and its adoption by the Symbolist movement was actually buoyed by a much greater under-current in Western intellectual history.

6. A SYMBOLIST COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

Swedenborg's life coincided with the heyday of the Age of Enlightenment when religious faith and ecclesiastical power were systematically and radically challenged. For the first half of his career, when he dedicated himself to the empirical, scientific study of nature, he was, in the words of Paul Kléber Monod, a "paragon of Enlightenment."[63] Yet he later career as a mystic and a theologian would be not only a repudiation of his first career but also brushed against the grain of Enlightenment intellectual developments.

Swedenborg's epistemology, which argued for the supremacy of the "internal," "spiritual," and "intuitive" senses as the means of finding the ultimate explanation of nature, ran counter to the empirical method articulated by Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle, according to whom the report of our senses – empirical data – constitute the very first step of research and the final authority on the claim to knowledge. If the consequence of Galileo and Newton's celestial mechanics and Descartes' philosophy was the mechanical model of the world where God had designed and set off the giant and sophisticated clockwork that is the universe and then left it to its own devices for

[63] Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2013), 253.

humans to exploit, then Swedenborg would re-insert divinity's active presence in every bit of nature. Swedenborg's worldview jarred so much with the ascendant Enlightenment current that Immanuel Kant, a contemporary of Swedenborg, felt compelled to write a treatise on Swedenborg's claims about spiritual revelations and celestial beings in order to dispel the notion that one can have any knowledge whatsoever about the spiritual realm or get to know the essence of the *Ding an sich*, the "Thing-in-itself."[64]

From the point of view of the Enlightened *philosophes*, Swedenborg's mystical revelations would have been a quaint anachronism in the age of reason, an echo of the past when magic and superstition still shrouded the mind. Indeed, Swedenborg's whole system – his epistemology, his metaphysics, his cosmology – was much more in tune with what Michel Foucault dubbed the "classical episteme," in which everything has its God-intended place in the Great Chain of Being that is the natural world and knowledge – the very possibility of knowledge – is guaranteed by a system of correspondences, sympathies, similitudes, and analogies that encompass the whole of creation.[65]

In my view, it is precisely the apparently anachronistic nature of Swedenborg's thought that made him stand out. His teachings were far from original; many of his ideas had sources in antiquity or the Renaissance. The idea of divine emanation can be traced back to the Neoplatonist philosophers of the third century AD, who first proposed the idea that the logos of creation were hidden in the physical world, which is animated by a world soul. The idea of macrocosm and microcosm was known to ancient Greek philosophers and became crucial to the Hermetic tradition,

[64] See Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 185.
[65] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 19-50.

which was systematically revived during the Renaissance by authors such as Ficino, Agrippa, and Paracelsus. Swedenborg's writing also bears significant parallels with that of the German protestant theologian Jacob Boehme, who wrote a century before his time – although Swedenborg claimed to have never read Boehme, his followers had no problem harmonizing their views.[66]

It is telling that when Swedenborg abandoned his first career as a scientist and an engineer to devote entirely to his "spiritual awakenings," he saw the cause of his former ignorance and dissatisfaction with life to be the over-reliance on the use of reason, which, according to him, leads to a self-indulgent and self-aggrandizing disposition that clouded one's mind. For Swedenborg was, I would argue, not a nostalgic anachronism but ahead of his time in one sense: his views heralded the Romantic movement that was to protest so vehemently against the values of the Enlightenment, against the industrial world, and against the bourgeois social order.

William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were both keen readers of Swedenborg.[67]Blake referred to Swedenborg as the "synthesis of all occult philosophies of the past."[68] Across the Atlantic, Ralph Waldo Emerson elevated Swedenborg to be among his "representative men" which included Plato, Shakespeare, and Napoleon, and claimed that Emerson as a "colossal soul, he lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them, and requires a long focal distance to be seen."[69] Balzac Honoré de Balzac wrote his *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta* as

[66] Monod, Solomon's Secret Arts, 247-254.
[67] Mark Schorer, "Swedenborg and Blake," in *Modern Philology* 36, no. 2 (1938): 157-178; Leonard Martin Edmisten, "Coleridge's Commentary on Swedenborg" (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1954); Clarke Garrett, "Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-Century England," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no.1 (1984): 67-81.
[68] Blake quoted in Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement*, 12.
[69] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic" in *Essays & Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 661-689, 666. It must be qualified that did point out Swedenborg's limitations in comparison to Boehme: "Swedenborg's system of the world wants central spontaneity; it is dynamic, not vital, and lacks power to generate life. There is no individual in it. The universe is a gigantic crystal, all whose atoms and laminae lie in uninterrupted order, and with unbroken unity, but cold and still," 682.

thought experiments on the ideas of Swedenborg and professed "Swedenborgism" as his personal religion.[70]

Swedenborgianism and the Romantics were "fellow travelers" because their worldviews were united against that of the Enlightenment. Neither could accept that the world was really as the mechanical philosophy of the Enlightenment philosophes had described – like a giant clockwork mechanism, bound by rational and rigid rules, cold, uncaring, indifferent. As a consequence of the rise of the mechanical worldview since Descartes, all natural phenomena could be explained as the movement of matter in space.[71] The German poet Novalis, whose work would be revived in Francophone circles in the late nineteenth century through Maeterlinck's translation, defiantly wrote that the Enlightenment view of the world had "disfigured the infinite creative music of the universe into the monotonous clatter of a gigantic mill."[72] Blake, who railed against the pollution of England's "green and pleasant land" by the "satanic mills" of the industrial revolution, also warned of a spiritual pollution. He saw the task of the visionary poet as one "to cast off Bacon, Locke, and Newton from Albion's covering, to take off his filthy garments and clothe him with imagination."[73][74]Thomas Carlyle complained of his age, the time of modernity, as

[70] Balzac quoted in Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement*, 18. Gwendolyn Bays articulated Balzac's exploration of the occult ideas of "illuminism" in his *Le Livre mystique*, which comprised of *Les Proscrits*, *Louis Lambert*, and *Séraphita*. Bays considers the common ground between Balzac, Swedenborg, and the Mesmerism of Anton Mesmer: "each saw within man immense as-yet-undiscovered and undeveloped psychic powers, two of which are only today beginning to be studied scientifically – telepathy and "second-sight" or clairevoyance – and a third, called 'Mesmerism' after its founder but now known as hypnosis, the nature and utilization of which are even today still incompletely understood." Balzac as a "seer," as a deeply spiritual writer in his mature years, has been relatively unknown compared with the idea of Balzac as a master of realism. Gwendolyn Bays, "Balzac as Seer," in *Yale French Studies*, no. 13, Romanticism Revisited (1954): 83-92. See also, Saori Osuga, "Swedenborg et la Théosophie mystique dans Séraphîta," in *L'Année balzacienne*, no. 14, (2013), 183-197.

[71] Michael Hunter, *The Decline of Magic in Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2020), 10.

[72] Novalis quoted in Peter Gay, *Why the Romantics Matter* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2015), 14.

[73] From Blake's narrative poem, "Milton." William Blake, *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake, ed. David Erdman* (New York: Anchor Books, 1982), 142. See also Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution: A History* (New York: Random House, 2012), 19.

[74] Compared Blake's opinion of Newton to that of Voltaire's: "Newton is the greatest man who has ever lived, the very greatest, the giants of antiquity are beside him like children playing marbles."

"not an Heorical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age," but above all a "Mechanical Age" in "every outward and inward sense of the word": "men are grown mechanical in head in in heart, as well as in hand."[75] Alfred North Whitehead, in his lectures on science and its impact on the modern world, explicitly argued that Romanticism was a protest "mechanism on behalf of organicism."[76]

The crowning of reason as the supreme faculty of man went hand in hand with the increasing confidence in its application in science and technology - the ability of humankind to subject nature to its own purpose and design. Simultaneously, the Enlightenment ideal of the self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and self-interested man was bolstered by the growing power and self-estimation of the bourgeoisie as a social class.[77] For the Romantics, this view of the human being and of nature was unacceptable. Romantics were never against the application of reason *per se* but had serious reservations about making reason the governing faculty of our mind and of society at large. The Romantics championed the imagination as the highest faculty and emphasized the continuity of our mind with nature. Against the Cartesian view, which separated nature into thinking substance and dead matter, the Romantics saw the whole of nature as a living and changing organism. Gérard de Nerval proclaimed in his "Vers dorés":[78]

> Respecte dans la bête un esprit agissant:
> Chaque fleur est une âme à la Nature éclose;
> Un mystère d'amour dans le métal repose;
> "Tout est sensible!" Et tout sur ton être est puissant.

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[75] Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essay* (London: Champman and Hall, 1888), 233, 235.
[76] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures 1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 117-118.
[77] Lucien Goldmann wrote, "as Western bourgeois and capitalist society developed, the intellectual and affective value of a community gradually became less important as far as men's actions and ideas were concerned, and was replaced by a self-centred attitude which allowed considerations of communal interest to play only a small part by the side of private and personal ones. The social and religious man of the Middle Ages was replaced by the Cartesian and Fichtean Ego, the doorless and windowless monad of Leibnitz, and the 'economic man' of the classical economists." Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, 28-29.
[78] Gérard de Nerval, "Vers dorés," in *French Symbolist Poetry*, ed. C.F. MacIntyre (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 2.

According to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, the mind is conceptualized not as a radically different sort of substance, res cogito, as opposed to res extensa per Descartes, but is simply nature becoming conscious of itself.[79] For the Romantics, the mind is not passive, a "lazy looker-on on an external world," but continuous with nature; it is not a mirror merely reflecting the world around it as it is presented to the senses, but a lamp giving off its own light.[80] If the Enlightenment was to banish the notion of the sacred from nature, and make all of nature subjected to measurement, quantification, and rationalization as "resources," then Romanticism, a form of "natural supernaturalism" according to M.H. Abrams, was to reinsert it into the world, to re-infuse nature with the sense of the divine, just as Swedenborg had done with the doctrine of correspondence.[81]

If the Romantic movement constituted, from the perspective of the *longue durée* of Western intellectual history, an "anti-capitalist critique" of the modern industrial society dominated by bourgeois values, according to Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre.[82] Then, Swedenborgism can be seen as part of that critique, which is a counter-current against the Enlightenment, and against what Bruno Latour would call the "ideological settlement" of modern society – scientific materialism. Swedenborg's doctrine contains within it a resistance to the

[79] S.J. McGrath, "Schelling on the Unconscious," *Research in Phenomenology*, no. 40 (2010): 72-91.
[80] Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp.
[81] The phrase is originally from Thomas Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 1987), 182. See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*.
[82] Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 15. Ernst Fischer also described romanticism as "a movement of protest – of passionate and contradictory protest against the bourgeois capitalist world, the world of 'lost illusions,' against the harsh prose of business and profit … at each turning poin t of events, the movement split up into progressive and reactionary trends … what all the Romantics had in common was an antipathy to capitalism (some viewing it from an aristocratic angle, other from a plebian), a Faustian or Byronic belief in the instability of the individual, and the acceptance of 'passion in its own right'" From Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art* (London: Verso, 2010), 64-5.

disenchantment of the world, which, together with the quantification of nature and the mechanization of social life, were the hallmarks of modernity according to Max Weber.[83]

In my view, the adoption of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondence by Baudelaire and his Symbolist followers served as a bridge connecting the Symbolist movement to the vital impulses of its Romantic predecessors. But the Symbolist Swedenborg also signals a difference from the Romantic mindset. Swedenborg served as a springboard from which Symbolism became increasingly preoccupied with the occult – Eliphas Lévi, the mid-nineteenth century occult revivalist widely read among the Symbolists, built on Swedenborg's system;[84] the Salon de la Rose + Croix, a Symbolist sect headed by the self-proclaimed Sâr Joséphin Péladan, modeled themselves as a Rosicrucian cult and saw the Symbolists artist as "an ever-struggling medieval knight in the symbolic pursuit of the Holy Grail, a furious crusader against the bourgeoisie."[85]

René Wellek puts it poignantly that the end of the Romantic period was "clearly marked by the victory of positivism and scientism, which soon led to disillusionment and pessimism." The Romantic protest was clearly unfulfilled, and after Romanticism, the Symbolist path was to be illuminated from the beginning with what Gérard de Nerval called "the black sun of melancholy."[86] By the second half of the nineteenth century, the hope of achieving utopia on this side of eternity had all been dashed. Rousseau foresaw that all the progresses made by science and reason have

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[83] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 302. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 39-40. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999), 310.

[84] Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2011), 87. For a historical account of Swedenborg's ideas on French literary culture from 1700 to 1870, see Lynn R. Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1996). For a summary account of the exchange between Symbolism and the occult in the late nineteenth century, see Marja Lahelma, "The Symbolist Aesthetic and the Impact of Occult and Esoteric Ideologies on Modern Art," in *Approaching Religion* 8, no. 1 (2018): 31-47. For a more detailed account, see Burhan, "Visions and Visionaries," especially Chapter II.

[85] Joséphin Péladan, "In Search of the Holy Grail (1888)," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 269.

[86] "Ma seule *Etoile* est morte, - et mon luth constellé / Porte le *Soleil noir* de la *Mélancolie*." Gérard de Nerval, "El Desdichado," in *The Penguin Book of French Poetry*, ed. William Rees (London: Penguin, 1994), 79.

only "spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains which weigh men down."[87] Industrial, capitalist modernity had "drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm … in the icy water of egotistical calculation."[88] Unlike the Romantics, the Symbolists counted no world-historical revolutionaries in its ranks, harbored no Faustian ambitions in its bosom, and monumentalized no Byronic heroes in its poetry. From the perspective of its Romantic precursors, Symbolism would seem an impoverished Romanticism, increasingly cloistered, moribund with intense and melancholic introspection, obsessive with spirituality and mysticism, and seemingly incapacitated by ennui: "La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres," exclaimed Mallarmé.[89]

However, I would argue for a positive account of Symbolism, not as a deflationary Romanticism. If the Romantic movement represented the last sortie against the encroachment of capitalist modernity and the disenchanted worldview that it implies, then Symbolism can be seen as a last stand under siege. Chateaubriand, writing in 1802, already saw that the ennui which the Romantics expressed and the Symbolists indulged in was but another face of nonconformity, the unwillingness to accept a world devoid of spiritual meaning. Through René, the titular character of his novel, Chateaubriand lamented, "it was not elevated language or deep feeling that was asked of me. My only task was to shrink my soul and bring it down to society's level."[90]

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[87] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts or First Discourse," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.
[88] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York and London: Pathfinder, 2008), 33.
[89] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Brise marine," in *Collected Poems and Other Verse with Parallel French Text*, trans. E.H. and A.M. Blackmore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.
[90] The whole paragraph containing the quotation is illustrative of the condition which Alfred de Musset would later call "mal du siècle": "Je me trouvai bientôt plus isolé dans ma patrie que je ne l'avois été sur une terre étrange. Je voulus me jeter pendant quelque temps dans un monde qui ne me disoit rien et qui ne m'entendoit pas. Mon âme, qu'aucune passion n'avoit encore usée, cherchoit un objet qui pût l'attacher; mais je m'aperçus que je donnois plus que je ne recevois. Ce n'étoit ni un langage élevé ni un sentiment profound qu'on demandoit de moi. Je n'étois occupé qu'à rapetisser ma vie, pour la mettré au niveau de la société. Traité partout d'esprit romanesque, honteux du role que

It is precisely the refusal to "shrink the soul" which captures so well the Symbolist spirit, heir to the Romantic agony. If Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondence gave the Symbolist worldview its positive content and its organizing structure, then the struggle against the materialist-scientific worldview developed out of the Enlightenment tradition gave it relief and definition.

To the Symbolists, the physical and the sensible are only a portion or an aspect of a much larger interconnected reality whose every fiber is pregnant with spiritual essence. For the materialist, on the other hand, all there is to existence is matter moving about in space, there is neither a transcendental world of paradise nor an immanent plane of meaning. Drab matter and empty space are all there is in a world governed by what John Ruskin sarcastically called the "goddess of getting-on."[91] Victor Hugo, whose death in 1885 was perceived by the Symbolists as the closing of a great era, already saw the easy sliding between materialism the metaphysics and materialism the worship of material possessions.[92] To the Symbolists, such a worldview is anathema.

The Symbolist refusal to "shrink the soul," therefore, is a rejection of the disenchanted worldview which have come to define the modern condition and an attempt to, as Roger Shuttack said of the banquet years of "spiritual renewal" in the arts, "preserve spiritual meaning in a Godless universe."[93] For them, there is a more fundamental ground to all existence than mere matter, and there is a supra-sensible world that escapes everyday perception. This aspect of reality is hidden

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je jouois, dégoûté de plus en plus des choses et des hommes, je pris le parti de me retirer dans un faubourg pour y vivre totalement ignoré." François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala and René* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1906), 153. See also: Armand Hoog and Beth Brombert, "Who Invented the Mal du Siècle," in *Yale French Studies*, no. 13, Romanticism Revisited (1954): 42-51.

[91] John Ruskin, "Traffic, Delivered in the Town Hall, Bradford, April 21, 1864," in *Traffic* (London: Penguin, 2015), 19.

[92] The Senator's discourse with the Bishop, in Chapter 8, "After-dinner Philosophy," of Volume I, Book One in *Les Misérables*. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Signet Classics, 2013), 29-31.

[93] Roger Shuttack, *The Banquet Years* (London and New York: Vintage, 1968), 42.

and not available to us in ordinary circumstances. But we can still enter this "secret commonwealth" if we are gifted with "second sight" – not the supernatural ability to see the realm of fairies, but the second sight of revelationist art.[94] For Symbolists, art is the instrument which opens up this other reality.

We have returned to symbolist aesthetics, but this time, after having gone through the heart of its worldview, which gives rise to it. I argue that this is the crux of the Symbolist legacy: the idea of art as a form of revelation, which is only intelligible from the perspective of its enchanted worldview.

7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued for a new way of conceptualizing the Symbolist influence on *cinéma de l'esprit*: as, first and foremost, the transmission of a worldview. This approach not only allows me to get to the most fundamental aspect of their identity as artistic movements – their historical *raison d'être*, but also helps me articulate the relationship between them beyond what a catalog of textual references and a comparison of formal similarities can produce.

I argue that despite the formal and aesthetic diversities that exist among Symbolist artists, there was a shared worldview that united them. I have reconstructed this worldview around the notion of correspondence, and I have demonstrated, from a cultural-historical perspective, that this worldview is a protest against the disenchantment of the world. As such, it is plastic enough to

[94] The phrase secret commonwealth is from Robert Kirk, a seventeenth-century Scottish folklorist and clergyman, who wrote a treatise on fairies, witchcraft, folklore, and "second sight" in the highlands of Scotland, see Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth: Of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2019). Monod discusses "second sight" in *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 102,148, 192.

absorb new sources and move across media, yet durable enough not to lose sight of its core impulse and key insights in the course of history.

The Symbolist theory of art is a consequence of, and only intelligible through its worldview: Symbolists saw art as a medium for super-sensible revelation, a way of opening unto the hidden aspects of reality. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the transmission of the Symbolist worldview engendered a revelationist theory of film in the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement.

Chapter Two

The Veil of Isis: *Cinéma de l'esprit* and the Revelationist Theory of Film

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1. FOR AN HISTORICIZING APPROACH TO REVELATIONISM

In the last chapter, I proposed a new way of conceptualizing the influence of Symbolism on *cinéma de l'esprit* by subordinating formal, technical affinities to the transmission of a worldview. This means that at the most fundamental level, it is the enchanted worldview that *cinéma de l'esprit* inherited from its Symbolist predecessors, one which understood the world as organized by the correspondence of spiritual and material realities, that explains the historical provenance of the movement's theoretical positions.

I will continue to trace the formation of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s theoretical positions using the same diachronic, genealogical method in Chapter Two, and explain how the transmission of this worldview was expressed as and evolved into the movement's claims and speculations about the status of cinema as an art.

I argue that *cinéma de l'esprit* constituted its own revelationist tradition of film, one which organized its aesthetic positions and theoretical speculations about cinema around its potential as a medium for revelation. In the process of articulating the movement's revelationism, I will also

excavate a long-forgotten utopian dimension to *cinéma de l'esprit*'s aspirations, a missing chapter in its historiography: in the early twentieth century, cinema was proposed, based on its revelatory capacity and its status as an art of the crowd, as a surrogate for religion in modernity.

Understanding this utopian dimension as the core of the movement's identity will have implications not only for the conception and historiography of *cinéma de l'esprit* as an avant-garde movement, but should also prompt revisions to our understanding of modernism and modernity in general.

The term "revelationism" was first proposed by Malcolm Turvey in *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition*.[1] In this book, Turvey argues that there is a hitherto unidentified yet coherent tradition in the history of classical film theory which can be clearly distinguished from the modernist and realist alternatives.[2] Turvey dubs this strand of film theory, whose chief contributors were Jean Epstein, Béla Bálazs, Siegfried Kracauer, and Dziga Vertov, the "revelationist tradition."[3] Unlike the realist and the modernist film theories, which defined cinema's medium specificity as either its ability to reproduce visible reality or to manipulate it, the revelationist tradition argued that cinema's most important property is its "revelatory capacity" - its ability to "uncover features of reality invisible to human vision."[4] The revelationist theorists expressed, according to Turvey, "near-religious extremes of euphoria" about cinema revelatory capacity, and conceived of it as a "awesome, even miraculous" power that can escape the

[1] Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[2] Ibid, 9.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid, 3.

limitations of human vision and bring about a fundamental change for the better in human existence.[5]

However, when Turvey submits the revelationist tradition to the test of Wittgensteinian analytical philosophy, he faults these theorists for making what the British ordinary language philosopher Gilbert Ryle called "categorical errors": their claims about the cinema's "revelatory power" does not pertain to the category of ordinary perception at all, making their arguments non-sensical.[6]

Turvey's identification of such a revelationist tradition is illuminating, and his coinage of the term has heuristic value beyond his analysis. By circumventing the stereotypical realist/modernist dichotomy, the idea of a revelationist tradition invites us to revisit the scene of early film theory with a renewed appreciation for the utopian hopes that early film theorists invested in the cinema.

However, I must point out that in spite of my adoption of Turvey's terminology, my understanding of the term differs significantly, as I approach the idea of revelation from a different perspective and employ a different method of articulation. Turvey approaches the notion of revelation rationally, philosophically, and a-historically. He sees his contribution as "primarily a work of theory, not history."[7] And his goal, as he puts it, is "not only to better understand the theories that are its subject, but to advance arguments about them and offer a critique of the revelationist tradition."[8]

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[5] Ibid, 6.
[6] Ibid, 14.
[7] Ibid, 11.
[8] Ibid.

Turvey's work on revelationism, I should point out, must be understood within the context of his own scholarly ambitions in relation to the field of film studies in general. His approach is representative of the cognitive-analytical trend in film theory which aims to replace "Grand Theory" with "piecemeal," "mid-level," theorizing under a methodological paradigm derived from Anglo-American analytical philosophy and the natural sciences, whose aim is "securing approximate truths through practices of … error elimination and criticism."[9]

His approach to historical film theory is progressive but a-historical; it takes past theorists as unmediated interlocutors with contemporary cognitive-analytical approaches to film theory and submits theoretical positions of historical theory to philosophical critique in order to assess the value of these positions for contemporary theory building. In an article on Jean Epstein, Turvey argues that if we fail to demonstrate why historical theory is superior to ours in terms of its ability to "offer better explanations" or to "account for data," then we must discard it or risk repeating the errors of previous generations.[10] Turvey's critique of past theory is carried out on conceptual and categorical grounds, and its procedure is modeled on or inspired by Anglo-American analytical philosophy and the natural sciences. History plays little or no part in such an approach as its interest in earlier theory is not historically motivated but sustained by epistemological and cognitive protocols.[11]

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[9] Noël Carroll quoted in Casey Haskins, "The Disunity of Film Theory and the Disunity of Aesthetics," in *European Film Theory* (London and New York, 2009), 34. David Rodowick summarized this paradigm this way: "[it] posits that the epistemological value of a well-constructed theory derives from a precise and generalizable conceptual framework defined in a limited range of postulates. This approach assumes there is an ideal model from which all theories derive their epistemological value. In turn, the value of film theory is measured by its historical progress toward commensurability with this ideal model." D.N. Rodowick, Elegy for Theory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 67; and in D.N. Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory," *October*, no. 122 (2007): 94.
[10] Malcolm Turvey, "Epstein, Sound, and the Return to Classical Film Theroy," *Mise au Point*, no. 6, (2016), http://journals.openedition.org/map/2039.
[11] Johannes Von Moltke, "Out of the Past: Classical Film Theory," *Screen* 55, no. 3 (2014): 400.

So, although Turvey pays cursory attention to the influence of Romanticism in the book, it is only to further bolster his claim about revelationism as erroneous.[12] While Turvey is interested in whether elements of revelationism can still be of service to contemporary theory-building - if they pass the test of philosophical rigor, I am interested in a very different set of questions.

"Do not all charms fly, at the mere touch of cold philosophy?" Under the scalpel of Turvey's cool analytical incisions, the revelationist tradition appears riddled with contradictions, inconsistencies, and equivocations. Turvey wants to see if there are morsels of healthy tissue or organ which may yet be transplanted to serve another function somewhere else. I, on the other hand, cannot help but wonder if it is the once palpitating heart that needs to be resuscitated from oblivion.

I want to understand why there was so much, as Turvey duly acknowledges, "near religious" fervor invested in the revelatory capacity of cinema? Why was this enthusiasm "religious?" What can it tell us about the state of film theorizing at the time, or about the theorists themselves – their historical moment, their cultural situation, their concerns and aspirations, their mentalities and inclinations? I want to understand the "whyness" of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism as well as its content: where it came from, why it took the form it did, and how did the theorists see it fit within the larger matrices of social and cultural formations of the time.

Turvey understands revelationism in the singular - grouping Epstein, Vertov, Balazs, and Kracauer in the same tradition, whose common motivation is the distrust of the limitations of human vision. I argue that revelationism should be understood in the plural. Just as there are different varieties of realisms depending on one's definition of reality, as Roman Jakobson argued,

[12] Turvey, *Doubting Vision*, 25-26.

there are different varieties of *revelationisms* depending on the framework in which the idea of revelation is understood.[13]

Therefore, I adopt a historicizing approach, which is to say that I do not treat the idea of revelation as a philosophical absolute whose meaning can be determined through the procedure of analytical philosophy regardless of context, however rigorous that procedure might be. Instead, I understand the meaning of revelation as first and foremost embedded in and circumscribed by the shifting historical discourses in which it participates. In order to understand my claim that *cinéma de l'esprit* constituted a distinct revelationist theory of film, we must, as Miriam Hansen put it, "reconstruct a historical horizon for the text - the circumstances of its production, its genealogy and address, the discourses in which it might have intervened."[14]

This is not to shield *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism from criticism but an attempt to look at it from a different perspective, one that gets us in touch with the vitality of the movement. Once we reconstruct the "horizon" of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism, we shall see that what appeared to be "errors" in Turvey's account can, when we shift our vantage point, simply be a case of historical parallax. *Cinéma de l'esprit*'s theory of revelationism is a coherent discourse if we approach it first from the perspective of its worldview and understand it in its original historical, cultural, and discursive contexts.

[13] Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19-27.
[14] Miriam Hansen quoted in Johannes von Moltke, "Out of the Past," 403.

2.1 THE PROMETHEAN AND THE ORPHIC MODES OF REVELATION

One crucial implicit assumption in Turvey's analysis and critique of the revelationist tradition is that the notion of revelation should be understood to refer exclusively to ordinary visual perception. Revelation, in Turvey's account, is a visual phenomenon and means seeing with our eyes what we could not see previously. Applying revelation to phenomena that, by definition, escape human vision is, according to Turvey's definition, a category error. For instance, when the theorists of the *cinéma de l'esprit* argued that cinema reveals to us – allows us to "see" - the "soul of things," they were wrong because the soul was not some material object whose appearance could be detected by the sense of vision.

But must this assumption be accepted? Is there only one sense in which we can speak of revelations? Must revelation always refer to ordinary visual perception? Are there not instances where it makes perfect sense to speak of revelation as a case of going beyond what our ordinary vision is capable of? If we break down the notion of revelation into its component parts, we find that it corresponds to a very basic gesture, which can be literal or metaphorical: that of removing a veil. Etymologically, the word revelation is formed by attaching the prefix "re," signifying reversal, to the Latin root "velum," which means veil. To speak of revelation is to suggest, at the most basic level, the uncovering of something previously hidden. We can break down this metaphor of unveiling further into its four basic components, and ask questions about each: 1) who is the subject doing the unveiling, 2) what is the object hidden behind the veil, 3) what is the veil that separates the two, and 4) what is the mechanism of the unveiling? Depending on how these

four components are configured, there might be a variety of meanings for revelation, not all of which can be said to be a strictly visual phenomenon. [15]

If we interrogate the notion of revelation from a historical perspective, we will find that this stricture imposed by Turvey is nothing but an arbitrary theoretical invention – it is necessitated by his own analytical procedures, but it is far from the only way in which the idea has been understood historically. In fact, the sense in which *cinéma de l'esprit* theorists typically understood the notion of revelation descends from a tradition that emphatically construed revelation to be **that experiential event that disrupts, reorders, and transcends our own conventional, ordinary understandings of vision and the division of the senses.**

The sense of revelation operating in *cinéma de l'esprit*'s film theory, *pace* Turvey, neither stems from, nor can it "only be understood within the context of" the "distrust of human vision" prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[16] It has a much older source and should be understood within a different context.

In *the Veil of Isis*, the French philosopher Pierre Hadot offers a sweeping intellectual history of the idea of revelation stretching back to its origin in ancient antiquity, and demonstrates how Western ideas of nature have always been governed by this shifting yet enduring metaphor of

[15] See Theodore Ziolkowski, "The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth," *Religion and Literature* 40, no. 2 (2008): 61-81.
[16] Turvey argues on page 9, that "[t]he considerable value Epstein, Vertov, Balázs, and Kracauer attach to the cinema's revelatory capacity, and their attendant euphoria about it, can only be understood within the context of their distrust of human vision, and considering them together throws this distrust into sharp relief." Although I have no problem admitting that the distrust of human vision might be one of its attendant features, I do not think that is its root cause. I am aware of the argument made by Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes*, as are Turvey, but I do not consider that to be the best way to understand the deeper currents which sustained revelationism. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

the veil. He traces the ideas of revelation, or unveiling nature, to the ancient mystery cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis and to the famous dictum of the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus that "nature loves to hide." Isis, whose statue at Sais allegedly carried the inscription "I am all that has been and is and shall be; and no mortal has ever lifted my veil," gradually became the personification of and synonymous with nature, so that unveiling Isis became the metaphorical shorthand for revealing nature's secrets.[17]

According to Hadot, we can distinguish, in the history of Western thought, two distinct attitudes to nature, each suggesting a different approach to the unveiling of Isis. The first one Hadot terms the Promethean attitude, after the Greek titan who stole fire from the gods in order to improve human lives. This attitude is "voluntarist;" it is characterized by audacity, curiosity, violence, and the will to power. It conceives nature as an opposition, an obstacle to overcome, something that needs to be conquered, dominated, exploited, and subjugated to the will of humans. The Promethean attitude traces its parentage to the art of mechanics, to magic, both of which, according to Hadot, seek to discover nature's secrets through interrogation and force, and use the knowledge thus gained to coerce nature to produce effects which, in her normal course of events, are not wont to occur.[18]

Hadot dubs the other and contrasting attitude the Orphic. This attitude, named after the poet Orpheus whose captivating melodies have power over birds, beasts, and even Hades, is "contemplative;" it is characterized by humbleness, mysticism, harmony, and what Hadot calls "naive perception."[19] The Orphic attitude does not see nature as an opponent; it emphasizes our inseparability from it, the interpenetration of self and nature, and the interconnectedness of

[17] Hadot, The Veil of Isis, 318.
[18] Ibid, 91-98.
[19] Ibid, 95.

existence. It traces its lineage to the music and does not seek to unveil nature by force but stresses communion with nature through either ritual initiation or aesthetic contemplation.[20]

These two attitudes, Hadot emphasizes, although can be combined sometimes in a single personality (Goethe is a great example), are clearly distinct. However, since the Enlightenment, the differences between the Promethean and Orphic attitudes have only become more entrenched and irreconcilable. Although it is not explicitly formulated as such in Hadot's work, I would argue that such a radical bifurcation is a reflection of the conflict between the Scientific-Materialist and the Romantic-Symbolist worldviews I outlined in the previous chapter.

Since the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, the experimental sciences have become emblematic of the Promethean attitude to nature. Many a scientific treatise in the seventeenth century bore an image of an unveiled Isis on its frontispiece to signify the confidence of the empirical sciences to discover the hidden laws of nature through observation and experimentation.[21] Francis Bacon, who was among the first to articulate the empirical method, argued that "the secrets of nature are better revealed under the *torture* of experiments than when they follow their natural course."[22] Immanuel Kant, argued that nature must be "*obliged* to answer questions" put to her by the philosopher.[23]

According to this Promethean, or Scientific-Materialist, mode of revelation, the unveiling subject is the scientist, what is behind the veil are either previously unobserved phenomena or previously unknown natural laws - regularities and mechanisms, the veil is nature's ostensibly capricious behavior, and the mechanism of unveiling is the application of the scientific method

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid, 137.
[22] Ibid, 93.
[23] Ibid, 94.

based on observation and experiments. Such a Scientific-Materialist mode of revelation entails going beyond everyday perception, but only to the extent that the raw data of sense perception are abstracted, recorded, measured, and mathematicized. The result of the revelation is rational knowledge, derived from empirical (that is, sensory) observation, logic, and analysis of the physical world.

In contrast, the Romantics and the Symbolists rejected the Promethean attitude because it is only intelligible within the mechanical, positivist conception of nature implied by the Scientific-Materialist worldview; it will not tell us about the ultimate reality of existence since it is by definition spiritual. The Romantic-Symbolist mode of revelation operates in a radically different frame of reference, relies on the application of a different human faculty, and entails a qualitatively different kind of experience.

It does not understand itself to be a means of obtaining empirical knowledge about natural phenomena or of deriving natural laws from observations. It is not a process of looking into or behind some bits of natural *phenomena* and finding more *phenomena* previously unavailable to the observer. It is not analogous to opening a box and discovering what was hidden inside, or using a prosthesis to observe what was previously not within the range of sensory organs. Nor is it a way of abstracting from and summarizing sensory data in order to derive empirical knowledge. Instead of Knowledge, it is in pursuit of what is called Gnosis - the direct perception of spiritual truth, an unmediated encounter with that supra-sensible presence which has been variously called God, the divine, Geist, the noumenal, the Mysterium, essence, the world soul, or the ultimate reality.[24]

In taking up the Orphic attitude, the Romantic-Symbolist tradition revived what Hadot called the "poetic model of the world," which conceives of nature as divine poetry, holy hieroglyph,

[24] Leon Surette, The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press),13-14.

a book to be read symbolically.[25] Novalis, whose writings would be revived in France through the translation of Maurice Maeterlinck, once lamented to August Schlegel that "the process of depoeticization has lasted long enough. It is high time that air, fire, water, and earth be poeticized once again."[26]

From the Romantic-Symbolist perspective, nature does not stand in opposition to the intellect that is trying to unveil its secrets. Its mysteries are not available to us if we are, to quote Wordsworth, "out of tune" with nature.[27] The most fundamental truth about reality is not something that can be attained through empiricism and rationalism. Goethe said, "what [nature] does not wish to reveal to your mind, you could not constrain her to do with levers and screws."[28] The only way to unveil Isis is through what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called "the progressive fusion of spirit and nature" in moments of ecstasy, which transcends the limitations of empiricism and rationality.[29]

According to the Romantic-Symbolist tradition, the world is divided into the physical and the spiritual, the sensible and the super-sensible, appearance and essence, each half corresponding to its other in a vast network of analogies. The physical world, nature as it appears to the senses, or the world as "representation" as Schopenhauer puts it, is the very veil that needs to be lifted, the

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[25] Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 202.
[26] Novalis quoted in Peter Gay, *Why the Romantics Matter*, 14. Novalis' The Disciple at Saïs was translated by Maurice Maeterlinck into French, and contributed to the revival of interest in Novalis among Symbolists in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Novalis, *Les disciples a Saïs, et les Fragments de Novalis*, trans. Maurice Maeterlinck (Brussels: P. Lacomblez, 1895).
[27] William Wordsworth, "The World is Too Much with Us," in *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, eds. Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 2001), 432-433.
[28] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, trans. Walter W. Arndt (New York: Norton, 1998), 20.
[29] See the "Fifth Walk" of Rousseau's Reveries. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (London: Penguin, 1980). See also Marcel Raymond, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*, 3.

limit that perception must go beyond.[30] Nature, as Swedenborg puts it, is "created simply of clothing the spiritual and for presenting it in a correspondent form in the outmost of order."[31]

Correspondence, therefore, is not just a theory of how the world is put together, but simultaneously a theory of revelation, of how we can find out about the ultimate reality of the world. As Swedenborg puts it, man is the "medium of the conjunction of the physical and the spiritual."[32] We are endowed with not just the external senses, but also an inner sense, a spiritual faculty that gives us unique access to the supra-sensible reality of the world.

The Romantic-Symbolist mode of revelation may well have a sensory component, in fact they often start out as sensory perceptions, but must not end in such and must seek its own transcendence. As M.H. Abrams said of the Romantics,

> The preoccupation is with a radical opposition in ways of seeing the world, and the need to turn from one way to the other, which is very difficult, but works wonders. "Single vision," the reliance on the "bodily", "physical," "vegetable," "corporeal," or "outward eye," which results in a slavery of the mind to merely material objects, a spiritual sleep of death, and a sensual death-in-life - to this way of seeing [Romantic] poets opposed the liberated, creative, and resurrective mode of sight "thro' and not with the eye," the "intellectual eye," the "imaginative eye," or simply, "the imagination." The shift is from physical optics to what Carlyle in the title of one of his essays called "Spiritual Optics," and what Blake and others often called "Vision."[33]

That is to say, since the ultimate reality of existence, that which is hidden, is categorically and strictly speaking, not the object of the senses, then our senses alone will not reveal it to us. We must use our innate spiritual faculty in order to peer behind the veil of the sensible. The Romantic-Symbolist mode of revelation depends upon the activation of what I call *ecstatic*

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[30] The Symbolists were almost uniformly students of Schopenhauer. Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 25, 142-143.
[31] Emanuel Swedenborg quoted in John Kelly, "A Dweller by Streams and Woodland: The Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg in 'The Cantos,'" *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 27, no. 1 (1998): 65.
[32] Ibid, 62.
[33] Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 377.

perception - a mode of perception which transcends the limit of the senses, an experience that is qualitatively different from our everyday perception.

Table 1: Two Modes of Revelation

	Scientific-Materialist	Romantic-Symbolist
The subject of the unveiling	Scientist	Artist
What is behind the veil	New phenomena or natural laws	The supra-sensible
The veil itself	Nature's behavior	The physical world as it appears to the senses
Method of unveiling	The scientific method	Ecstatic perception

2.2 FROM THE TECHNIQUES OF THE SENSES TO THE TECHNIQUES OF ECSTASY

> "The supreme effort of the writer as of the artist only succeeds in raising partially for us the veil of ugliness and insignificance that leaves us incurious before the universe"
> - Marcel Proust[34]

In comparison to its disenchanted modern counterparts, the Romantic-Symbolist tradition is an alternative way of knowing the world as well as an alternative way of being in it. That is why, in the context of twentieth-century modernity, it still runs up against the secular scientific culture - an effect of which is that in the analytical schema of Turvey, its ideals seem irredeemably erroneous.

[34] Marcel Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, ed. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1994), 211.

In 1943, Heidegger gave a lecture on the philosophy of Nietzsche where he interpreted the Nietzschean dictum "God is dead" as meaning that as a consequence of modernity, "the suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics, i.e. Western philosophy understood a Platonism, is at an end."[35] The Romantic-Symbolist tradition, however, although it has no qualms about giving up on organized religion or on the Judeo-Christian god, still represents a refusal to accept that diagnosis, an unwillingness to forego the Platonic foundation of thought. As Marcel Raymond said of the poetic tradition from Baudelaire to Surrealism, after the Enlightenment, poetry had to become "some irregular instrument of metaphysics."[36] In its worldview, even without god, there would still be a supra-sensible realm that is the root which makes the world cohere, and its whole regime of art, as is its worldview, depends on the basic distinction between the sensible and the supra-sensible, the material and the spiritual, appearance and essence.

The Romantic-Symbolist ideal of art, therefore, always has its arrow pointed towards that which is beyond the proper province of art - the human sensorium as it is commonly understood. On the one hand, we get from it the emphasis on the function of art as one of transforming, perfecting, or educating perception. On the other hand, we arrive at the seemingly paradoxical, almost impossible ideal - at least to the representational, mimetic regime of art - that the manipulation of the senses can lead to its self-transcendence. In this sense, an artistic medium takes on a supernatural sense, to borrow the expression from Swedenborg, as the conjunction of the

[35] Martin Heidegger, "The World of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, INC., 1977), 61.
[36] Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism, 2.

physical and the spiritual. In other words, art, as a technique of the senses, must become a technique of ecstasy.[37]

I argue that *cinéma de l'esprit* is part of this Romantic-Symbolist tradition of revelationism; it is the continuation of the Romantic-Symbolist ideal of art, which sees art as an instrument that, although grounded in sensory perception, aspires toward the revelation of supra-sensible spiritual truths.

Ricciotto Canudo and Élie Faure both argued that cinema, in order to be worthy of the status of art, must go beyond the representation of "objective life" in a "wholly exterior manner," beyond "the most external and banal appearances" of the world, and strive to reveal the inner essence of reality.[38] Marcel L'Herbier, wanted the cinematic image to become "the epiphany of an imagination," and dreamed of our eyes sharpened by the cinema to "discover the primal and invisible sign of things" and "find a bearing through the misty vision of the *anima mundi*."[39] Émile Vuillermoz urged sympathetic cinéastes to use their medium to discover "the soul of things" and reconnect with the "secret pantheism" which animates the world;[40] he praised Abel Gance for making an attempt at a cinematic "correspondence" which may one day "photograph the music of the soul and fix its changing visage on the screen in rhythmic images."[41] Germaine Dulac insisted

[37] The phrase "technique of ecstasy" is taken from Mircea Eliade's definition of shamanism. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Arkana, 1989), 4.
[38] Ricciotto Canudo, "The Birth of a Sixth Art," 62; Élie Faure, "The Art of Cineplastics," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 259.
[39] L'Herbier, "Hermes and Silence," 59.
[40] Émile Vuillermoz, "Devant l'ecran: Les initiés," *Le Temps*, December 15, 1917, 3.
[41] Émile Vuillermoz, "Before the Screen: *La Dixième Symphonie*," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 170.

on the ultimate purpose of her cinema as the conveyance of "spiritual nuances,"[42] and Jean Epstein envisaged a cinema that is "polytheistic and theogonic."[43]

In other words, cinema must go beyond the sensible *appearance* of the physical world and reveal its corresponding supra-sensible spiritual *essence*. Or as Canudo puts it, it must develop its "faculty of representing immateriality" and "[pave] new avenues for the soul's expression."[44] These arguments are clearly non-sensical in the framework of the materialist worldview, and only becomes intelligible in when placed in the discursive context of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition of revelationism.

The Romantic-Symbolist tradition did not understand perception to be a fixed category, but believed it to be plastic, expandable, and in flux. Neither its *modus operandi* nor its boundaries are unalterable. The everyday mode of perception which we use to get through most of our activities – that mode which is goal-oriented, matter-of-fact, utilitarian – although it dominates how we use our sense most of the time, is not the limit to our perceptual capabilities. This everyday mode of perception can be, under the right conditions, transcended. Perception can become, in other words, ecstatic, out of its static mode, beside and beyond its normal boundaries. In such a moment, the whole experience is no longer purely perceptual in the ordinary sense of the word but also spiritual.

In his posthumously published *Stephen Hero*, James Joyce describes the experience of ecstatic perception under the name of "epiphany." [45] Stephen Daedalus, Joyce's semi-

[42] Germaine Dulac, "Le cinéma, art des nuances spirituelles," in *Écrits sur le cinéma*, ed. Prosper Hillairet (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1994), 52.
[43] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 317.
[44] Canudo, "Reflections on the Seventh Art," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 301.
[45] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions), 211.

autobiographical artistic avatar, explains that "by an epiphany he meant a sudden *spiritual* manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself."[46] Stephen adds that the clock of the Ballast Office in Dublin is capable of an epiphany:

> I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany. … I imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached, the object is epiphanized. It is just in this epiphany that I find the supreme quality of beauty.[47]

At such a moment, Stephen says, the epiphanized object's "soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant."[48]

In fact, the formation of perceptual rigidity was understood to represent an impoverishment of our personality and our faculties. Walter Pater wrote, "to burn away with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. Failure is to form habit; for habit is relative to a stereotyped world."[49] The desire to make perception ecstatic, to maintain the ecstasy of revelation, is not just a recurring trope in Romantic and Symbolist art; it is arguably the motivating impulse behind the tradition. William Blake compared the mundane mode of perception to seeing through "narrow chinks of his cavern," and spoke of "cleansing the doors of perception" so that "everything would appear to man as it is: infinite."[50] Baudelaire wrote about the need to "plonger … au fond

[46] Emphasis on spiritual my own. Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, 211.
[47] Joyce, Stephen Hero, 212.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Walter Pater, "Poems by William Morris," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 29.
[50] William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), xxii.

de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau."[51] Arthur Rimbaud spoke of the need for the poet to become a seer through "un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens."[52]

Marcel Raymond, in this study of the poetic tradition from Baudelaire to Surrealism, argued that the task of poetry had become, for the Symbolists, to "re-create [the] lost happiness by means of the word … to prolong or to revive the original ecstasy." The idea that art becomes the instrument for recreating the ecstatic experience is a constant theme in Symbolist discourse, and would continue to influence modernist conceptions of art in the twentieth century. Ezra Pound, for instance, described the goal of his art to William Carlos Williams in the same terms when he defined ecstasy as "the sensation of the soul in ascent," and argued that art is the "expression and sole means of transmitting, of passing on that ecstasy to others."[53]

In sum, connecting *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism with the Romantic-Symbolist tradition allows us to understand the true reasons why its theorists invested such euphoric hope in cinema's revelatory capacities. Cinema's potential as a revelatory medium, according to the movement, was based not on its ability to simply augment human vision in its normal operations and everyday modality, but more crucially, on its ability to make perception ecstatic and to make the experience of film always more-than-perceptual, suffused with a surplus spiritual significance unavailable to us otherwise. Cinema, as an art, does not simply record the visible surface appearance of the world, but reveals, through its ability to serve as a bridge between the sensible and the supra-sensible, how perception can become, to use the poet Thomas Gray's phrase,

[51] Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 182.
[52] Arthur Rimbaud, "Charleville – À P. Demeny – 15 mai," Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete works, Selected Letters: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 374.
[53] Pound, in a letter to Williams, alluding to his reading of Swedenborg, in Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, 130.

"pregnant with religion."[54] Had *cinema de l'esprit* theorists construed cinema's revelatory capacity purely as the ability to make more of the material world available to visual experience, there would be little reason to accord cinema its special status as an art and separate it from other forms of visual technologies that did exactly that around the turn of the century – the X-ray machine and the microscope for instance.

Fundamentally, cinema was understood to be not just a technology of vision, but a set of techniques of ecstasy. This, I argue, is the reason why so much utopian enthusiasm was invested in it, and why for *cinema de l'esprit*, it could become the surrogate for religion in modernity.

2.3 CINEMA: RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

> "I see such power in the art of the moving picture that I do not hesitate to regard it as the nucleus of the common spectacle which everyone demands, as being perfectly susceptible of assuming a grave, splendid, moving character, ***a religious character even, in the universal, majestic sense of the word***."
> -Élie Faure[55]

In an essay published in 1918, Canudo recorded his experience of going to a cinema in "the most active and interesting working-class district of Paris."[56] He reported that the audience, which consisted of mostly mechanics and factory workers, were hissing at a "crude melodrama that was

[54] Thomas Gray, "To West, Nov 16, 1739," in *The Letters of Thomas Gray, Including the Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, ed. Duncan C. Tovey (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 45.
[55] Elie Faure, *The Art of Cineplastics*, trans. Walter Pach (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1923), 20. See a discussion of Faure in Margaret C. Flinn, "The Prescience of Élie Faure," *SubStance* 34, no. 3/108: French Cinema Studies 1920s to the Present (2005): 47-61.
[56] Canudo, *L'Usine aux images*, 44. English translation of the passage can be found in Steven Philip Kramer and James Michael Welsh, Abel Gance (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 43.

supposed to be popular."[57] For Canudo, this was a sign that such run-of-the-mill melodramas were failing to meet the demand of ordinary people for "a cinema elevated above daily banalities." The crowd wanted, opined Canudo, something which aspired "towards nobler states of the spirit." For Canudo, cinema could no longer be just a means of divertissement, but had to take up a much more profound mission and fulfill its true destiny.

Canudo did not hesitate to link the workers' dissatisfaction with the state of cinema with the general demoralization of the French nation in the wake of the First World War, and quickly identified the role cinema could play in the post-War push for national revitalization: "it's the characteristic of all art to renew the nation and their deepest life. Cinema can no longer be an exception."[58] For Canudo, there is no question that the "deepest life" of the nation is spiritual in nature. He wrote, "it's the characteristic of every art to satisfy this very general spiritual need, which consists in always tending from the beast to God."[59] In other words, according to Canudo, cinema could and should assume the responsibility of attending to our spiritual life, a function previously reserved for religion.

It might be tempting to dismiss such statements as empty grandiloquence divorced from reality or lacking theoretical substance.[60] A discerning reader may very well point out that Canudo's positionality as an elite social observer makes his report of the *quartiers populaires* questionable; the workers' dissatisfaction with the state of cinema might simply be a misunderstanding on Canudo's part. One might point out that Canudo, a well-educated aesthete

[57] Ibid.
[58] For more background on the post-War push for "regeneration" – a phenomenon in the culture in general, in avant-garde art circles too, see Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[59] Canudo, L'Usine aux images, 44.
[60] An accusation made by David Bordwell about the influence of Symbolism in general on "Impressionist" theory.

deeply involved in the avant-garde art circles of the time, was speaking less on behalf of the working-class audiences than on behalf of a section of the French cultural elite at the time. Moreover, for today's literary taste and theoretical criteria, Canudo's prose can come across as unnecessarily florid, replete with erudite classical references and a vagueness and opacity typical of the late-nineteenth century Symbolist style.

Such a prose style is common to the writers of *cinéma de l'esprit*, and commentators tended to be put off by, be dismissive of, or glide over those elements in their writing which are not immediately transparent in today's discursive context. As a result, what has been often missed is that Canudo's speculations were shared by the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement as a whole. When these statements are considered together and in context, the idea of cinema becoming a surrogate for religion emerges as a salient theme uniting the members of the movement.

As early as 1908, Canudo started describing the cinema of the future, the "sixth art," as the site for a new kind of religious communion.[61] Élie Faure echoed the same sentiment when he compared the cinema to a medieval cathedral in terms of its "social function."[62] Léon Moussinac, whose career as a Communist critic overlapped with his sympathetic appraisal of the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement, would later borrowed the same analogy Faure used to argue that the cinema is the spiritual emblem of the modern age, and that in cinema, "the modern masses will express this mysticism without which no era can convey its beauty."[63] Marcel L'Herbier, who initially did not believe that cinema could be an art, would be convinced by Vuillermoz that a future cinema

[61] Canudo, "The Birth of A Sixth Art," 65.
[62] Elie Faure, Fonction du cinéma, de la cinéplastique à son destin social (Paris: Plon, 1953), 62-64.
[63] Léon Moussinac, *Naissance du cinéma* (Paris: Société Cinématographique des Auteurs et des Gens de Lettres, 1925), 8. Translation taken from Sarah Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theoy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 48.

"worthy of Silence, this new god" would be his calling.[64] Germaine Dulac argued that cinema could be the agent of a "spiritual revolution" as the "art des nuances spirituelles."[65] Abel Gance envisioned cinema as the new "gospel" for humanity, capable of revealing to us the esoteric mysteries passed down by the world's great religious teachers.[66] Last but not least, Jean Epstein attributed theurgic powers to the cinematic image, and argued that the life created on screen are "like the life in charms and amulets, the ominous, tabooed objects of certain primitive religions."[67] As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 4, his lyrosophic project, a preoccupation for the entirety of his career was a conscious attempt to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the affective parts of our mind together in a synthetic "lyrosophical" mode of thinking made possible by the cinema, with the aim of reconciling the concerns, domains, and methods of science with those of an esoteric, mystical religion.[68]

Among the theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit*, there was a shared style of thinking. A lexicon typically reserved for describing spiritual experience, ecstatic sensations, and mystical revelations came to populate the theoretical writings of the movement. The experience of cinema is frequently described in quasi-religious terms. The terms "aesthetic" and "spiritual" shade into each other seamlessly, and become, almost imperceptibly, conflated, indistinguishable, overlapping concepts.[69] For *cinéma de l'esprit*, the aesthetic-spiritual elision is taken for granted; it is a built-in premise of its argumentative procedures, an axiom that few, if any, ever questioned. In the theoretical paradigm of the movement, "cinema," "art," and "religion" are taken as three

[64] L'Herbier, "Hermes and Silence," 154.
[65] Germaine Dulac, "Le cinéma, art des nuances spirituelles," 52.
[66] Abel Gance, "La Confession d'Abel Gance. La puissance au cinéma" *La Revue hebdomadaire* 32, no.6 (1923): 474. See also Paul Cuff's discussion of Abel Gance's idea of cinema as religion in Paul Cuff, *Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema*, 21-29.
[67] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," 317.
[68] Jean Epstein, *La Lyrosophie* (Paris: La Sirène, 1922).
[69] Such equivocation is not a sign of philosophical weakness, but typical of the style of thinking common to turn-of-the-century French intellectuals: synthesis and syncretism.

interlocking, isomorphic terms composing a conceptual loop. At the risk of oversimplification, let me formulate the paradigm as explicitly as possible for the sake of clarity: **cinema, as a revelatory art, can become a surrogate for religion in the future.**

This claim is utopian in its aspiration, and absolutely central to the identity of the movement for it sets a coherent aim for its members, a common horizon for their speculations. Yet, it has eluded canonical accounts of the movement. Perhaps partly as a result of its axiomatic status, partly due to the rhapsodic rhetorical momentum of the prose, scholars can easily overlook the fact that between cinema-as-art and cinema-as-religion, a quantum leap has taken place. We must, however, not gloss over this conceptual *pas de deux* and take a step back to ask why this leap was so ubiquitously taken. The claim for cinema's status as an art is easy enough to understand. But why should it aspire towards the status of religion?

3.1 THE AWARENESS OF WHAT IS MISSING: REASON VS ROMANTICISM

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."
- Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"[70]

[70] Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," in *Dover Beach and Other Poems*, ed. Candance Ward (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, INC, 1994), 86.

It might seem, to those who are perfect at home in a secular society, that modernity and religiosity are not compatible terms, that to be modern is to be, at the core, irreligious. According to this view, modernity means the constant upheavals, revolutionizing change, to experience "all that is solid melts into air."[71] It means the dissolution of traditional social ties, the drowning of "the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor … in the icy water of egotistical calculation" according to Marx, to live as an atomized, anonymous, and free individual in a modern metropolis according to Simmel, to be part of a Gesellschaft and not a Gemeinschaft according to Tönnies.[72] To be modern is to live a fractured life, to experience disintegration, to live without the sense of a social totality or an absolute metaphysical support, to be unmoored or completely estranged from whatever is considered sacred, divine, set apart from the profane world of capitalism, it is to be disenchanted.

Those who accept these descriptions of modernity at face value might also see modern art, modernist art, as that which is oriented towards describing, transmitting, mediating the shocks of the modernity by turning its attention to the sensational, the volatile, the transient, the hyper-stimulating, the disorienting. Modernism aspires towards an image of modernity thus described, rather than towards religion. Have we missed anything?

I think that this is only half the story. Jürgen Habermas pointed out that although "cleavage between secular knowledge and revealed knowledge cannot be bridge," there is, in our secular societies, in our incomplete project of modernity, still "an awkwardness," "an awareness of what

[71] Marx and Engel, *Communist Manifesto*, 35.
[72] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 324-339; Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

is missing."[73] What is missing? Baudelaire, when writing about modern art, argued that beauty consists in two halves in harmony; one half is modernity, by which he meant "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent." The other half is the "eternal and the immutable." Modernity is the "icing on the divine cake."[74] Perhaps what is missing from the abovementioned account of modernity and modernism is precisely that poignant awareness of the hollowing out of the divine, the death of God as Nietzsche put it.

I argue that the other half of the story of modernity and modernism is precisely the inability or the refusal to be completely at home in a secular, disenchanted world. That there is another strand of modernism whose motivating impulse is precisely to supplement, to replace, to preserve some dimension of the divine in the modern world. Terry Eagleton identified a metanarrative in the cultural history of the West since the Enlightenment which revolves around that awareness of the missing divine. He writes, "[f]rom Enlightenment Reason to modernist art, a whole range of phenomena therefore took on the task of providing surrogate forms of transcendence, plugging the gap where God had once been."[75] Alain de Bottom, a staunchly secular popular philosopher, also lamented the inadequacies of many proposed social and cultural forms as replacements for religion. Yet, in both of their accounts, it never crossed their minds that cinema was once proposed as a candidate, that there was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a modernist movement of film that aspired precisely to be a replacement for religion. This aspiration of *cinéma de l'esprit* was also conspicuously absent from canonical accounts and conventional understandings of the movement too. It is time to revisit that utopian dimension.

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[73] Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 17.
[74] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painters of Modern Life and Other Essay*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1995), 3, 13.
[75] Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, ix.

The idea of replacing religion with civic institutions forms a through line through the history of republicanism and laicity in France. The idea that religion (and in our context, mainstream Christianity) could be and should be replaced by something else emerged out of and became conceivable and topical in the course of the Enlightenment critiques of ecclesiastical privileges and religious superstitions. It became effective during the violent upheavals of the French Revolution.

The first proposal for a surrogate for religion was the Cult of Reason, established in Year II (1793) of the Revolution as an attempt to eradicate Catholicism.[76] The new civic religion came equipped with its own panoply of saints, martyrs, feast days, and festivals. But this atheistic Cult of Reason would soon be replaced by Robespierre in 1794 with his own deist Cult of the Supreme Being, vindicating Voltaire's dictum that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him. But the French tradition of civic religions did not stop with Robespierre. In the course of the nineteenth century, Saint-Simon would propose his own "nouveau christianisme" as an attempt to remake the almighty in the image of the industrial bourgeoisie. He envisioned a new society where new choirs would "sing to the worship of industry and progress, to accompany the new communications of electricity and rail."[77] In the Saint-Simonian society, industry would replace the pastoral role once played by the church, and scientists would be its priests and the benevolent industrialist its philosopher king. Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism and a disciple of Saint-Simon, would go on to found his own Religion of Humanity, with a "complete system of belief

[76] For a brief historical outline of the early French attempt to make a civic religion after the Revolution of 1789, see Chapter One, "Refounding Society," in David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Pres, 2011), 15-33.
[77] See Jacques Rancière's discussion of Saint-Simon in *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011), 28-29.

and ritual, with liturgy and sacrements, priesthood and pontiff, all organized around the public veneration of Humanity."[78] Comte's rationally enlightened humanity 2.0 unencumbered by superstition would be the new "grand être suprême," and Comte was to be, ironically Popish, its High Priest. He invented a new catechism and kept all the trappings of the old church, so much so that Thomas Huxley once remarked that his new secular religion is simply "Catholicism *minus* Christianity."[79] Comte's project puts him in the tradition of critique of religion as an illusion which goes back to Feuerbach and extend all the way to Freud.[80] For Feuerbach, the Christian god was nothing but real human powers and attributes projected onto an ideal but illusory super-human power. The human is the source of the power, not the other way around.[81] As Marx, a student of Feuerbach put it, "religion is the only illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself."[82]

However, these proposals based on rationality and human powers never quite gathered the strength in numbers required to replace religion. Whatever the causes of their failures, it was widely felt by European intellectuals that if all that these proposals could offer as the succor for human suffering was reason, then it was thin gruel indeed. Reason, order, and progress are not

[78] For a good discussion of August Comte's Religion of Humanity, see Chapter 1, "The Invention of Humanity," especially the section "The Religion of Humanity," in Tony Davis, *Humanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 25-33. The quotation is from page 28.
[79] Thomas Henry Huxley, "On the Physical Basis of Life," in *Collected Essays*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 156. See also Sherrie Lyons, "A Most Eminent Victorian: Thomas Henry Huxley," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, no. 76 (2012): 85-104.
[80] See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), and Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1989).
[81] Feuerbach wrote, "Man – this is the mystery of religion – projects his being into objectivity, and then makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he think of himself is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself." Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 29-30.
[82] Marx, echoing Feuerbach, wrote, "Religion is indeed the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself or has already lost himself again." Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1992), 244.

ideals enough to inspire the sanguine enthusiasm required for devotion and worship, not to mention social cohesion.

Hence, we gain a new perspective on Romanticism's critique of reason. Romanticism advanced the claim that rationality does not encompass the whole range of the human experience, for it leaves out a crucial component that was, however, intrinsic to religion: the feelings of awe, wonder, the sublime, and the experience of something which is considered divine, sacred, and infinite. Wordsworth located this pantheistic, animating principle present in nature itself:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[83]

What Romanticism was able to articulate about art and religion is the insight that both cultural forms were at their core ways of maintaining vital contact with the divine. As the Romantic theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher argued, this experience is the *sine qua none* of Christianity: "religion is the outcome neither of the fear of death, nor of the fear of God. It answers a deep need in man. It is neither a metaphysics, nor a morality, but above all and essentially an intuition and a feeling … Dogmas are not, properly speaking, part of religion: rather it is that they are derived from it. Religion is the miracle *of direct relationship with the infinite*."[84]

[83] William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abby," in *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, 266.
[84] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13.

M.H. Abrams called this relocating of the Christian idea from god to nature, the elevation of "natura naturans" to a divine status, a form of "natural supernaturalism."[85] The poet T.E. Hulme argued that Romanticism was a result of the "natural instinct of religion" being misdirected away from its original, proper outlet of the Christian church, and spread out into other domains of human experience; it was a "split religion."[86] If Romanticism represented the re-channeling of previously "religious" feelings into other domains, then the natural avenue for its expression would be art, the sensuous embodiment of the spirit as Hegel puts it.[87]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this idea had further evolved into what William Parson has called "unchurched mysticism," the notion that religion stems first and foremost from, as William James once put it, "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." One does not need to be part of a religious institution to sustain a spiritual life, nor does one need dogmas to interpret what Romain Rolland, in his riposte to Sigmund Freud, called the "oceanic feeling" which is the urform of religious sentiment.

If it was possible to have *revelatio extra ecclesiam*, then there would be no fundamental difference between aesthetic ecstasy and religious ecstasy; art can become the refuge for those

[85] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*.
[86] T.E.Hulme wrote, "The inevitable result of such a process is that the repressed instinct bursts out in some abnormal direction. So with religion. By the perverted rhetoric of Rationalism, your natural instincts are suppressed and you are converted into an agnostic. Just as in the case of the other instincts, Nature has her revenge. The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. You don't believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You don't believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism. The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table. Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion." T.E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 118.
[87] G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin, 2004), 88.

experiences which were once channeled into religion. Art can become, in other words, a private religion.

3.2 CINÉMA DE L'ESPRIT IN THE SHADOWS OF WAGNER

> "Everything sacred and wishing to remind sacred is enveloped in mystery. Religions take refuge in the shelter of secrets unveiled only to the predestined: art has its own."
> - Stéphane Mallarmé[88]

Hence, cinema's candidacy to replace religion joined a long tradition of avant-gardism, initiated by the Romantics, which saw the mission of art as the regeneration of spiritual life and fulfilling the utopia once promised by religion. If this conception of art was already implicit in Romanticism, then the Symbolists, through their adoption of Wagnerism, made it an explicit program. Wagnerism, in other words, represented the *public* form of the idea of art as a private religion.

As Laurent Guido and Emmanuel Plasseraud made abundantly clear in their respective works on the period of 1910-1930, theoretical discourses on the link between musicality and film, the obsession with the idea of rhythm, ideas about film reception were permeated with the ideas of Wagner.[89] And the *cinéma de l'esprit* theorists, were directly or indirectly, acknowledged as such or not, Wagnerians in their conception of cinema as a spiritual art of the crowd.

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[88] Mallarmé, cited in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta(Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Sandford University Press), p. 43.

[89] Laurent Guido, *L'age du rythme: Cinéma, musicalité et culture du corps dans les théories françaises des années 1910-1930* (Lausanne: Editions Payot Lausanne, 2007); Emmanuel Plasseraud, *L' Art des foules: Théories de la réception filmique comme phénomène collectif en France 1908-1930* (Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2011).

The Symbolist precursors of *cinéma de l'esprit* were almost uniformly devoted to Wagner.[90] Baudelaire was an early sympathizer of Wagner's music dramas when Wagner was still relatively unknown and largely disliked in France. He saw in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* the vindication of his own ideas of correspondence as an artistic principle, and described the experience of going to Wagner's Tannhäuser in Paris in terms typically reserved for religious ecstasies:

> … I remember the impression made upon me from the opening bars, a happy impression akin to the one that all imaginative men have known, in dreams, while asleep. I feel freed from the *constraint of weight*, and recaptured the memory of the *rare joy* that dwells in *high places* … Then, involuntarily, I evoked the delectable state of a man possessed by a profound reverie in total solitude, but a solitude with *vast horizons* and *bathed in a diffused light*; immensity without other décor than itself. Soon I became aware of a heightened *brightness*, of a *light growing in intensity* so quickly that the shades of meaning provided by a dictionary would not suffice to express this *constant increase of burning whiteness*. Then I achieved a full apprehension of a soul floating in light, of an **ecstasy** *compounded of joy and insight*, hovering above and far removed from the natural world. (Italic emphasis in the original, bold emphasis my own) [91]

For Baudelaire, the Wagnerian Music Drama provided the model for the art of the future, where the power of myth, music, light, and spectacle unite to send the spectator into a quasi-religious trance of revelation: "The character of the scene and the tone of the legend work together to throw the mind into that dream-state where it is soon brought to the point of full clairvoyance, and it discovers a new interrelationship of the phenomena of the world, which the *eyes could not perceive in the ordinary waking state*."[92]

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[90] For an engaging recent account of the Symbolists' history with Wagnerism, see Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020). Especially Chapters 2, "Tristan Chord: Baudelaire and the Symbolists," and Chapter 4, "Grail Temple: Esoteric, Decadent, and Satanic Wagner." Ross points out that the Symbolists shared Wagner's hatred of "conservative, patriotic, 'official' France." For the Symbolists, "anti-Wagnerism was the sign of a backward mind," 93.

[91] Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris," in Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature, trans. P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1993), 331.

[92] Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris," 339. Emphasis my own.

In the same year when Jean Moréas published his "Symbolist Manifesto" in *Le Figaro*, another Symbolist, Édouard Dujardin founded the journal *Revue wagnérienne*, which soon became a rallying point for Symbolists, according to whom "le dieu Richard Wagner,"[93] the Meister, was more understood in France by the Symbolists than by his compatriots in Germany.[94]

Wagner had such a deep impact on the Symbolist movement not only because the Symbolists perceived the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* to be the application of their doctrine of correspondence,[95] a vindication of their worldview, but also because Wagner's diagnosis of the problems of the modern world resonated sympathetically with the Symbolists.

Just as Symbolism was an anti-Enlightenment protest against Scientific-Materialist interpretation of the world on behalf of the spiritual, immaterial, unseen grounding of existence, Wagner was equally critical of the idea that life can be based on materialism and rationality. Wagner diagnosed the problems of society to be originating precisely from the abuse of reason at the expense of spirituality. In an 1873 letter to his wife Cosima, Wagner wrote cynically, "if only we could reach the point of no longer looking to them (the Enlightened *philosophes*) for our ideas! … How low they have sunk one can see by the fact that they imagine they can get things done by maxims based on reason. As if anything ever comes of reason! Only religion and art can educate a nation - what use is science, which analyses everything and explains nothing?"[96]

The term religion in the previous quotation must be understood in its most general and abstract sense, as Wagner was critical of the state of the Christian religion as they were in Europe, and was, along with the majority of the Symbolists, "unchurched mystics" who took their spiritual life too seriously to leave it up to the church.

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[93] Mallarmé, "Hommage," in *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, 72.
[94] Ross, *Wagnerism*, 97-98.
[95] Ibid, 100.
[96] Wagner quoted in Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*, 196.

In his 1880 essay "Religion and Art," Wagner opened by claiming, "… where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of Religion" He goes on to say:

> Religion has sunk into an artificial life, when she finds herself compelled to keep on adding to the edifice of her dogmatic symbols, and thus conceals the one divinely True in her beneath an ever growing heap of incredibilities commended to belief. Feeling this, she has always sought the aid of Art, who on her side has remained incapable of higher evolution so long as she must present that alleged reality of the symbol to the senses of the worshipper in form of fetishes and idols, - whereas she could only fulfil her true vocation when, by an ideal presentment of the allegoric figure, she led to apprehension of its inner kernel, the truth ineffably divine.[97]

So here is the kernel of Wagnerism, and the core of the Romantic-Symbolist idea of art as a form of surrogate religion, which is simultaneously a critique of science and a denunciation of official religion: since the ultimate reality of the world is spiritual in nature and can only be perceived ecstatically, such spiritual truth can neither be revealed to one through science nor be confined to the church and straightjacket by dogmas. However, one's spiritual life, which becomes generally mystical once severed from any strict doctrinal interpretations, can and must find expression in other avenues, and art is a natural candidate since aesthetic experience already is the analog of the mystical, ecstatic experience of revelation. Art replaces religion by saving the revealed truth of reality from the church.

The French art historian Élie Faure, although still primarily known for his contributions to art history, was close to the *cinéma de l'esprit* circle, and his writings on cinema should be counted as part of the theoretical corpus of the movement. Faure was appreciative of the potential of cinema to remedy the modern spiritual crisis, and was less than subtle about what kind of institution cinema is replacing and what kind of experience cinema will supply when he compared cinema to

[97] Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 213.

the medieval cathedral while discussing the "social function" of cinema. According to Faure, the cathedral was the product of the collective efforts of anonymous artists united for a single purpose, expressing a shared spiritual aspiration. But the old religion, of which the cathedral was its symbol, is now nothing but "worm-eaten planks, repainted several times, which people who don't know how to swim cling to when a ship sinks." Humanity is ready for something to replace the old orthodoxy with a "new mystique," which cinema serves to unveil:

> [a] sort of pantheist life must surge forth to the light from the interior unfolding of our spiritual universe. All its secret passages shall join our substance to the visible passages which the Cinema wrests ceaselessly from the world's inertia. This condition for new ecstasies had seemed hopeless since the death of all the gods. … For the first time, the infinite diversity of the world offers to man the material means to demonstrate its unity. With tireless willingness, a plea for universal communion offers itself to all.[98]

Likewise, Canudo does not mention Wagner by name, and his avant-garde art journal was named *Montjoie!* after the French nationalist slogan,[99] but reading his essays on the sixth/seventh art, one cannot fail but perceive Wagner haunting its every line.[100] Canudo saw cinema as uniting "the rhythms of space" and "the rhythms of time," thereby giving birth to a synthesis of all the arts while fulfilling their destiny, which is spiritual in origin and in nature.[101] He called cinema "notre Temple, notre Panthéon et notre Cathédrales immatériels."[102] And in this new religio-cinema, Canudo imagined that we shall "be able to feel … our first sacred emotion, we shall have a glimpse

[98] Faure, *Fonction du Cinéma*, 84-85.
[99] The journal's subtitle is "the organ of French artistic imperialism" "organe de l'impérialisme artistique français"
[100] Giovanni Dotoli wrote, "les theories de Canudo sont-elles un pastiche esthétisant de wagnérien tardif …?" in Giovanni Dotoli, *Ricciotto Canudo, ou, le cinéma comme art* (Paris: Didier, 1999), 95-96. See also Jean-Yves Chateau, "L'idée de 'septième art comme Art total," in *Pourquoi un septème Art?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 21-45; Luc Vancheri, "Le moment Canudo," in *Le cinéma ou le dernier des arts* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2018), 247-270.
[101] Canudo, "The Birth of a Sixth Art," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 59.
[102] Canudo, *L'Usine aux images*, 122.

of the spirits, moving towards a vision of the temple, where Theater and Museum will once more be restored for a new religious communion of the spectacle and Aesthetics."[103]

Abel Gance is no exception. Paul Cuff's recent study of Gance's career makes his religious conception of cinema abundantly clear.[104] According to Gance, Cuff writes, "cinema was a transcendent language with a profoundly important social function … their medium was not only a means of global communication, but also a modern religion whose expressive power surpassed all earlier vessels of spiritual truth."[105] Cinema, as a new and universal form of revelation, can potentially not only convey esoteric, perennial spiritual truth passed down through the centuries, but also break down the divisions of culture, nationality, and religions. Gance wrote in 1923:

> Cinema is a universal language, the Esperanto of images. [...] We must always consider that Frenchmen, Spaniards, Germans, Anglo-Saxons, Chinese, or Latin Americans might sit side-by-side in theatres, and we must take advantage of their presence so that these brothers become powerfully aware that they are united by a common soul. Cinema is a Gospel.[106]

The same Wagnerian ideal is equally found in the writings of Émile Vuillermoz, who, according to Christophe Gautier, turned to film criticism as a result of not being able to listen to any Wagner during wartime, and brought Wagnerian ideals to bear on his conception of cinema as a total work of art.[107]

The notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art synthesizing all means of artistic expression for the realization of a unified effect, helped Canudo and others define a version of cinematic medium specificity that is based not on analytical and exclusive criteria but on synthetic and inclusive ones. Wassily Kandinsky distinguished between two tendencies in modernist art -

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[103] Canudo, "The Birth of a Sixth Art," 65.
[104] Paul Cuff, *Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema*. Especially Chapters 2 and 3.
[105] Cuff, *Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema*, xx.
[106] Gance, "La Confession d'Abel Gance," 474. Translation from Cuff, *op.cit.*, 22.
[107] Christophe Gautier, *La Passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929* (Paris: Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma, 1999), 238.

one towards "the unification of the arts," the other towards their separation through a process of purification so that each art becomes totally "immersed in itself."[108] For Canudo and others, cinema was elevated to the status of an art precisely on the grounds of its synthetic nature, its ability to bring together means of expression found in the other arts.

It is telling that the way in which Wagner described the effect of his musical drama on the spectator sounds so much like a description of what *cinéma de l'esprit* imaged for the cinema. In one essay Wagner wrote in 1837, he wrote,

> Once [the spectator] has taken his seat, he finds himself in a veritable "theatron" – that is, a space designed for nothing other than looking, and looking where his position points him. Nothing distinctly perceptible comes between him and the image to be looked at – instead only a sense of hovering distance, which results from the architectural arrangement of the two proscenia; in this way, the abstracted image assumes the unapproachability of a dream vision, while the music, sounding spectrally from the "mystic abyss," like vapors arising from the sacred Ur-womb of Gaia beneath the seat of Pythia, carries him into that inspired state of clairvoyance in which the scenic pictures becomes for him the truest reflection of life itself.[109]

The unification of the arts represents the fulfillment of the Romantic idea that aesthetic experience can become the catalyst for social change. As David Roberts puts it, "it was Wagner above all who made the idea of the synthesis of the arts in the service of social and cultural regeneration a central focus for aesthetic modernism."[110] *Cinéma de l'esprit* followed the Wagnerian ideal in its conception of cinema as a site where a collective spirituality can find expression and as a medium for the utopian transformation of society. I would argue that, rather than its formal innovations, it is the aspirational social dimension, without which its aesthetics would not be fully intelligible, that makes *cinéma de l'esprit* deserving of the title of an avant-garde.

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[108] Kandinsky, quoted in David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, 4-5.
[109] Wagner quoted by Alex Ross, in *Wagnerism*, 44.
[110] Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, 8.

The totality of cinema mirrors not only the Romantic unity of all human experience, but also reflects in it the imagined totality of a society of spectators to come. Collective reception is integral to the idea of the total work of art, and *cinéma de l'esprit* was, from its inception, conceived as an art of the crowd.

3.3 CINEMA AS ART OF THE CROWD

> "We need to re-read the texts from this period [of the 1910s and 1920s] to recollect to what extent cinema was felt to be the art of the crowd and the masses, at this very point when its social reality, as well as the obsession it elicited, exploded."
> - Raymond Bellour[111]

During the fin-de-siècle, the increasing presence of the urban crowd as a result of rapid urbanization in European capitals becomes a contentious issue. Different from the notions of the masses, of the people, and of the public, which invariably took on connotations of particular social classes, political affiliations, or tastes and opinions in their definition, the crowd imposes its presence and power by the sheer physical presence in public spaces and its heterogenous composition. As such, the crowd, as a concept, becomes the site where questions of urban hygiene, social control, political mobilization, and even the questions of media and morality were fought over. Various imaginations and representations of the crowd emerged, and urban sociology and crowd psychology arose at this particular historical junction as ways of conceptualizing the dangers and potentials of the crowd as a new kind of socio-political fact.

[111] Raymond Bellour, "The Cinema Spectator: A Special Memory," in *Audiences*, ed. Ian Christie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Universtiy Press, 2012), 207.

One particular fear shared by commentators from across the political spectrum is the issue of uniformity produced out of heterogeneity as a result of physical togetherness. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the crowd still afforded the frisson of anonymous curiosity and freedom to the Baudelairian dandy-flaneur, where the crowd was the veil through which the observer indulged in various sensory delights of the modern metropolis. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, however, this older conception of the crowd, in Symbolist circles, gradually gave way to a sense of visceral resentment of the ever-present crowd. The crowd was now considered not as the foil to eccentricity but as the leveling agent threatening the maintenance of individuality. This effect was only made worse in the fashionable cultural discourse of civilizational decline, of the obnoxious notion of "degeneration" popularized by Max Nordau. Edmond de Goncourt captured the elite attitude toward this new reality with the word "mediocracy."[112]

The Symbolist response was to shore up the individual, to let him stand apart from the riff-raff with increasing deliberateness and intensity, to make him impervious to the outside world, lost in an autonomous and quintessentially private world of aesthetic contemplation. Revel in one's deviance, extol one's nonconformity, indulge in transgressions, "il faut épater le bourgeois" was the battle cry - as long as these activities are bracketed in the realm of the aesthetic - the last domain of genuine freedom according to the Symbolists. Art for the sake of art, and art for the sake of the individual. Huysmans' Des Essentes is a portrait of the Symbolist aesthete *par excellence*, who envelops himself in the trapping of exclusive taste, amasses antiquities and art to lose himself in the world of sensory delights, unbound by convention and morality, and is ultimately insulated from the crowd - physically and spiritually.[113] Maurice Barrès, who started his literary career as a

[112] Edmund de Goncourt quoted in Eugen Weber, *France: Fin de Siècle*, 23.
[113] Huysmans, *Against Nature*.

Symbolist poet but later turned into an anti-Dreyfusard right-wing nationalist politician, took individualism to an extreme and elevated it to the status of a "cult" in his trilogy of books known as *Le Culte du moi*, the first of which, entitled *Sous l'œil des barbare*s, expressed a virulent misanthropy against "the vulgar, that is indeed all mankind, a few excepted."[114] Symbolism cultivated, openly or secretly, the image of the hermit, the *poète maudit* who must retreat from the crowd. Mallarmé spoke of himself to his friends during one of his Tuesday soirées, "there is only one man who has the right to be an anarchist, Me, the Poet, because I alone create a product that society does not want, in exchange for which society does not give me enough to live on."[115]

There is no doubt that for Symbolism, the reception of art is always assumed to be an intensely private affair, and it is done in the mood of quiet contemplation. The Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff described the intensely individualistic experience of revelation stimulated by his contemplation of a painting by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones:

> How perfectly delightful were the hours spent in long contemplation of this work of intense beauty! … The Spectator was enraptured by this living atmosphere of dream-love and spiritualized fire, carried away to a happy intoxication of the soul, a dizziness that clutched my spirit and bore it high up, far, far away, too far away to be any longer conscious of the brutal presence of the crowd, the mob of sightseers amid whom my body fought its way out again through the doors. This artist's dream, deliciously bewildering, had become reality; and at this moment it was the elbowing and struggling reality that seemed a dream, or rather a nightmare.[116]

[114] Barrès quoted in Eugen Weber, *France: Fin de Siècle*, 24-25.
[115] Mallarmé quoted in Rosemary Llyod, *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 213.
[116] Fernand Khnopff quoted in Sharon Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society*, 57. Hirsh's argument that Symbolism's "social goal" is the "direct enhancement of the individual in modern society," a "defense of the individual," is made in Chapter 2, "Symbolist Society," of her book.

We can formulate the idea thus: the ability to have an aesthetic experience marks me out from the crowd. Sharon Hirsh summarized "Symbolism's true social goal" as to save the individual from the perils of urban society through art.[117]

It is clear to see that by the time of the *cinéma de l'esprit*, this has given way completely to a new desire, not only to reconcile with the crowd, but to be embraced by it, to be right in its bosom again - cinematic reception, if it is to constitute a modern form of spiritual revelation, must inevitably start with the assumption of collective, rather than private, reception.[118] Delluc, speaking of this new mode of reception in a language typical of the Wagnerian-Nietzschean fad of invoking the Ancient Greek tragic theater, wrote that cinema was the assemblage "de la foule, de toutes les foules." Like the amphitheater of old, it is a spectacle addressed to "toutes les classes de la société" and constituted "le seul spectacle où toutes les foules se recontrent et s'unissent."[119]

From the other side of the political spectrum, another much darker and fearful imagination of the crowd emerged. The decade between 1885 and 1895 witnessed the flourishing of the new discipline of crowd psychology, whose chief representative, one whose name still appears in psychology textbooks on collective behavior to this day, Gustave Le Bon, warned of the volatile dangers the urban crowd brought. In his 1895 book, *Psychologie des foules,* Le Bon characterized the dawning new century as the "era of the crowd."[120] Le Bon characterized the crowd as by nature "brutal," "barbarous," enemy of order and civilization, possessing immense destructive power.[121] As Susanna Barrows pointed out, this nascent science of crowd psychology pioneered by Le Bon

[117] Sharon Hirsh, *op. cit*., 57.
[118] This is also the argument made by Emmanuel Plasseraud in *Art des foules*.
[119] Louis Delluc, Le Cinéma et les cineastes: Ecrits cinématographique I (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 1985), 59-60, 75.
[120] Translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896). "The Era of Crowds," is taken from the introduction to the book.
[121] Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, xix.

and his colleagues encapsulated "encapsulated many of the fears of their well-to-do contemporaries - fears deeply rooted in the social fabric of the time. Their crowds loomed as violent, bestial, insane, capricious beings whose comportment resembled that of the mentally ill, women, alcoholics, or savages."[122] For conservatives such as Le Bon, the urban crowd is "awesome, almost invariably terrifying," it is a presence to be controlled and policed.[123]

The primary reason for Le Bon's fear is the argument that sheer physical proximity reduces the mind to its subconscious functions, which are sub-personal, animalistic, affective as opposed to rational, but most importantly, malleable and incredibly susceptible to "hypnotic" manipulations by a potential demagogue.[124] The dominance of the subconscious, which is below the level of personality, produces a form of psychological uniformity among the crowd. For Le Bon, this psychological uniformity is what makes the crowd dangerous and potentially fascistic.

At the same time as Le Bon's imagination of the crowd as a supra-personal collective subconscious prone to mob rule gained traction among those who identified with his Machiavellian gaze of the state, a competing conception of collectivity emerged to inform and circumscribe the figure of the crowd in *cinéma de l'esprit*'s discourse. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the excessive focus on individualism, on aesthetic experience as a private phenomenon gave way to a new conception that emphasized the collective nature not only of social life in general, but also of aesthetic experience as well.

The translation and popularization of Walt Whitman's poetry in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the study of Betsy Erkkila, had a revitalizing effect on the post-Symbolist generation of French writers in terms of both style and substance, and post-Mallarméan

[122] Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 5.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 10-12.

generation soon counted Whitman as one of their own. Georges Duhamel would count the writers of L'Abbaye de Créteil commune, including Rene Arcos and Charles Vildrac, together with Abbaye associates such as Jules Romains, Georges Chenneviere, and Lucas Durtain, under the aegis of Whitman.[125] Whitman's broad, humanist conception of the universality of human life helped lead French verse out of the ultra-private, egoistic, and cryptic cult-de-sac of late Symbolism, and become the rallying symbol for a new conception of poetry aimed at connecting itself with the collective vitality of modern life.

Jules Romain, in parallel with the trend of *whitmanisme*, developed a conception of art based on the idea of unanimity, according to which the goal would be to convey, rather than the psyche of an individual, the existence of supra-personal, collective souls formed as a conglomerate of people and their environment. Romain conceived that this kind of grouping of individuals based on shared psychic life and simultaneity would eventually become conscious of itself to become a superhuman deity figure, which is ultimately destined to merge with the greatest unanimity of humanity as a whole.[126]

Jean-Marie Guyau, a philosopher and sociologist whose work prefigured many of the similar ideas that would later be popularized through the works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Gabriel Tarde, and Émile Durkheim, proposed in a series of works including the widely read *L'irréligion de l'avenir* and the posthumously published *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, a conception of society in which solidarity would lie at the root of both religion and art.[127] As he put it, just as religion is primarily a social bond, a way of imagining human togetherness, "la sympathie sociale

[125] Betsy Erkkila, *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 140.
[126] See an explanation of Jules Romain's Unanimism in Felix Walter, *Unanimism and the Novels of Jules Romains*, PMLA 51, no. 3 (September 1936): 863-871.
[127] Jean-Marie Guyau, *L'Irréligion de l'avenir* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1906); Jean-Marie Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1897).

que l'art produit, doit s'étendre au groupe d'hommes le plus vaste possible," since "la solidarité sociale est le principe de l'émotion esthétique la plus haute et la plus complexe."[128] Aesthetic phenomena, according to Guyau, were not a matter of private sensations but "irreducibly collective in their effects."[129] In their basic sociological functions, art and religion, in Guyau's account, perform the same function of creating social cohesion, of bringing to awareness the bond between fellow human beings.[130]

L'Herbier and Epstein were both keen readers of Whitman, and Canudo called Abel Gance "our Whitman of the screen."[131] Epstein devoted a sizable portion of his study of modernist literature, *La poésie d'aujourd'hui, un nouvel état d'intelligence* to Jules Romain's aesthetics of simultaneity and unanimity. Canudo, Epstein and L'Herbier all cited Guyau in their theoretical writings. But whatever the lines of transmission, these new developments indicate a sea-change in the artistic culture of early twentieth century France in which art started to be considered as a phenomenon that is collective in its aspiration and its reception. What these influences have in common, as they show up as references or inspirations in the writings of *cinéma de l'esprit*, is the idea that psychological uniformity, instead of being the reason for the elite fear of mob violence

[128] Guyau, *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, xi, 13.
[129] See a brief discussion of Guyau in Nina Lara Rosenblatt, "Photogenic Neurasthenia: On Mass and Medium in the 1920s," in *October* 86, (Autumn, 1998): 55.
[130] In *L'Irréligion de l'avenir*, Guyau was not very far from Wagner in his conception of music. He wrote, "Wagner was not absolutely wrong in his notion that music will be the religion of the future, or at least, the cult of the future." However, Guyau argued that there is no reason to restrict the notion of music to instrumental music alone. Choral music can be just as "religious." He wrote, "music … in which many voices unite in producing the same chant, in beating the same rhythm which has been regulated in advance by genius. Thus conceived, music is truly religious and socially significant." Jean-Marie Guyau, *The Non-Religion of the Future: A Sociological Study* (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 417.
[131] Canudo, "Reflections on the Seventh Art," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 294. L'Herbier referenced Whitman and Guyau in the same sentence, see "Hermes and Silence," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 152.

or the excuse to retreat into the private world of contemplation, can be the basis for a new form of social solidarity that transcends divisions of class or culture.

By the end of the War, it had become evident that the conception of cinema as a spiritual art can no longer be separated from its status as the art of the crowd. *Cinéma de l'esprit* had completely reoriented the Symbolist social goal of preserving the individual from the perils of the crowd and put a different aim in its stead. Cinema became the site that offered the occasion to reimagine a united humanity, an alternative vision of social totality, whose experience of the spectacle is as much aesthetic as spiritual. Élie Faure puts all of these themes together evocatively in the following paragraph:

> In every land, mankind is attempting to escape from a form of civilization which, through an excess of individualism, has become impulsive and anarchic, and we are seeking to enter a form of plastic civilization that is, undoubtedly, destined to substitute for analytic studies of states and crises of the soul, synthetic poems of masses and great ensembles in action. … Cineplastics will doubtless be the spiritual ornament sought for in this period-the play that this new society will find most useful in developing in the crowd the sense of confidence, of harmony, of cohesion.[132]

[132] Élie Faure, "The Art of Cineplastics," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 267.

4. CONCLUSION

"every new technology has a utopian dimension which imagines a future radically transformed by the implications of the device or practice"

- Tom Gunning[133]

In this chapter, I have argued that the transmission of the Symbolist worldview expressed itself in the formation of a revelationist theory of cinema. I have proposed, in response to Malcolm Turvey's pioneering work on the revelationist tradition in film theory, an alternative way to understand the idea of revelationism. While Turvey marshals the apparatuses of analytical philosophy in order to critique what he considers to be common errors running through various revelationist film theorists, I approach the idea of revelationism from the perspective of intellectual and cultural history and emphasize the difference contexts make in an historicizing method which seeks to reconstruct the historical horizon of revelationism's utopian impulses.

What my method and framework allow me to see is how the basic ideas and the premises of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism descend from a much older lineage of Western intellectual tradition than Turvey gave credit for. However, connecting *cinéma de l'esprit* with this much older tradition of revelationism is not simply out of an antiquarian interest or to pedantically critique Turvey's work, but to see more clearly, *and in context*, the theoretical stakes of the movement's utopianism.

[133] Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the-Century," in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2003), 56.

By inheriting the Orphic mode of revelationism, which sees ecstatic perception, rather than the scientific method, as the way to lift the veil of nature, *cinéma de l'esprit* joins its Romantic-Symbolist predecessors in their protest against the scientific-materialist worldview and the instrumentalization of human faculties which that worldview was believed to imply.

Caught between the declining appeal of religious orthodoxy and the ascendant disenchantment of the world, which for many were the twin bases for modernity as such, *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism expressed itself in the imagination of cinema as the fulfillment of the Romantic-Symbolist dream of art as the surrogate for religion in the post-faith, but re-enchanted, modern world.

This utopian impulse, I believe, is not just what makes *cinéma de l'esprit* cohere as a movement with a shared aspiration, but also what qualifies it as an *avant-garde* movement as such. Beyond its technical experimentations, its stylistic innovations, and its alternative narrative articulations, I argue that it is the desire to look beyond cinema and see a future world transformed by it that drove its broadest theoretical speculations.

What makes the *cinéma de l'esprit* worth revisiting as an historical avant-garde, I argue, is not so much its formal elements, which have been carefully and systematically analyzed and absorbed by the commercial mainstream, nor in the sense that its theoretical speculations can withstand the a-historical acid test of analytical philosophy and the scientific method to be incorporated in some contemporary "theory" building project.

It is worth revisiting because the movement's hitherto unarticulated utopian dimension signals that there is still much that we missed in our engagements with early film theory, whose ambitions do not line up with the tracks and parameters of later academic film theories that aim to

describe only the status quo of a medium, rather than to use theory as a "speculative instrument" in order to envisage, map out, and articulate alternative potentials for its use. The tendentiousness of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism, I would argue, should not be taken as an indication of its lack of philosophical rigor or its weakness, but rather, should be seen as a sign of its vitality.

For just as Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Theodor Adorno later understood, *cinéma de l'esprit* also saw cinema as the decisive battleground for the fate and meaning of modernity. The idea of cinema as an art of the crowd implies a wider notion of the aesthetic, which, as Miriam Hansen puts it, "situates artistic practices within a larger history and economy of sensory perception." Whereas the thinkers of the Frankfurt School understood cinema to be the site where the perceptual shocks of modern life can be represented, mediated, and processed, the site for the training and even rehabilitation of the human sensorium, the theorists of the *cinéma de l'esprit* conceptualized the medium's social potentials in a different direction. They saw the medium of cinema as capable of offering that experience which was understood by them at the time to be simultaneously aesthetic and spiritual, the basis for both art and religion - that of ecstatic perception. This ecstatic experience, which cinema could help to educate, activate, and preserve, represented, for *cinéma de l'esprit*, the opportunity to redress the negative impact of modernity on one's inner life, and be a bulwark against the mechanization of the world and the disenchantment of experience. If modernity was taken to be the annexation of the divine by the profane and the loss of power of the supra-sensible, then cinema was imagined to be the site where an enchanted modernity could be reconstituted by offering revelation to the masses. In other words, cinema, through its revelatory capacity, demonstrated an alternative way of seeing, experiencing, relating to, and being in the world which was threatened by modernity.

But *cinéma de l'esprit* is not just an extension of Symbolism in another domain. Although preserving the same worldview, it had shed the sectarianism and the individualism of the Symbolists, and embraced the early-twentieth century optimistic universalist humanism as its "esprit nouveau." Its innovation upon its Symbolist predecessors is the recognition that collective reception of art is the basis for which cinema, rather than other art forms, was uniquely positioned to be not just a synthesis of the arts, but also the art of the crowd, and hence the religion of the future. In the years around the First World War, cinema became the avenue *par excellence* for expressing this universalism which transcended the divisions of class, culture, and language and imagined humanity reuniting in its perennial wholeness.

Taken together, the diachronic, genealogical approach I have adopted in the first two chapters has outlined the historical momentum behind *cinéma de l'esprit*'s revelationism. I have explained the provenance and the stakes of its claims about cinema as the surrogate for religion in modernity in relation to the intellectual and cultural histories of which it is a part.

But I have not addressed one of the central assumptions of its formulation of revelationism: the equivalence between aesthetic and spiritual experiences. Since the Orphic mode of revelation depends on the ability of the subject to have an ecstatic experience, the question which remains becomes this: under what conditions can the experience of film be said to be ecstatic?

This, of course, is as much a question about film form as it is a question about what kind of subject the film spectator is, about cinema as constituting "techniques of ecstasy" and the spectator as a subject capable of responding to these techniques.

I have already argued that for *cinéma de l'esprit*, the reception of film is understood to be a collective phenomenon, which implies that aesthetic effects work on sub-personal, supra-

personal, and interpersonal levels. This means that the film spectator, as a subject, can no longer be considered to be the solitary, self-identical, self-sufficient individual, the insulated Cartesian "cogito," the "passive, lazy onlooker to an external world," as Coleridge put it.

To unpack *cinéma de l'esprit*'s conception of the subject requires a synchronic, archaeological approach that reconstruct its emergence in situ, in its contemporary milieu. It is to this question that I will turn in the following chapters.

Chapter Three

The Enchanted Borderlands: The Intellectual Milieu of *Cinéma de l'esprit*

1.1 TELESCOPIC VS PANORAMIC VISION

In the first two chapters, I have employed a diachronic, genealogical method of investigation and articulation in order to situate the formation of cinéma de l'esprit as it emerged at a particular juncture in the flow of time. My aim was to find the temporal coordinates for the movement so that its emergence can be understood in relation to and as a part of the broader intellectual and cultural history of Europe. My perspective in these chapters was telescopic. In order to understand the advent of the movement, I had to look a lot further back into the movement's pre-history beyond its own lifespan, to perceive the sources of those accumulated cultural momentums that propelled it forward and the intellectual currents that carried it and interacted with it. Then, I had to adjust my vision and learn to look to the future through its lens, and see the sunrise on its utopian horizon, in order to know in what direction are its energies focused, to have a sense of both what drove the movement and where it was going.

In the second half of the dissertation, I will articulate the formation of *cinéma de l'esprit* in another dimension: I will try to describe its spatial coordinates and see how it fits into its contemporary cultural and intellectual milieu. My method will be **synchronic and archeological.**

The French philosopher and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, in his study on the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, pointed out that "the influence of the religious, political, economic, intellectual phenomena, in a word, of the contemporary milieu, upon [Comte's] system, is as indisputable as its own influence upon the milieu." What Lévy-Bruhl said of the Comtean system of positivist philosophy can be equally applicable to the relation between film theory and its milieu: the relation is not a one-way street, but one of dynamic tension, exchange, and circulation.

Dudley Andrew and Steve Ungar, in their study of Parisian culture during the period of the Popular Front government of the 1930s, proposed an alternative to the standard hermeneutical model of culture.[1] They argued that instead of treating seeing the culture of a period as a text, whose meaning is to be decoded and interpreted according to semiotic procedures, historians could image it more like the weather of a period, the study of which becomes akin to a sort of intellectual meteorology, a process of gauging pressures, measuring flows, tracing circulations, and detecting fronts and formations.[2] Culture, as they put it, "lifts itself from text into atmosphere."[3] Their conception of cultural milieu (both material in the form of institutions and practices, and intangible as ideas and mentalities) as atmospheric conditions allow them to capture what was "in the air," to get a feel of the "tone of period," and to capture the circulatory as opposed to linear movement of

[1] Dudley Andrew and Steve Ungar, *Popular Front and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[2] Ibid, 13.
[3] Ibid, 9.

cultural forces.[4]

If the first two chapters follow a linear movement of cultural forces through history, the next two will try to arrest the incessant circulation of ideas at a particular historical moment and see them as a constellation through conceptual mapping.[5] This necessitates the use a synchronic mode of analysis.

French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan developed a horizontal, as opposed to vertical, method of digging, and a planographic, rather than stratigraphic, mode of analysis. This synchronic method allowed Leroi-Gourhan to understand archaeological finds "in terms of its inner relationships."[6] The "horizontal cut" forced "the recognition that the vestiges of former life as spatially situated are not fortuitously deposited." By turning his gaze toward the spatial relationship between objects found at the dig site, Leroi-Gourhan imaged his site as an "embedded horizon," which was "indispensable for in the in-place feeling (*le dégagement en place*) of ordinary testimony."[7]

Leroi-Gourhan's innovations helped Jennifer Wild articulate her definition of horizontality as a cultural historiographic method in her study of the relationship between the early cinema and the Parisian avant-garde in the period 1900-1920. Wild's focus was less on the films per se, but

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[4] Ibid, 11.

[5] My idea of a constellation derives from the way Walter Benjamin, as well as Miriam Hansen, used the term. In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to his study of the origins of German mourning play, Benjamin argued that "ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars." That is to say that ideas are no more present in the world than constellations exist physically in the heavens. But ideas, like constellations, allow us to perceive the relationship between objects. It is the task of the critical intellect to bring ideas into a "constellation," a formation, a system which illuminate the relationship between them. My historicizing approach to the theory of cinéma de l'esprit, therefore, starts with the restoration of its original contexts of production and aims to construct a conceptual map of its ideas, with the ultimate goal of making it legible and "actual" for contemporary thought so that its utopian dimension can once again be part of our own theoretical speculations. As Benjamin puts it, "it is the function of concepts to group phenomena together, and the division which is brought about within them thanks to the distinguishing power of the intellect is all the more significant in that it brings about two things at a single stroke: the salvation of phenomena and the representation of ideas." See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009), 34-35.

[6] Jennifer Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 1900-1923 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 5.

[7] Ibid.

more on "the formal and symbolic aspects of the spaces that accommodated their viewing, the projection techniques that permitted their display, and the ephemeral artifacts related to films and cinema that were deposited within the cultural surroundings."[8] And the horizontal, synchronic approach enabled her analysis to "[cut] laterally across the surface of the age of cinema," in order to "examine the inner relationships of the period by examining how these artifacts emerge in situ."[9]

Although the focus of my own study of milieu is more on ideas than on artifacts, this synchronic, horizontal method is equally advantageous for my purposes, for it allows me to not just attend to the content of ideas, but also articulate the constellation of epistemological resources available for their formulation and elaboration. The aim of my study is to excavate the conditions of possibility for a theory of film that is capacious enough to accommodate questions of spirituality, revelation, and the possibility for the replacement of religion. Tristan Tzara wrote in a comment on Picasso, that his intention is "not to explain Picasso's painting, but to fit it into a system of relations suited to the spirit of the time."[10]

This captures succinctly my intention with the theory *cinéma de l'esprit*. The question is not just what did they say about cinema, but what did they have to know or be able to think, in order to sensibly say what they said about cinema. The goal is therefore to articulate the formation of this body of theory as a discourse, or, to use Foucault's words, to "map the first surfaces of their emergence."

[8] Ibid, 4.
[9] Ibid, 6.
[10] Ibid, 2.

1.2 INCOMMENSURABLE MODELS OF THE SUBJECT

The second reason I am using a Foucauldian archeological method to arrest the linearity of thought is that I want to emphasize that early film theories, including the film theory of *cinéma de l'esprit*, are not just primitive attempts at theorizing which would be improved upon incrementally by later generations of theorists. They are not early versions of later, better, more comprehensive, more scientific accounts of how films work in general, but are driven by their own concerns, circumscribed by their own intellectual paradigms.

Francesco Casetti's 1993 book, *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995*, took a step towards historicizing film theory by providing a conceptual schema which divides the film theories produced since the post-WWII era into three paradigms or generations as "ontological theories," "methodological theories," and "field theories." Each of these paradigms is governed by its own set of epistemological protocols, with its own research programs, and an international structure for the production of knowledge. Each paradigm is also distinguished by its unique institutional set-up, its network of scholars, and its sociological context.[11] By adopting concepts from the philosophy of science, Casetti is able to conceptualize the history of film theory since 1945 as a series of Kuhnian paradigm shifts. However, Casetti's idea of film theory contains an implicit "scienticist" bias, for he defines theory as "a set of assumptions, more or less organized, explicit, and binding, which serves as a reference for scholars so that they can understand and explain the nature of the phenomenon under investigation."[12] The very idea of film theory as something which unifies, regulates, and organizes the production of knowledge about the nature of film as an object

[11] Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995*, trans. Francesca Chiostri, Elizabeth Gard Bartolini-Salimbeni, and Thomas Kelso (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
[12] Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, 2.

or phenomenon, arguably, was itself historically conditioned and did not arise before the institutionalization of film studies as a discipline in the post-WWII era that Casetti examines.

David Rodowick's work on film theory has made clear that our contemporary sense of what theory means is in fact the result of a "broad shift in the immediate postwar period that involved a new set of criteria for identifying theory as a concept allied to a distinct set of institutional practices."[13] He characterizes the history of film theory since the early 20th century as a succession of different "modes of discourse" – the aesthetic, the structural, and the cultural, and alerts us to the fact that "what we call theory today was characterized very differently throughout the long and complex history of writing on film before the end of World War II – as dramaturgy, aesthetic philosophy, and philosophy of art, if the writers bothered to characterize their work at all."[14] I think this is a helpful way of thinking about early film theory, because it avoid the imposition of today's epistemological framework and standards for academic film theory on the past without the necessary historical mediation, and cautions against the rather arrogant assumption about the primitiveness of early film theory.

As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener pointed out in their introduction to *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, the history of film theory is not one of teleological advancement toward perfection by virtue of the fact that each new theory improves upon the preceding one.[15] Instead, paradigm shifts happen between successive bodies of film theories, making them, according to Thomas Kuhn's understanding (and this is a factor Casetti neglects), incommensurable with each other. This means that the terms, ideas, concepts which might be

[13] D.N. Rodowick, "The Aesthetic Discourse in Classical Film Theory," *Screen* 55, no. 3 (Autumn, 2014), 413.
[14] Ibid, 415.
[15] Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

assumed axiomatically in paradigm do not just have shifting epistemological valences, but are also ontologically changed. We cannot understand the theory of one paradigm in terms of another.[16]

Elsaesser and Hagener argued that "each type of cinema (as well as every film theory) imagines an ideal spectator and, as a result, postulates a certain relation between the (body of the) spectator and the (properties of the) image on screen." I take this to mean that every film theory must base itself, implicitly or explicitly, on a certain fundamental understanding of the spectator as a perceiving, feeling, and thinking being who enters into a certain relation with the image on screen in a particular arrangement of the apparatuses of cinema. It means that every film theory possesses, axiomatically, a working theory of the capacities of the spectator's mind and/or body, what I would call a model of the subject, which is historically conditioned, and circumscribed by the larger intellectual paradigm of its time.

Modern film theories often come equipped with a "ready-made" mode of the subject as the basis of their theoretical architecture. This model often originates from and finds its ultimate support and justification in another discipline beyond the confines of film studies. For example, psychoanalytic film theory derives its understanding of the subject from Freud and Lacan. The apparatus theory argues that the set-up of the cinematic apparatus conditions the subject ideologically so that it identifies with the position of the bourgeois universal "cogito" in the capitalist visual regime. The cognitivism of the 1990s operates on, implicitly, the metaphor of the mind as a computer, with a set of perceptual hardware and a cognitive software coupled together to "process" narrative information in a logical, goal-oriented manner. The recent neurological film

[16] Here is an example of the consequence of a paradigm shift making theories incommensurable: In Rutherford's atomic model, electrons are said to particles orbiting the nucleus. Whereas in quantum mechanics, electrons are said to appear in space unpredictably, whose probability of appearing at a specific point in space at a particular time is described by a probability function. These two theories of the electron are incommensurable, because one cannot understand the quantum properties of the electron in terms of orbits.

theory relies on the experimental results such fMRI brain scans and eye-tracking softwares for it conceives the subject as identical with the evolutionarily-derived, biologically-hardwired brain, and derives its authority from the reigning paradigm in neuroscience.

The model of the subject that each film theory is based on is embedded in the larger intellectual paradigm of its time, and shifts from one generation to another. They are incommensurable, epistemologically and ontologically with one another: the axiom of one becomes the error of another, the reality of one becomes the construct of another. Film scholars need to be sensitive to this fact or we risk talking at cross purposes with an historical interlocutor.

1.3 THE AGE OF CINEMA AND THE AGE OF THE MODERN MIND

> "It is impossible to write ancient history because we do not have enough sources, and impossible to write modern history because we have too many."
> - Charles Péguy

> "[the scholar should] steep these texts in their historical moments – to reimmerse them into their contexts where, like a strip of film in a chemical bath, they begin to reveal their previously unseen contours. In this way, the text themselves becomes newly legible in terms of the historical discourses in which they participated."
> - Johannes von Moltke[17]

In David Bordwell's treatment of "Impressionist" film theory, he claims that there is a serious flaw at its center: the theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit* did not have a coherent theory of emotion and cognition; they could not adequately and systematically account for what a "feeling" was.[18] The model of the subject in *cinéma de l'esprit*, therefore, suffers from a profound contradiction: "[a] physiological characterization would be at odds with the idealist assumptions

[17] Von Moltke, "Out of the past," 401.
[18] Bordwell, "French Impressionist Cinema," 97.

[…] operating in Impressionist theory."[19]

Bordwell is perspicacious in noticing these two strands in *cinéma de l'esprit*'s model of the subject, one "scientific," the other "spiritual" and "philosophical." However, were these terms at odds with each other as Bordwell suggests? Were these strands incompatible with each other even in the context of the early twentieth century? Were the "materialist" and "idealist" tendencies *a priori* oppositions for the *cinéma de l'esprit* movement?

What was the intellectual paradigm that *cinéma de l'esprit*'s model of the subject was embedded in? How do we make it intelligible again so that we can perceive, as I believe to be the case, that *cinéma de l'esprit* had a coherent model of the subject; it was able to systematically account for what a feeling, a sensation, or an emotion was, albeit not in terms commensurable with later understandings.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, lamented that "the philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul," that the mind is always a "residuum" philosophy could not resolve, and for that reason, the human being remains "a stream whose source is hidden."[20] Emerson's poetical acquiescence in the face of the unfathomable depth of the human mind would look out of place just a couple of decades later. By the time of his death in 1882, there had been revolutionary changes in our understanding of the mind, not all of which issued from the province of philosophy.

From the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, revolutionary changes happened in the Western understanding of the self. This period of modernity witnessed

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul" in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 385.

the emergence and consolidation of the first experimental science of the mind. For the first time, the perceptual, affective, and cognitive apparatuses of the human being were subjected to laboratory studies; psychology, based on physiological discoveries, airlifted itself from abstract philosophical speculations of the past to claim for itself *the* science of the mind. This is also the period when the marvels of the mind were dissected systematically - from somnambulism, hypnosis, to hysteria, each put under the gaze of scientific investigation. In the meantime, such seemingly miraculous phenomena as mental suggestion, mediumship, and telepathy became the stuff of newfangled intellectual or cultural movements which are sometimes considered less than "official": the occult revival, spiritualism/spiritism, and the burgeoning psychical research. This was also the time when urban modernity was understood to exert novel impacts on our elastic mind - intellectual fatigue, neurasthenia, hyper-stimulation became cyphers of the modern condition, a lens through which the malaise of the modern national body politic can be made legible. Philosopher, experimental psychologists, spiritualists, occultists, and psychical researchers, all claimed authority over the "science of the soul." To put it simply, the age of cinema coincided with the age of the modern understanding of the mind.

This plurality and heterogeneity in the early twentieth century discourses of the mind are reflected in *cinéma de l'esprit*'s model of the subject as well, in the way the movement understood the capacities of the body and mind of the spectator. Theorists sometimes imagined the mind as microcosm which correspond to the universal macrocosm and interacts with it sympathetically. The language they used to describe this aspect of the mind were almost mystical, filled with occult embedded in the European esoteric tradition. Theorists sometimes conceived the spectator as capable of receiving telepathic communications form the screen, with images carrying supra-sensible, psychic messages. The mind was also described as a vibrating medium, as if a tuning

fork in the *harmonia mundi* of a world permeated by an invisible ether. At the same time, theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit* did not shy from the conception of the mind as an organic, embodied, physiologically conditioned nervous system, which regulates those subconscious, pre-linguistic, affective processes which are prior to or independent from our cognitive, linguistic, and intellectual faculties.

Therefore, the subject of the spectator, I argue, must be understood as a hybrid object in Bruno Latour's sense of the word, a phenomenon which resists the process of purification, an object which cannot be neatly classified as belonging to the domain of the human or the non-human, nature or culture, the humanities or the sciences.[21] The model of the subject which operates in *cinéma de l'esprit*, I will demonstrate, is the result, not just of a process of eclectic assemblage, but of a creative synthesis, which holds heterogeneous elements together in dynamic and capacious tension, and contains valences not as either/or dichotomies but as both/and antinomies. If *cinéma de l'esprit*'s model of the subject seems difficult to untangle, it is not because of it is incoherent, but is a sign of its capaciousness; it is, to use Latour's words, "a very tight knot at the center of a net. It is hard [to understand] because it had to hold so many heterogenous resources together."[22]

Thus, this is what I have planned for the next two chapters: I will first present a ground survey of the site of my archeological excavation of *cinéma de l'esprit*'s spectator, in order to articulate the conditions of possibility for the movement's hybrid model of the subject. I will demonstrate what resources were available, clarify their provenance, and illuminate their inter-relationships. In other words, Chapter Three will reconstruct the matrix which gave rise to the movement's model of the subject. Then, in Chapter Four, I will examine the various facets of this

[21] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-12.
[22] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 106.

model and articulate how they fit together in a dynamic constellation.

2. A COMMON ATMOSPHERE

On February 22, 1926, Abel Gance was invited by the Institut général psychologique to give a lecture in the Amphitheater of Medicine at the Collège de France. His address was entitled "La Beauté à travers le cinema." After some brief remarks thanking the organizers of the event, Gance opened his discussion of the art of cinema with a quotation from the French physiologist Claude Bernard: "I am convinced that the day will come when the physiologist, the poet, and the philosopher will speak the same language and understand each other."[23]

This opening, at first glance, seems to be nothing more than a simple and felicitous way for Gance to ingratiate himself with his scientific audience. Claude Bernard was a professor of medicine at the Collège de France, where he worked in the physiological laboratory there from 1847 to 1878. Moreover importantly, Gance is faced with the thorny task of straddling the "great divide" between what C.P. Snow called in the late 1950s the "two cultures," being a filmmaker from the side of traditional, literary, artistic culture addressing a group of psychologists representing the modern, empirical, scientific culture.[24] Perhaps Bernard's sanguine projection of a future common language shared by the two cultures will be both consolation and alibi for anyone faced with the perilous prospect of interdisciplinary discourse.

However, one cannot help but wonder what this common language which Bernard was convinced will arise and in which Gance had sympathy for would look like. Bernard was neither

[23] The text of the lecture is published in the bulletin of the Institut Général Psychologique and in three issues of the Cinémagazine in 1926. Abel Gance, "La Beauté à travers le cinema," *Cinémagazine*, no. 10 (1926): 48.
[24] C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the first nor the last to conceive of a common culture capable of re-uniting the sciences and the arts. The modern motif of the rift between different branches of human knowledge, the conflict between different disciplines, epistemologies, and authorities, can be traced back to the beginning of the scientific revolution. The Romantic reaction to the "mechanistic science" of its time,[25] the nineteenth-century *Methodenstreit* in German universities, the "Two Cultures" debate initiated by C.P. Snow in the late 1950s, and Habermas' lament over the unbridgeable cleavage between secular knowledge and revealed knowledge[26] are all indications of the same fragmentation which Western culture is still to this day unable to repair. The desire to mend it has never ceased, and the form it has taken has ranged from the supremacy of one epistemology over the others, to harmonious coexistence and reconciliation, to a new synthetic holism. The German Romantic's proposal to bring nature and spirit in one system of *Naturphilosophie*, John Brockman's proposal of a Third Culture in which humanistic culture's traditional domain will be annexed by increasingly authoritative, and dare we say authoritarian, natural sciences, are all proposals for repairing the divide.[27] As recently as 2017, Murray Smith has proposed another "third culture", a "naturalized aesthetics" for film studies, capable of bringing the insight of the experimental sciences, especially cognitive science, in harmony with the humanist understanding of film.[28]

The desire for genuine interdisciplinary dialogue, for a unified culture, for some sort of holism is an old and continuing theme. But how did Gance, apparently ventriloquized by Bernard, imagine the contours of this common culture? In other words, what is, for Gance and for Bernard, the historically specific form that this common culture is to take?

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[25] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 93-118. See another version of the explanation of this divide in Hans Eichner, "The Rise of Modern Science and the Genesis of Romanticism," *PMLA* 97, (1982): 8-30.
[26] Habermas, *Awareness of What is Missing*.
[27] John Brockman, *Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).
[28] Murray Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Let us try to unravel this problem by first having a closer look at Claude Bernard. The quotation used by Gance, which is more of a paraphrase, appears to be from an 1865 article by Bernard entitled "Étude sur la physiologie du coeur".[29] The majority of the essay contains a rather detailed exposition on the physiology of the heart. Bernard points out that the physiological understanding of the function of the heart as the central organ for the circulation of blood is in fact *not* incongruent with the philosophical and artistic idea of the heart as "the seat and the emblem of the most noble and tender feelings of our soul."[30] According to Bernard, the heart and the brain are intimately connected via the nervous system in a reflex feedback loop. Our feelings are in fact reflex actions of the sensory nervous system which modifies the functioning of the heart, hence the blood supply to the brain, which in turn modifies its operations. Thus, the artist's and the philosopher's sense of the heart as the organ of feeling has a sound physiological interpretation. Bernard surmises that it is the incomplete and immature science of the present that creates apparent contradictions between science and the other disciplines:

> Science does not contradict the observations and data of art, and I cannot accept the opinion of those who believe that scientific positivism must kill inspiration. In my opinion, the opposite will necessarily happen. The artist will find more stable foundations in science, and the scientist will draw a more secure intuition from art. There can undoubtedly be times of crisis in which science, both too advanced and still too imperfect, worries and troubles the artist rather than helping him.[31]

However, Bernard argues that this will only be a transitory state of affairs. With the refinement of scientific understanding, the "most elevated regions of human knowledge" will necessarily come together to form a "common atmosphere:" **"I have the conviction that when physiology is**

[29] Claude Bernard, "Étude sur la physiologie du Coeur," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 56, no. 1 (March 1865): 236-253.
[30] "le siège et l'emblème des sentiments les plus nobles et les plus tendres de notre âme" in Bernard, "Étude", 236.
[31] Bernard's original "La science ne contredit point les observations et les données de l'art, et je ne saurais admettre l'opinion de ceux qui croient que le positivisme scientifique doit tuer l'inspiration. Suivant moi, c'est le contraire qui arrivera nécessairement. L'artiste trouvera dans la science des bases plus stables, et le savant puisera dans l'art une intuition plus assurée. Il peut sans doute exister des époques de crise dans lesquelles la science, à la fois trop avancée et encore trop imparfaite, inquiète et trouble l'artiste plutôt qu'elle ne l'aide." Page 252. Translation my own.

sufficiently advanced, the poet, the philosopher and the physiologist will understand each other."[32]

Bernard's article appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes*, a highbrow political, literary journal read by France's cultural elites throughout the nineteenth century. He had good reasons to be humble about the role of physiologists when writing for an audience immersed in the traditional literary, humanist culture. When Bernard took over his predecessor François Magendie's role at the Collège de France in the mid-nineteenth century, experimental physiology was still a relatively young discipline. Experimental psychology, on the other hand, would still have to wait until the 1870s and the pioneering work of Wilhelm Wundt to establish itself as a science to be based on the physiological research on the human sensory apparatus. When Bernard spoke of a common atmosphere, the study of the mind was still, by and large, the province of philosophy, not physiology or psychology.

However, one cannot help but suspect a hint of disguised condescension and a quiet confidence about the prospect of physiology in Bernard's ostensibly amicable and conciliatory tone when discussing the future of these disciplines. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, Bernard seems to have foreseen which discipline would set the terms of the dialogue on the nature of the mind. Soon after his death, an experimental science of the mind would emerge from physiology, and it will soon annex intellectual territories reserved for philosophy or literature.

Indeed, Gance and the *cinéma de l'esprit* collectively, would have every reason to count Bernard as a precursor. As I will detail in the next chapter, it was the physiological accounts of the

[32] On page 236, Bernard wrote: "Je pense enfin que, dans leurs régions élevées, les connaissances humaines forment une atmosphère commune à toutes les intelligences cultivées, dans laquelle l'homme du monde, l'artiste et le savant doivent nécessairement se rencontrer et se comprendre." And on page 252: "j'ai la conviction que quand la physiologie sera assez avancée, le poète, le philosophe et le physiologiste s'entendront tous." Translations my own. Bernard, "Étude," 236, 252.

human sensory apparatus, which has as its basis, the assumption that the human being is an organism whose mental processes are deeply connected with the biological processes of the nervous system and the rest of the body, that supplied the theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit* many of their crucial concepts regarding the mind including the subconscious, coenesthesia, and intellectual fatigue.

Bernard's "common atmosphere" represents the confidence of a discipline in its ascendency. However, is physiology, or the later discipline of experimental psychology, going to have the last word on the nature of the mind?

Bernard left a complicated legacy. As a physiologist, his monumental work was monumental and had wide-ranging influences on the French culture of the 19th century.[33] The Goncourts brothers once remarked in their *Journal* that "Claude Bernard aurait annoncé qu'avec cent ans de science physiologique, on pourrait faire la loi organique, la création humaine en concurrence avec le Créateur."[34] Throughout his career, Bernard, who thought of the human body as a "machine vivante," sought to establish through experimentation, in which the use of vivisection played an important role, the physical and chemical mechanisms that govern vital processes. According to Bernard, the "laws which govern the chemico-physical properties of

[33] For a historical analysis of the ways in which Bernard's physiology influenced French literature of the late-19th century, see Reino Virtanen, "Claude Bernard's Prophecies and the Historical Relation of Science to Literature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 2 (April-June, 1986): 275-286.

[34] Edmond and Jules Goncourt, *Journal, Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, cited in Virtanen, op.cit., 281. For a succinct overview of the work of Bernard, see Francisco Grande, "Introduction to the Symposium," in *Claude Bernard and Experimental Medicine: Collected Papers Form a Symposium Commemorating the Centenary of the Publication of An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine and the First English Translation of Claude Bernard's Cahier Rouge*, ed. Francisco Grande and Maurice Visscher (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, inc., 1967), 3-8.

matter" apply equally to the phenomena of life.[35] However, life does not then reduce to inert matter. As he puts it, "[i]t is obvious that living things, by nature evolutionary and regenerative, differ radically from inorganic substances, and the vitalists are correct to say so."[36] For Bernard, an organism is a living machine, but not a mechanical machine, not in the eighteenth-century sense that it is composed of interlocking parts geometrically located in space.[37] With the maxim "la fixité du milieu intérieur est la condition de la vie libre," he insisted that the relation of the living organism to its external environment is not one of passive dependence, precisely because the "milieu intérieur" (or what we call in current parlance homeostasis after the American physiologist Walter B. Cannon) assures the organism of an "obvious independence," "a protective mechanism," an "elasticity."[38] It is the organization of life that is unique and peculiar to living things: "the guiding idea of the vital evolution is essentially the domain of life and belongs to neither chemistry nor to physics nor to anything else."[39] Even though Bernard argues that material determinism governs specific vital processes, he was not able to completely dispense with the notion of vital force when it comes to the overarching organization of life. As Sebastian Normandin puts it, the source of life, the vital force, remained for Bernard as much an "occult force" as gravity was for Issac Newton.[40]

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[35] Claude Bernard, quoted in Sebastian Normandin, "Claude Bernard and An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine: "Physical Vitalism," Dialectic, and Epistemology," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62, no. 4 (2007): 519.

[36] Quoted in Georges Canguilhem, *A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings from Georges Canguilhem*, ed. François Delaporte, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 274.

[37] Ibid, 272.

[38] Ibid, 272. This idea, as Reino Virtanen points out, is seminal for Henri Bergson's ideas expressed in his *L'Evolution créatrice*, but "[t]he Bergsonian vitalist mystique has little in common, however, with Bernard's approach to the phenomena of life. Bergson recognized this fact, for he admitted that Claude Bernard did not give, nor did he try to give, a metaphysics of life." Virtanen, *op.cit.*, 277.

[39] Claude Bernard, "Introduction," quoted in Normandin, "Claude Bernard and An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine," 519.

[40] According to Sebastian Normandin, Bernard can be seen as a "physical vitalist" who does not subscribe to the idea of a vital *substance*, but cannot completely dispense with vitalism in the explanation of life as a *process*. Similary, Charles T Wolfe identifies Bernard as a "weak vitalist" who makes use of vitalism in the explanation of the function and organization of living matter but resists the temptation to ontologize these properties. Normandin, op.cit., 527;

Bernard the philosopher of science, on the other hand, is much less tolerant towards any notions of the occult, grey areas, or nebulous metaphysics. In Bernard's seminal work *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, the thinly veiled condescension behind his accommodation of the naiveté of the littérateurs in the *Étude* article gives way to a rather unapologetic defense of experimental science's superiority as the only way to certain knowledge, as a way of penetrating into the unknown.[41] Philosophers, although they represent "l'aspiration éternelle de la raison humane vers la connaissance de l'inconnu," cannot achieve any certainty in their knowledge, and often end up lost "dans les nudges."[42] Science, on the other hand, is rooted in rigorous, experimentally derived, and causally deterministic phenomena: "a physician needs to know … whether a patient will recover, and only the search for scientific determinism can lead to this knowledge."[43] Georges Canguilhem even claims that Bernard was "the first … to introduce the term 'determinism' into the language of scientists and philosophers."[44] This applies to physiology as much as to reason in general. He wrote, "the intellectual conquest of man consists in diminishing and pushing back indeterminism to the extent that he gains ground on determinism with the aid of the experimental method. This alone should satisfy his ambition because it is

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Charles Wolfe, "Vitalism and the Metaphysics of Life: The Discreet Charm of Eighteenth Century Vitalism," in Life and Death in Early Modern Philosophy, ed. Susan James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 292-314; and Charles Wolfe and Sebastian Normandin, "Vitalism and the Scientific Image," in *Vitalism and the Scientific Image in Post-Enlightenment Life Science, 1800-2010*, ed. Sebastian Normandin and Charles Wolfe (London: Springer, 2013), 1-15. For a typology nineteenth century vitalism, see E. Benton, "Vitalism in nineteenth-century scientific thought: A typology and reassessment," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 5, no. 1 (1974): 17-48. For a meta-theoretical analysis of the mechanism-vitalism debate, see Hilde Hein, "The Endurance of the Mechanism-Vitalism Controversy," *Journal of the History of Biology* 5, no. 1 (1972): 159-188.

[41] See Annie Petit's analysis of Bernard's rather unfavorable views on literature and philosophy: Annie Petit, "Claude Bernard and the History of Science," *Isis* 78, no. 2 (1987): 201-219.

[42] Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, quoted in Annie Petit, "Claude Bernard and the Hisotry of Science," 205.

[43] Claude Bernard, *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, trans. Henry Copley Greene (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 138.

[44] Canguilhem, *op.cit*., 272.

through this that he extends and *will extend* his mastery over nature."[45]

Ultimately, in spite of his willingness to extend an olive branch to philosophers and artists and his vestigial vitalism, certain aspects of his thought lend well to the metaphysical position of scientific naturalism, an ideology of science that later congealed into what Bruno Latour calls a modern settlement.[46] The nineteenth-century representatives of scientific naturalism would espouse philosophies of science remarkably similar to Bernard's.[47]

Only three years after the publication of Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale,* the English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley pushed this deterministic view of nature to the extreme in his influential 1868 lecture "On the Physical Basis of Life." For Huxley, the discovery of a proteinaceous substance inside the cells of plants and animals called protoplasm vindicated the unity of life in its material basis, as the evolution of all life forms, from the simplest to the most complex, originates from the development of the same basic matter of protoplasm. As a consequence, the materialist, determinist, and mechanistic view of nature can be extended to the sphere of life itself and vitiates all necessity of positing a metaphysical "vital principle" unexplainable by science, since all vital phenomena, physical or mental, can be explained in terms of the "molecular changes in that matter of life." Huxley's world picture admits nothing irreducible to the movement of matter in time and space, and as a consequence, the progress of science will mean "the extension of the province of what we call matter and causation, [with] the concomitant gradual banishment from all regions of human thought of what we call spirit."[48]

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[45] Bernard, *Introduction*, quoted in Matthew Brady Brower, *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xxiii.
[46] Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 310.
[47] Annie Petit writes, "[Bernard] helped instigate a divorce between the humanities and the sciences; he endorsed the segregation of philosophy from science…" Annie Petit, *op.cit*., 208.
[48] For discussions of Huxley's idea of the protoplasm being the physical basis of life, see Robert Michael Brain, "Protoplasmania: Huxley, Haeckel, and the Vibratory Organism in Late Nineteenth-Century Science and Art," in *The*

William Clifford elaborated on Huxley's idea in 1870 when he characterized the empirical method in his lecture "On the Aims and Instruments of Scientific Thought" as "describ[ing] the unknown and unfamiliar as being made up of the known and familiar." Even spiritual life will not escape the capture of the scientific method, as Clifford argued that "to every reasonable question there is an intelligible answer, which either we or posterity may know by the exercise of scientific thought."[49]

The idea that science will eventually tell us everything there is to know about the world found the most powerful summation in the German mathematician David Hilbert, who gave the program of scientific naturalism its most pointed slogan in a lecture addressed to the Society of German Scientists and Physicians in Königsberg in 1930. He countered the German physiologist Emil du Bois-Reymond's maxim "*ignoramus et ignorabimus*" by saying, "we must not believe those, who today, with philosophical bearing and deliberative tone, prophesy the fall of culture and accept the *ignorabimus*. For us there is no *ignorabimus*, and in my opinion none whatever in natural science. In opposition to the foolish *ignorabimus* our slogan shall be *Wir müssen wissen – wir werden wissen* (We must know — we will know)."[50]

As for Bernard himself, even though there might be aspects of nature whose determinism remain yet unknown, he categorically rejected the existence of the unknowable: "Our reason scientifically includes the determinate and the indeterminate, but that it cannot accept the

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Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture, ed. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 92–123. Charles S. Blinderman, "Huxley, Pater, and Protoplasm," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 3 (1982): 477–86. Gerald L. Geison, "The Protoplasmic Theory of Life and the Vitalist-Mechanist Debate," *Isis* 60, no.3, (1969): 272–92. Ruth Barton, "Huxley, Lubbock, and Half a Dozen Others' Professionals and Gentlemen in the Formation of the X Club, 1851-64", *Isis* 89, no.3 (September 1998): 410-444. The work of Frank Miller Turner also provides valuable background. See Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[49] Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

[50] David Leavitt, *The Man Who Knew Too Much: Alan Turing and the Invention of the Computer* (London: Phoenix, 2006), 36.

indeterminable, because that would be nothing but accepting the marvelous, occult, or supernatural which should be absolutely banished from all experimental science."[51]

Indeed, this ideology of science, the alliance of materialism, naturalism, and positivism, has become so enchanted as a position by the late nineteenth century that Max Weber's 1917 description of modernity as the "disenchantment of the world" could be recognized by his contemporaries as a statement of the program of scientific naturalism. He wrote, "the increasing rationalization and intellectualization … means that principally there are *no mysterious incalculable forces* that come into play, but rather that one can, *in principle*, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted."[52]

A disenchanted science of the mind? Although physiology and its younger sibling psychology did form an important part of cinéma de l'esprit's synthetic model of the mind, the positivist, materialist ideology of scientific naturalism, of which Bernard can be seen as an early representative, would be unacceptable to Gance and company. For them, the common language shared by the physiologist, the philosopher, and the poet would not be *dictated* by the physiologist, and it will certainly not be a disenchanted one. So why did Gance choose to quote Bernard after all?

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[51] Claude Bernard, *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, 178.

[52] Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 139. For a particularly insightful historical discussion of nineteenth-century scientific naturalism as a worldview and how it relates to Max Weber's idea of disenchantment, see Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2014). Especially relevant to the discussion at hand is Chapter 2, "Science as Worldview," 49-88. Asprem writes, "[a]t least as far as its basic ontology and epistemology is concerned, Victorian naturalism corresponds nicely with the epistemic dimension of disenchantment. … The project was built on an ambitious confidence that science would be able to conquer nature completely, leaving nothing unexplained," 86.

Gance's formulation of the sentence does not appear, in its exact form, in any of the writings of Bernard but appears verbatim on the first page of the introduction to the occult writer Edouard Schuré's book *Les Grands Initiés*, first published in Paris in 1889. It was Schuré who added the phrase "speak the same language" to Bernard's formulation.

Although largely forgotten nowadays, Edouard Schuré was a best-selling writer in his days and remained influential until the 1920s. When the first American edition of the *Les Grands Initiés* was published in 1961, Paul M. Allen claimed that since its first French edition, the book had gone through a staggering 220 new editions, sold 750,000 copies, and its French edition continued to sell about 3,000 copies annually. Schuré was not just a significant figure in the nineteenth-century occult revival through his connection with the Theosophists, but also an influential mediator between the occult and the arts in the fin-de-siècle. He counted Richard Wagner and Rudolf Steiner among his most significant friendships, and wrote poems, essays, and plays, and contributed regularly to the *Revue des deux mondes*, the same journal where Bernard published his essays. Together with the self-styled Rosicrucian "Sâr" Joseph Péladan, Schuré exerted considerable influence over the post-Impressionist movements in French art, such as the Symbolists and the Nabis. His treatment of Orpheus as a mystical prophet even influenced the conception of Guillaume Apollinaire's Orphic Cubism.[53] It is not surprising to find Abel Gance among Schuré's

[53] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "Mysticism and Occult in Modern Art" *Art Journal* 46, no.1 (Spring, 1987): 6. In fact, we can trace Schuré's legacy by following the breadcrumbs left be this rather evocative sentence of Bernard, which appears in the Edmond Jaloux' homage to Marcel Proust where Jaloux praised the "scientific" precision of Proustian psychological description as fulfilling Bernard's prophecy. Amédé Ozenfant's 1928 book *Art. I. Bilan des arts modernes* includes Schuré's formulation of Bernard in a list of aphorisms on art "for meditation." Camille Flammarion's study of life after death, *La mort est son mystère III: Apres la mort* also quotes Schuré's paraphrase of Bernard.

devotees, given the cultural cachet Schuré had accumulated during his career. Schuré ties Gance to a turn-of-the-century artistic milieu penetrated by occult influences. Not only does Gance refer to Schuré in his personal notebooks published later as *Prisme*, he was so impressed with Schuré's work that he named his unrealized film series, to be capped by *La Fin du monde* (1931)[54], "Les Grands Initié" after Schuré's book.

However, my interest in Schuré is not merely philological. The mediation of Bernard via Schuré is not just a matter of textual reference, but, as we shall see, can serve as a key to understanding the worldview of Abel Gance, and to a large extent, of *cinéma de l'esprit*. This is because the position Schuré occupies represents a nodal point of various competing epistemologies and the contested, in-flux boundaries between different disciplines in the fin-de-siècle. Using Schuré as an interlocutor, we can unlock the attitude toward reality held by Gance and his coterie, which fundamentally informed their artistic sensibilities and their film theory, for Schuré situates us *in medias res* in the fraught relationship between science and religion, rationality and spirituality, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

First, the occult positioned themselves outside the religious orthodoxy as an alternative to the dogmatic faith represented by the Church.[55] This is done first by postulating the existence of a primordial tradition of wisdom, or a perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*), which is also a deliberately hidden wisdom, a *scientia occulta*, transmitted by ancient sages, prophets, and initiates as links in a chain that includes Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Orpheus, and other

[54] Paul Cuff, *Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema*, 22-23.
[55] Thomas Laqueur wrote, "… the occult in most of its many manifestations is far less authoritarian and hierarchical than were the churches. One could sign on to eternal life without signing on to the dogma and organization." Thomas Laqueur, "Why the Margins Matter: Occultism and the Making of Modernity," *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no.1 (2006): 135.

characters. Éliphas Lévi (aka. Alphonse Louis Constant), who through a series of books published in the mid-nineteenth century exerted stupendous influence on his successors in France, put this idea of the perennial philosophy in very evocative terms at the beginning of his *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie:*

> Behind the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient doctrines, behind the darkness and strange ordeals of all initiations, under the seal of all sacred writings, in the ruins of Nineveh or Thebes, on the crumbling stones of old temples and on the blackened visage of the Assyrian or Egyptian sphinx, in the monstrous or marvelous paintings which interpret to the faithful of India the inspired pages of the Vedas, in the cryptic emblems of our old books on alchemy, in the ceremonies practiced at reception by all secret societies, there are found indications of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed. Occult philosophy seems to have been the nurse or god-mother of all intellectual forces, the key of all divine obscurities and the absolute queen of society in those ages – when it was reserved exclusively for the education of priests and of kings.[56]

According to Lévi, the unveiling of this knowledge is done through a systematic comparison of religions and mythologies. The Theosophists, led by Helena Blavatsky, would appropriate "Eastern" or Hindu mystical traditions and add them into the fold, and theosophical teaching as a tradition transmitted by the world's great spiritual teachers. Schuré's list of "grands initiés" would include Rama and Krishna to the list which ends with Jesus.

Secondly, this is done by taking up cosmological discourse outside of official theology. Although Christianity had within its theology elements of cosmology as its metaphysical justification, it had been largely discarded. Occultists would take up cosmological discourse "from the outside[57]," connecting the particular with the universal, the mind with a living nature, and refer to their teachings as "occult sciences," a way of inquiring the true nature of reality as a totality.

However, in spite of its claim to the status of a *philosophia perennis*, it would be simplistic,

[56] Éliphas Lévi, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1861), 63. The translation taken from English version translated by A.E. Waite.
[57] Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: A Concise History* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 7.

inaccurate, if not prejudicial to characterize fin-de-siècle occultism as a residual holdover from premodern times that is, to borrow Keith Thomas' words, "rightly disdained by intelligent persons,"[58] or as a "symptom of the regression in consciousness" as Theodor Adorno puts it,[59] or as a reactionary counter-culture directed against modernity. The historiography which pitches the occult against modernity has its roots in the Weberian equation of modernity with disenchantment, which transgresses against a pure description of the modern condition and makes the term modern a normative allied with a particular ideological settlement. To be modern is to be disenchanted, a materialist, a positivist; it is to sign up to the metaphysics of scientific naturalism. In this binary (and rather Whiggish) narrative about the modern mind, the occult is represented as the enchanted but irrational other of modernity.

This perhaps has to do with the historically marginalized status of the occult as a form of "rejected knowledge" by academia, its later associations with twentieth-century far-right politics, and its status as a "low," "unenlightened," and "vulgar" vernacular form of culture, what Christopher Partridge calls "occulture."[60] All of these factors contributed to the definition of modernity on the basis of what it ought to be rather than what it actually was as a historical phenomenon. It is therefore not surprising that recent historians have begun to cast doubt on the binary division which runs through the historiography of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when the study of popular culture makes it abundantly clear the pervasiveness and the

[58] Keith Thomas writes, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), that "this book began as an attempt to make sense of some of the systems of belief which were current in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, but which no longer enjoy much recognition today. Astrology, witchcraft, magical healing, divination, ancient prophecies, ghosts and fairies, are now all rightly disdained by intelligent persons."

[59] Theodor W. Adorno, "Thesis Against Occultism," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978), 238.

[60] See Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christopher Partridge, "Occulture and Everyday Enchantment," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. J.R. Lewis and I.B. Tøllefsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 315-332; Christopher Partridge, "Occulture is Ordinary," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. K. Granholm and Egil Asprem (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 113-133.

penetration of the occult in this period, and when more careful and balanced reading of occultism shows that its relationship with other aspects of modernity, such as the empirical sciences and the various modernisms in the arts, are in fact much more intimate and nuanced than previously given credit for.

Alex Owen claims that occultism is "intrinsic to the making of the modern;" it is "integral to ways of perceiving and experiencing" modernity and "constitutive of modern culture."[61] Likewise, Corinna Treitel argues that the German occult, together with other reform movements, represents the efforts to meet "the novel challenges of living in the topsy-turvy modern age," and, as such, is constitutive of the modern sense of self.[62] There is now a growing body of literature on the modern occult which reconfigures the relationship between modernity and enchantment as a both/and antimony rather than an either/or binary, and this new historiography of accords well with the assessment of French esotericism specialist Antoine Faivre, who argues that occultism constitutes "an essential aspect of nascent modernity," and as a form of culture should be construed as modernity confronted with itself, as a matter of answering questions posted by its own advent[63], rather than a counter-movement directed against modernity.

First of all, if we take science as a body of knowledge produced by professional scientists, the fin-de-siècle occult did not position itself as an alternative body of knowledge unrelated to, in contradiction with, or uncorroborated by the results of modern science. Like many of his generation, who, according to C.P. Snow, would be the bastion of "traditional literary culture" and

[61] Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 16.
[62] Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 27.
[63] Antoine Faivre, *op.cit.*, 7

would have as much insight into the achievement of modern science as their Neolithic ancestors, Schuré was, on the contrary, immersed in and competently knowledgeable about contemporary science.[64] He was keenly aware of the contemporary scientific investigations of the apparent anomalies of the mind such as mental suggestion, somnambulism, hypnotism, mediumship, and telepathy, phenomena which the occultist writer Jules Bois aptly named "miracles modernes."[65] Schuré, like the majority of occultists, theosophists and spiritualists, welcomed the research of the physiologists, alienist, and psychologists for it represented the extension of the scientific method into the inner mechanisms of the human mind, proving "the existence of an invisible, spiritual world," and constituting a "*positive* science of the soul." This is construed, by the occult, as a vindication of their doctrines, a modern corroboration of their perennial philosophy, but their repudiation. As Schuré puts it, "the science and spirit of modern times are, without knowing or wishing it, preparing for the reconstruction of ancient theosophy with more precise instruments and on a more solid foundation."[66] Rhetorically, the occult frequently appealed to the authority and social prestige of contemporary scientists to bolster the cultural capital of their teachings.[67] The

[64] C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 15.

[65] Jules Bois, *Le Miracle moderne*, (Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1907). See also Jules Bois, "Le Miracle moderne," in *Revue bleue: revue politique et littéraire* 17, no.1, series 4, (January 1902): 21-27. He wrote, on page 21, "Pour désigner dans leur ensemble les prodiges du spiritisme et des sciences psychiques, tables éloquentes, extériorisation de la motricité ou de sensibilité, voyance, psychométrie, hallucinations télépathiques, rêves réalisés, écriture automatique, suggestion mentale, dédoublement de la personnalité, divination, etc., j'emploie le terme général de "miracle moderne", parce que ces phénomènes renferment en effet même élément merveilleux que le miracle d'autrefois, mais revêtent un aspect nouveau essentiellement contemporain en ce qu'ils sont examinés de plus près et que nous nous efforçons de les expliquer ou du moins de les classer parmi les autres faits psychologiques déjà connus."

[66] Schuré, *The Great Initiates*, 36.

[67] Olav Hammer argues that the occult often employs an epistemological strategy of rhetorical imitation and presents itself as a form of "scientism," as "the active positioning of one's own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features — without, however, the use of methods generally approved within the scientific community, and without subsequent social acceptance of these manifestations by the mainstream of the scientific community through e.g. peer reviewed publication in academic journals." However, Hammer's model conceives of the relation between science and the occult as a one-way street, where the occult, parasitic upon science, appropriates "real" science without actually being scientific. This, as we will see, is not a good way conceptualizing the complex, sometimes mutual, discursive transfer between the two terms. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge, Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 206. Mark Morrison's *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University

founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky, could cite scientific authorities such as Faraday, Edison, Graham Bell, and William Crookes to support her interpretation of Eliphas Lévi's idea of "astral light" as synonymous with the ether that mediates various occult forces.[68] The second generation of Theosophists led by Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater would take the alignment of occult knowledge with modern science even further and run in their journal *The Theosophical Review*, articles carrying titles such as "Theosophy, the Religion of Science," and "Confirmations of Theosophy by Science."[69]

Second, if we take science to mean its methodology - experimentalism and rationality - then the fin-de-siècle occult did not represent itself as the rejection of rationality, but its transcendence, through the claim to "higher knowledge." Éliphas Levi emphasized that "la religion est raisonnable."[70]Allan Kardec, the founder of French Spiritism (the related but distinct French counterpart to Anglo-American Spiritualism), did not deny that occult phenomena could *in principle* be understood rationally. Each issue of his Spiritist journal, *Revue spirite*, carried on its front page these words of Kardec: "tout effet a une cause. Tout effet intelligent a une cause intelligent. La puissance de la cause intelligent est en raison de la grandeur de l'effet."

What the occult did advocate is the superiority of their epistemology as an enlargement of rationality. Schuré argues that "science would not have to change its methods, but rather to extend its sphere of action."[71] In his *Traité méthodique de Science Occulte,* Gérard Encausse, known as Papus in occult circles, explicitly characterized the difference between the method of modern science and that of the "occult science" in terms of the difference between analytical versus

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Press, 2007) is a good counterpoint. See Also Egil Asprem, "Dis/unity of Knowledge: Models for the Study of Modern Esotericism and Science," *Numen* 62, no. 5/6 (2015): 538-567.

[68] Egil Asprem, "Theosophical Attitudes towards Science: Past and Present," in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 409.

[69] Morrison, *Modern Alchemy*, 72.

[70] Lévi, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, 142.

[71] Schure, *The Great Initiates*, xxxiv.

synthetic ways of thinking. For Papus, the reliance on experimentalism and analysis has created ever more refined and specialized branches of knowledge, but it has also inadvertently led to the fragmentation, isolation, and alienation of human knowledge, a situation which he represents evocatively with the metaphor of an immense city:

> The domain which the study of the universe, according to the rigorous procedures of our epoch, appears to an impartial observer like an immense city where sumptuous temples are erected, image of each of our great sciences. Inside these temples, an infinity of little chapels are filled with fervent devotees who, by influence or merit, fight to enter into the sanctuary. The chapels are the image of these thousands of specialties where students and professors are always to be found. But these is no overall plan. The chapels are erected randomly in each temple, the temples built without any order in the city, so much so that a foreigner can no longer find his footing in this inextricable mess.[72]

Papus evokes Claude Bernard and argues that this confused state of knowledge results from the limitation of the experimental method, for it only verifies a preconceived idea by testing a hypothesis.[73] But inspiration does not flow from the realm of deductive, analytical reasoning; it is to be supplied by synthetic thinking, the application of "la méthode analogique," which, echoing Schuré, "does not aspire to replace the experimental method, but on the contrary, offers this method a new field of action."[74] The application of analogical reasoning, according to Papus, brings together the freedom of imagination of the poet and the rigor of reason demanded of the mathematician. The occultist idea of "la méthode analogique," we shall see later, is a precursor to Jean Epstein's speculations on his *lyrosophie* as the synthesis of intelligence and feeling; we might even claim Epstein's *Lyrosophie* as an occult text.

The fin-de-siècle occult represents its epistemology, discursively, not as the negation of reason but its sublation. Moreover, by attempting to incorporate scientific rationality within its

[72] Papus, *Traité méthodique de Science Occulte* (Paris: Georges Carré, 1891), xiv.
[73] Bernard famously said that those who do not know what they are looking for, will not understand what they find.
[74] Papus, *Traité méthodique de Science Occulte,* xx.

system, it can also be read as a distinctively modern response to the epistemological paradigm of the scientific revolution with recourse to resemblance, which, according to Foucault, was the *episteme* of Western culture up to the end of the sixteenth century. Éliphas Lévi conceived the analogical method as the method quintessential method of magic or "occult science." As he put it, "analogy is the key to all secrets of Nature."[75] He would conceptualize the occult as, on the one hand, the recovery of lost ancient wisdom intentionally hidden throughout history, on the other, the mediation between science and religion, stating that magic "reconciles perfectly and incontestably those two terms, so opposed on the first view - faith and reason, science and belief."[76]

This brings us to my third point. Although the occult did not reject either the knowledge or the method of science *tout court*, it did reject the disenchanted worldview that the ideology of scientific naturalism implies. In Schuré, we can identify an epistemic position often sidelined in the conventional narratives of modernity as the triumph of science over religion. Schuré was wary of the schism between science and religion (although both conceived in their ideal form), a schism which the American evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould would characterize as "non-overlapping magisteria:" one concerning facts, the other pertaining value, two domains firmly segregated. For Schuré, such as a separation, "the greatest evil of [his] time," would be a sign not of progress, but of the impoverishment of the modern personality. Helena Blavatsky, in the first volume of her Isis Unveiled (1877), lambasted the "prejudice and bigotry of men of science" such as Tyndall, Huxley, and August Comte, who are "blind leaders of the blind." According to Blavatsky, science, when conducted with materialism as its alpha and omega, is not so much

[75] Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 104.
[76] Éliphas Lévi, *The Doctrine and Ritual of High Magic*, trans. Mark Anthony Mikituk (New York: Tarcher Perigee, 2017), 155.

incorrect as it is incomplete, short-sighted, and misguided. Both sides agree on the existence of an unseen world, an invisible reality, a hidden aspect, an occult facet, but they disagreed on its demarcation, and they disagreed on its significance and interpretation. While the position of scientific naturalist would assimilate the occult into the materialist worldview, where mechanical determinism would provide the answer in the last analysis, the occult tended to see the invisible world as not entirely captured by the image of "matter moving in space" and positioned their teachings as closing the gap between "matter and meaning."[77]

The occult positioned their teachings as the transcendence of the dichotomy between science and religion and the synthesis of different branches of human knowledge. Schuré sees occultism as uniting science and religion "in one living force, together, and of one accord." Antoine Faivre, who identified the four fundamental characteristics of the occult as 1) the idea of universal correspondences, 2) the idea of living nature, 3) the role of mediations and of the imagination, and 4) the experience of transmutation, would conceptualize the occult as a "form of thought" that is the radical alternative to the disenchanted worldview that is supposedly a consequence of modern science.[78]

Furthermore, between fin-de-siècle science and its "occult other", there was a complex negotiation over the boundaries between them. Although both formations, the occult and the psychological-science-in-the-making, imaged their enterprises as ways of discovering the secrets of nature, of "unveiling Isis," there was no pre-determined consensus about precisely where science starts and the occult stops. Jules Bois, a French writer who documented the mushrooming

[77] Phrase taken from Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 92. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 62-76, 113-81.
[78] Faivre, *op.cit*., 12, and Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 5.

of new spiritual orientations at the fin-de-siècle, of what he called the "petites religions" of Paris,[79] defined occultism not as the study of the supernatural, but as the investigation of hidden phenomena not yet account for by present scientific theories. For Bois, those apparent anomalies of the mind, such as mental suggestion, somnambulism, hypnotism, mediumship, and telepathy, were considered "miracles modernes" only in so far as their precise mechanisms remain unexplained. The French neurologist Joseph Grasset defined occultism in the same way: "occultism is not a survey of all things hidden from science; it is a survey of facts not yet belonging to science (I mean to positive science, after August Comte's manner) but which may belong to it." Recalling the French physiologist Charles Richet's term for psychic phenomena, "metapsychical," Grasset offered his definition of the occult as "juxta- or pre-scientific." As he put it, "un miracle susceptible d'être, un jour ou l'autre, scientifiquement expliqué ne serait plus un miracle."[80] A contributor to an 1892 issue of Kardec's journal argued that the Spiritists, the Occultists, the Theosophists, were essentially working toward the same goal, to "désocculter l'occulte."[81]

Through Schuré, we can identify the discreet charm of the occult for the *cinema de l'esprit*: not as a "flight from reason" or a "revolt against positivism," but as an enchanted worldview not in opposition to but incorporating and transcending the modern scientific rationality. The terms of "common atmosphere" which Bernard evoked are not to be dictated by scientists. With regard to the domain of the human mind, the nascent physiological and psychological sciences did not banish "the marvelous, the occult, the supernatural" as Bernard had hoped, but in fact had, as

[79] Jules Bois, *Les Petites Religions de Paris* (Paris: Léon Chailley, 1894).
[80] Joseph Grasset, *L'Occultisme hier et aujourd'hui: Le merveilleux préscientifique* (Montpellier: Coulet et fils, 1908), 38.
[81] J. Marcus de Vèze, "Spirites, Occultistes et Journalistes" in *Revue spirite. Journal mensuel d'études psychologiques*, no.6, (June 1892): 244.

Schuré suggested, "thrown open the doors of the invisible," and put science "on the threshold of another world." In effect, the experimental sciences of the mind had not led to the disenchantment of the world or the mechanization of the spirit but had only established, between the occult and the sciences, what American parapsychologist Walter Franklin Prince called "an enchanted boundary."[82]

4. THE ENCHANTED BORDERLAND

> "The familiar classification of the world into subjects and objects, inner and outer world, body and soul, somehow no longer quite applies and indeed lead to difficulties."
> - Werner Heisenberg on the consequences of modern physics[83]

It was in this enchanted boundary that the Institut général psychologique (IGP), the research establishment that invited Gance, conducted most of its research. The institute was set up in its preparatory form as the Institut psychique international, designed to be a French counterpart of the British Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and to fill the vacuum left in France after the dissolution of the Société de Psychologie Physiologique after Charcot's death in 1893.[84] The initial discussion of the institute include prominent names of French psychology and physiology, including Pierre Janet, Théodule Ribot, Alfred Binet, Étienne-Jules Marey, and Henri Bergson, and the mission was conceived to be the scientific study of "supra-normal" phenomena, which Ribot characterized as "the most cutting edge and adventurous part of psychology and not the least

[82] Walter Franklin Prince, *The Enchanted Boundary: Being a Survey of Negative Reactions to Claims of Psychic Phenomena 1820-1920* (Boston, MA: Boston Society for Psychic Research, 1930).
[83] Werner Heisenberg, "The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics," *Daedalus* 87, no. 3, Symbolism in Religion and Literature (Summer 1958): 104-105.
[84] Brower, *Unruly Spirits*, 47.

seductive."[85]

Although at the beginning of its reconstitution as the Institut général psychologique in 1902, the institute had sections devoted to general psychology, including zoological psychology, collective psychology, and moral and criminal psychology. The section devoted to the original intent of the institute, the Group d'Étude des Phénomènes Psychiques (GEPP), soon proved to be the most active and most effective in attracting research funding due to the general popular appeal of its subject matter[86], which was the scientific investigation of telepathy, telekinesis, lucidity, split consciousness, suggestion, and mediumship.

Its most famous project was a three-year study of the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. From 1905 to 1907, the IGP conducted observations of forty-three séances with Palladino, using all sorts of recording apparatuses, measuring her with subtle physiological instruments, photographing her from the front, the side, and in three-quarter shots, recording her pulse and breathing, analyzing her urine daily.[87] However, in spite of the elaborate setup and the rigorous observation, and the fact that Eusapia was caught cheating on multiple occasions, the conclusion of the IGP, outlined in Jules Courtier's report published in the IGP's bulletin, was disappointingly inconclusive. The scientists could not establish scientific certainty about the real mechanisms of Palladino's performances due to the lack of any "controls of a purely physical nature" in which the observer's subjectivity can be out of the question.[88]

The situation was further complicated as the persistence of psychic anomalies was coupled with the possibility (and hope) that some genuine physical force of nature might be discovered in

[85] Ibid, 48.
[86] Ibid, 64.
[87] Sofie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853–1931* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 84.
[88] Brower, *op.cit.*, 74.

the application of the experimental method used in the laboratories, which might account for and substantiate various phenomena of mediumship and telepathy. The "discovery" of the short-lived and discredited N-rays by Réné Blondot is a case in point. In 1903, Blondot announced the discovery of a new type of radiation as a result of his further study of Röntgen's X-ray, which he named after the University of Nancy where he worked. The Sorbonne physicist and physiologist Arsène d'Arsonval claimed that the dimly visible and barely detectable N-rays could also be emitted by the human nervous system. Two members of the Institut général psychologique, Jules Courtier and Serge Youriévitch (who invited Gance in 1926), were sent to witness N-ray phenomena in Nancy, and reported on their observations of N-ray experiments. Members of the IGP, including Théodule Ribot, even conjectured that the emission of N-rays might explain parapsychological phenomena such as the visual hyperacuity of hysterics. D'Arsonval hypothesized that "there exists around individuals a kind of atmosphere of an altogether special nature, a radiation for which one can determine physical constants absolutely, as for all other manifestations of energy."[89] Suddenly it seemed the auras claimed by occultists to exist around human bodies were explainable as a real, natural phenomenon confirmed by science.

N-rays were soon disputed and discredited, and the episode was remembered by the scientific establishment as a case of folly, a cautionary tale where the subjective bias of the scientists impinged on objective observation and experimentation. The American chemist-physicist Irving Langmuir even used N-rays as a textbook case of "pathological science."

[89] See Mary Jo Nye, "N-Rays: An Episode in the History and Psychology of Science," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 11, no. 1 (1980): 134.

If we were to take, retroactively, the perspective of a later, institutionally established "ready-made science" of psychology, then the inconclusive investigation of Eusapia Palladino by the IGP and the now-debunked N-ray discovery would be aberrant failures only to be remembered with embarrassment.[90] However, if we see these issues contextually and take early psychology as a "science-in-the-making," then they can inform us about crucial aspects of the nascent science of the mind that are relevant for our discussion.

First, these examples demonstrate the importance of Thomas Gieryn's concept of "boundary-work" in science, a social process whereby scientists, during and after professionalization, attempt to draw and reinforce sharp distinctions between "real" scientific activity on the one hand and what is deemed "pseudoscience" on the other.[91] This process creates in-groups and out-groups and works to maintain a boundary which is negotiated and contested from both sides. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no clearly established, uncontested, ultimate legitimate authority on all matters related to the human mind. Both psychical researchers, many of whom came from disciplines other than psychology, and psychologists, who were still struggling to separate their own discipline from physiology which in the nineteenth century laid the foundation for psychology as an empirical and experimental discipline, purported to be studying the human psyche, and competed for the definition of what can be a legitimate research program for the science of the mind (not to mention the contestation from the occult). So much so that Joseph Jastrow, reminiscing about the contested boundary between the "new psychology" and the psychical research in the fin-de-siècle, would remark that "in many circles a

[90] Helge Kragh argues that the N-ray episode is a classic case of "pathological science." See Helge Kragh, "Social Constructivism, the Gospel of Science, and the Teaching of Physics," in *Constructivism in Science Education*, ed. M.R. Matthews (Boston, Dordrecht, New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 134.
[91] Thomas F. Gieryn, "Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (December, 1983): 781-795.

psychologist meant a 'spook hunter.'"[92]

Among psychologists, Charles Richet's work represented the persistence of the program of psychical research within the realm of mainstream psychology in France, and in the United States, the sidelining of the late William James, the founder of American psychology, because of his allegiance to psychical research, represents the result of this boundary-work.[93] As Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail point out in their cultural history of the neurological sciences at the turn of the century, the new sciences of the mind were "particularly troubled by the tense relationship between its scientific status and the uncontrollable cultural life of its major terms and conceptions," these disciplines were "particularly susceptible to absorbing the impressions, sensations and contaminations of the broader cultural discourses in which it was immersed."[94] The eventual rejection of psychical research by psychologist as its para-scientific "other" is the product of this demarcation process, not its origin. The establishment of psychology as a paradigmatic discipline with clear institutional boundaries, a discipline whose shape we would recognize today, was the product of these negotiations at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Second, these "failures" demonstrate the methodological, theoretical, and epistemological problems associated with a discipline that was still in its pre-paradigmatic phase and expose the underlying ontological uncertainties that characterized the fin-de-siècle scientific worldview in

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[92] Andreas Sommer, "Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology: Hugo Münsterberg, William James and Eusapia Palladino," *History of the Human Sciences* 25 no. 2 (2012): 25.
[93] Ibid, 39.
[94] Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail, ed., *Neurology and Modernity: A Cultural History of the Nervous System* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 8-9. This is also consistent with the ideas of Canguilhem, who argued that "Experimentalists need not pretend to be pure empiricists, working without ideas of any kind, in order to make progress. Bernard observed that the experimentalist who doesn't know what he is looking for won't understand what he finds. The acquisition of scientific knowledge requires a certain kind of lucidity. Scientific discovery is more than individual good fortune or accidental good luck; hence, the history of science should be a history of the formation, deformation and rectification of scientific concepts. … it is easy to confuse experimentation with empiricism." Canguilhem, *The Vital Rationalist*, 110-111.

general. The formation of the science of the mind is embedded in the larger context of the sea-change in the 19th-century conception of the physical world, and by extension, the place of life and mind in it.

The historian of science Helge Kragh characterized fin-de-siècle physics as a revolutionary period in which the foundations of the physical world picture inherited from Newtonian mechanics were criticized and reconsidered.[95] Matter became, in this period, no longer the most fundamental aspect of reality, and mechanics no longer sufficed as the ultimate laws governing nature. The worldview based on materialism and mechanics was increasingly being replaced by new formulations based on energy, the ether, and electromagnetism. An invisible world, first as an abstraction necessitated by theoretical speculations, had become an empirically proven reality by the end of the nineteenth century thanks to rapid invention and improvement of instruments of detection and recording. The discovery of J. J. Thompson's electron through his study of cathode rays, of radioactivity first by Henri Becquerel and then Marie and Pierre Curie, of the X-ray by Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen all gave both scientists and the general public the proof for the existence of an invisible reality beyond immediate sense perception.

Psychical research was conducted within this context. Many psychical researchers had their scientific training in physics or chemistry. The list of members of the Society for Psychical Research, as Andreas Sommer points out, reads like "the Who is Who of Victorian and Edwardian secince, including iconic figures like Alfred Russel Wallace, William Crookes, J.J. Thompson, and Oliver Lodge in Britain, Heinrich Hertz in Germany, and Camille Flammarion and Marie Curie in France."[96] Richard Noakes suggests that psychical research, because of the contribution of

[95] Helge Kragh, "The 'new physics,'" in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler (London: Routledge, 2014), 441-455.
[96] Andreas Sommer, "Psychical Research in the History and Philosophy of Science. An Introduction and Review," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 48, (2014): 39.

physicists and its reliance on the challenge to materialist physics, needs to be seen not just in the context of the development of abnormal psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis, but should also be considered as "an episode in late-classical physics."[97]

Many psychical researchers considered their work explicitly as a challenge to the old materialism and mechanism. Frederic Myer, who coined the term telepathy, saw the task of psychical research as breaking down "that artificial wall of demarcation" between the natural and the supernatural. For Myers, psychical phenomena are not outside of the laws of nature, which makes it inherently unknowable and unexplainable, beyond the realm of empirical science:

> The word supernatural is open to grave objections; it assumes that there is something outside nature, and it has become associated with arbitrary interference with law. Now there is no reason to suppose that the psychical phenomena with which we deal are less a part of nature, or less subject to fixed and definite law, than any other phenomena.[98]

Myers prefers to refer to psychical phenomena as "supernormal" instead, arguing that these phenomena are not aberration of natural laws but anomalies which our theoretical account of nature as it currently stands cannot yet incorporate. Other psychical researchers used the term "residual phenomena" and saw the investigation of these strange mental phenomena as anomalies that challenge the paradigm of materialism, predating Thomas Kuhn's conception of the process of paradigm shift. James Hyslop of Columbia University, wrote,

> The residual phenomena which to-day excite so much interest are associated with a theory of things which physical science supposed it had successfully dislodged. It has become accustomed to residual facts within its own domain, but it is loth to admit the existence of facts that limit that domain or demand the acceptance of a larger than the ordinary material world.[99]

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[97] Richard Noakes, "The 'World of the Infinitely Little': Connecting Physical and Psychical Realities circa 1900," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008): 326.
[98] Frederic W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, volume 1 (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), xxii.
[99] James H. Hyslop, *Enigmas of Psychical Research* (Boston: Herbert B. Turner & Co., 1906), 3-4.

William Crookes considers these residual phenomena as potential clues for new discoveries:

> if we carefully scrutinise the process either of the laboratory or of nature, we may occasionally detect some slight anomaly, some excess or deficiency of action, some unarticulated phenomenon, which we cannot account for, and which, were received theories correct and sufficient, ought not to occur. Such residual phenomena are hints which may lead to man of disciplined mind and finished manipulative skill to the discovery of new elements, of new laws, possible even new forces.[100]

It was far from inconceivable, at the turn of the century, to conjecture the existence of an invisible force that would then be utilized to explain mental phenomena, normal or supernormal. After the discovery of the X-ray, French philosopher Alfred Fouillé would consider the N-ray as only of an infinite series of forces to be discovered by scientists, which, in naming them, would use up "every letter of the human alphabet."[101]

Psychical researchers often pleaded for the reader's open-mindedness regarding their subject, pointing out both the crisis of materialism and the limitations of immediate sense perception, both vindicated by new developments in the physical sciences. Camille Flammarion, whose work would influence the Symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck's late prose work and Abel Gance, introduces his discussion of "mysterious psychic forces" by reminding his readers of the ephemerality of matter:

> I believe it will be useful to call attention at once to the fact that matter is not, in reality, what it appears to be to our vulgar senses, to our sense of touch, to our vision, but that it is

[100] Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, 36.

[101] Brower, *op.cit.*, 61. This is, interestingly, not the last time when a period of scientific progress was dominated by the discovery of new invisible matter. Theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, recalling the mid-20th century research in particle physics, pointed out that physics once had some 60 subatomic particles, which have now "disappeared" as a result of newer theory. He writes, "we have so many particles that Oppenheimer once said you could give a Nobel Prize to the physicist that did not discover a particle that year. We were drowning in sub-atomic particles. Now we realize that this whole zoo of sub-atomic particles, thousands of them coming out of our accelerators, can be explained by little vibrating strings." One can only wonder what String Theory, the touted grand unifying theory of everything, from the perspective of the fin-de-siècle, where vibration became the central metaphor for a universal suffused by the ether. We have gotten rid of the ether, but the metaphor of vibration persists, even in the most advanced regions of theoretical physics.

> identical with energy, and is only a manifestation of the movement of invisible and imponderable elements. The universe is a dynamism. Matter is only an appearance. It will be useful for the reader to bear this truth in mind, as it will help him to comprehend the studies we are about to make. The mysterious forces we are here studying are themselves manifestations of the universal dynamism with which our five senses put us very imperfectly into relation. These things belong to the psychical order as well as to the physical. They prove that we are living in the midst of an unexplored world, in which the psychic forces play a role as yet very imperfectly studied.[102]

Sir Oliver Lodge, whose work was instrumental for the development of radio communication, reminds his reader that sense perception is a poor guide to reality:

> A physicist is never limited to direct sensory impressions, he has to deal with a multitude of conceptions and things for which he has no physical organ: the dynamical theory of heat, for instance, and of gases, the theories of electricity, of magnetism, of chemical affinity, of cohesion, aye and his apprehension of the Ether itself, lead him into regions where sight and hearing and touch are impotent as direct witnesses, where they are no longer efficient guides. In such regions everything has to be interpreted in terms of the insensible, the apparently unsubstantial, and in a definite sense the imaginary.[103]

Lodge's characterization of physics highlights one of the most salient features of the cutting edge of fin-de-siècle science. That is, amongst the growing dissatisfaction with the old framework of Newtonian mechanics, the frontier of scientific theory was, to use Whitehead's phrase, "outrunning common sense."[104] This is not simply in the sense that scientific theory was now beyond the comprehension of intuitive and practical everyday knowledge, but more importantly, scientific theory has moved outside the limits of the immediate human sensorium. There is a reality occluded from all the human sensory modalities, regions "where sight and hearing and touch are impotent as direct witnesses." This new reality was only made concrete, stepped outside the zone of theoretical speculation and of the "imaginary" thanks to the invention and improvement of detection and recording instruments that rendered parts of this hidden reality as analogues of the

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[102] Camille Flammarion, *Mysterious Psychic Forces: An Account of the Author's Investigations in Psychical Research, Together with Those of Other European Savants* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1909), 23.
[103] Oliver Lodge, *Raymond, Or Life and Death: With Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection After Death* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), 375.
[104] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 143.

human senses.

From the point of view of fin-de-siècle science, the world is no longer filled with sensible and ponderable substances as the fundamental building blocks of the universe but is populated by ever more numerous "occult forces" and "spooky actions at a distance."[105] Matter becomes ephemeral and substance is being replaced by energy and vibration. In this period of upheaval, physics was on the precipice of a revolutionary paradigm shift, where "all that is solid melts into air."

This was the world picture furnished by fin-de-siècle physics, which I would like to call, using a phrase by Egil Asprem, an "open-ended naturalism."[106] Not the naturalism of Huxley, Tyndal, and Bernard, and not the old substance-based materialism bound by mechanics. This "open-ended naturalism" was an expansion upon the old notion of the natural, and it could only be considered a materialism when the old idea of matter is stretched to its conceptual limits, if not beyond recognition. The dissatisfaction with the old framework even resulted in what the historian of science Stephen George Brush calls a "neoromantic" trend which attempts to establish the physical sciences on a new foundation that did not share the elements of the old materialism with which the old paradigm was associated.[107]

Around the turn of the century, the old scientific world picture was in crisis. It was cracking due to internal pressure and spurred on by new discoveries. This crisis stimulated a period of bold scientific speculations. Scientific theory was approaching, discursively, the condition of metaphysics, extrapolating into conjectures it could not yet prove. Science created around itself an

[105] A phrase attributed to Einstein.
[106] Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 9
[107] Brush, quoted in Kragh, "The 'New Physics,'" 453.

enchanted aura. And it was the dispersion and translation of new scientific concepts and theories, through popular scientific writing, through its contact with the occult, the supernormal, through aesthetic discourses which sought to base themselves on a science of the mind, that created the atmosphere where what Linda Dalrymple Henderson has called "vibratory modernism" and what Robert Michael Brain has called "physiological aesthetics" could thrive. In a recent article, Henderson has called the physical world picture, based on late-classical ether physics, the "meta-reality" of modernism.[108]

Under the umbrella of this meta-reality, psychical research was conducted by physicists, chemist, as well as physiologists and psychologists because the investigation of mental phenomena, as a natural process, promised insight into the most fundamental questions about existence, questions which the new physics of the fin-de-siècle finds itself poised to answer in a new paradigm which can potentially annul the old Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* versus *res extensa*.

Under an expanded conception of naturalism, abnormal or supernormal mental processes can be seen as part of nature but whose origins are hidden yet on the precipice of being uncovered. Thought itself could be "materialized" according to an expanded notion of matter, potentially having the same ontological status as other vibratory phenomena, which are found everywhere in nature under various guises.

Clarifying this fin-de-siècle world picture gives us access to reading the theory of the mind operating in *cinéma de l'esprit* in its larger context. Abel Gance called the art of cinema "télépathie du silence," and Jean Epstein called it "telepathy of the eye." Germaine Dulac argued that the art

[108] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "The Forgotten Meta-Realities of Modernism: Die Übersinnliche Welt and the International Culture of Science and Occultism," *Glass Bead*, 2016, https://www.glass-bead.org/article/the-forgotten-meta-realities-of-modernism

of film consists in capturing "visual vibrations," and that the success of a film is testified by its ability to make the sensibility of its public "vibrate" in sympathy. According to Canudo, "the cinematographic visions pass before its eyes with all the electrical vibrations of light, and in all the external manifestations of its inner life." Vuillermoz said of Gance, that he "discovers in the vocabulary of luminous vibrations turns of phrase and expressions which are strikingly new and original."

None of these would "make sense" if not considered in the context where, as Dulac puts it, cinema should be used as a revelatory medium to "express the inexpressible" and render the intangible, hidden depth of reality perceptible. The theorists of *cinéma de l'esprit*, in considering the experience of cinema in vibratory terms, as a telepathic process, shows the they are interlocutors with the emerging sciences of the mind, and participated in the same vibratory modernism.

Telepathy for them is not just some far-fetched metaphor, but a realistic model of cinematic experience, based on the model of the mind in which the mind and the world interpenetrate, the mind is continuous with the material world, the mind is wired into the same vibrating ether that penetrates the universe.

5. L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU

Now we can return, after following the long arc of the preceding discussions, to that historical event which concentrated in it all the various aspects of its context, and ask what can the conjunction of Gance, Bernard, Schuré, and the Institut général psychologique tell us about how *cinema de l'esprit* imagined its "ideal spectator." What are the sources of that imagination? What

are their implications? And how do they interact with each other and contribute to a model of the mind?

This conjunction demonstrates that there are three principal sources for this model of the mind. The first is the experimental psychology of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, which developed out of the physiological discoveries of the nineteenth century. The second is the concurrent psychical research which connected its understanding of the mind with not only abnormal and clinical psychology but also with the new vibratory materialism of the late-classical ether physics. The third is the occult, which represented an attempt to harmonize perennial spiritual knowledge with a modern "positive science of the soul."

It is inappropriate to speak of a materialist/idealist conflict in the theory of *cinéma de l'esprit*, for it was formed in an intellectual context where the terms of that old distinction were being deconstructed and reconfigured, where the very distinction itself was breaking down and losing meaning. For *cinema de l'esprit*, the "ideal spectator" is a vibratory as well as spiritual organism, an embodied mind continuous with the material world that surrounds it and penetrates it.

Whether it is for the occult, the sciences of the mind in the making, or the physical sciences, there is a common enchanted borderland, a common atmosphere, in which these diverse disciplines conceived their efforts as ways to achieve the same goal of "unveiling Isis." As Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia remarked, "in every field, a principal direction of the 20th century was the attempt to capture the 'nonperceptible.'"[109]

Most crucially, however, is that in addition to the overlapping terrains of these disciplines,

[109] Henderson, "Modernism and Scinece," p. 384.

there is a desire to create a synthesis that underpins the theoretical writings of the movement. Not only did the theorists of *cinema de l'esprit* saw cinema as a synthetic art form, but they also thought of theory building as a modern synthesis itself: not an activity which describes, partitions, and analyzes the world, but an activity which brings diverse intellectual resources together in response to a set of modern problems, driven by an ideological orientation which resisted not modernity itself, but the disenchanted interpretation of it.

It is important to recognize that before disenchantment became associated with modernity as *the* characterization of its mentality, there was a synthesizing spirit at large at the beginning of the twentieth century, one which straddled diverse disciplines and resisted the idea of intellectual life divided between hard-headed comprehension of facts on one side and the questions of meaning and value on the other. We must not forget, as Linda Henderson puts it, that "In the face of such evidence, no longer can we accept a streamlined, secularized history of modernism that presents modern art as a product of those attitudes towards reality which characterize the historian's own milieu rather than that of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.[110] …"

In closing, let me refer to Frédéric Paulhan, a philosopher who kept abreast with the development of experimental psychology and became an early contributor to Théodule Ribot's journal *Revue philosophique.* In his 1891 book, *Le nouveau mysticisme*, Paulhan described a new intellectual orientation in formation, which on the one hand, contains a mysticism which far from rejecting the support of science, willingly researches it, in order to approach the limit of our knowledge and penetrate into the domain of occult sciences as well as the positive science.[111] On the other hand, there is the conviction that "any outpouring of the sentimental which is not

[110] Henderson, "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art," 6.
[111] Frédéric Paulhan, *Le nouveau mysticisme* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1891).

accompanied by precise knowledge runs a great risk of remaining ineffective; science, scientific spirit, precision in facts, thoroughness in analysis, rigor in synthesis are for us the only means to achieve serious results, either in theory or in practice." The fusion of these two halves, the new mystical religious spirit and the scientific spirit, produced a "new general way of looking at man and the world, a new logical assemblage of ideas, beliefs, and feelings" which is markedly different from the mentality of previous generations. Paulhan called this new mentality an "esprit nouveau" before the term associated with Apollinaire and the eponymous journal by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant. In many ways, what Paulhan described at the end of the nineteenth century also characterize the mentality of *cinéma de l'esprit*, a movement that attempted to harmonize in its theoretical ventures both the sense of *esprit* as spirit and *esprit* as mind: this is the "esprit nouveau" of the movement.

If we project ourselves into the future of the this "esprit nouveau," we find that eventually, the various disciplines which this "common atmosphere" once attempted to hold together would go their own ways and define their separate paradigms in their attempts at self-purification. Early experimental psychology would settle into Gestalt Psychology and Behaviorism, and would separate itself from its philosophical ancestry and its physiological upbringing. As for psychical research, although the original Society for Psychical Research continued to operate until this day, it has become an outsider science, or a pseudoscience in the eyes of mainstream academia, and would struggle to maintain the kind of interest it once received from philosophers, psychologist, physiologists, and physicists. The occult, on the other hand, would, argued Christopher Partridge, become completely "ordinary" and be absorbed by the mundaneness of popular culture and lose its once underground, oppositional, counter-cultural status. Both psychical research and the occult would become, however, in the eyes of legitimate academia, "rejected knowledge."

So, Abel Gance's dream that the philosopher, the physiologist, and the scientist would one day speak the same language and understand each other remain unrealized. The common atmosphere of the early twentieth century did not materialize into a coherent Grand Theory of the Human Subject. However, perhaps its incoherence is precisely the point of it – the ability to hold antinomies together, even if just for a moment, was not only one of the clearest signs of the collapse of a paradigm as Thomas Kuhn understood it, a sign of the crisis of an ideology, but also the creation of a unique opportunity to break new pathways. The Enlightenment subject – the one built upon Descartes' dualism finally falls under both the long-standing critique of Romanticism and its own weight – mind and body are shown to be not two different kinds of substances but intimately related, both part of nature at large. The old materialist view of the world also ran into self-contradictions – Newton's worldview of tangible objects following mechanical movement in uniform space and absolute time was shown to be nothing but an illusion. In such a pre-paradigmatic phase of research, old axioms are overthrown as untruths, old assumptions are discarded as "epistemological obstacles," and old models are destroyed as false constructs. What was previously strictly forbidden to even contemplate is now a genuine possibility again, the phantasms of the past become the realities of the new present, and the crisis is also an opportunity. If cracks did show in the synthesis of the early twentieth-century, it was because it once contained such tremendous energy.

Chapter Four

The Suspension of the Intellect

1.1 THE INCOMMUNICABILITY OF ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE

"In certain supernatural states of the soul, the profundity of life reveals itself in the sight before one's eyes, however ordinary it might be. The second becomes the symbol of the first."
- Baudelaire[1]

"The world's meaning has been lost, we are left with only the letters."
- Novalis[2]

Hugo von Hofmannsthal's short story, "A Letter," which takes the form of an imagined letter from Philip, the Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon, describes in evocative language what it might be like to have a moment of spiritual ecstasy.[3] In the letter, Chandos apologizes to Bacon for his inability to meet his friend's expectations for new literary compositions. Chandos attributes the cessation of his creativity to the frequent and intense spiritual ecstasies which have completely overwhelmed him of late and left him incapable of writing. He is tormented not only by the

[1] Charles Baudelaire, "Fusées," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard), 659.
[2] Novalis, cited in Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 20.
[3] Hugo von Hoffmansthal, "A Letter," in *The Lord Chandos Letter*, trans. Joel Rotenberg (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005).

mysteriousness of these experiences but also by his complete inability to account for them.[4]

Chandos feels that any mundane object can suddenly become for him the "vessel" for a "vast empathy," any ordinary phenomenon can suddenly induce the feeling of the "presence of the infinite" and make him feel seized by a "mysterious, wordless, infinite rapture."[5] He says, to illustrate these strange occurrences,

> A watering can, a harrow left in a field, a dog in the sun, a shabby churchyard, a cripple, a small farmhouse - any of these can become the vessel of my ***revelation***. Any of these things and the thousand similar ones past which the eye ordinary glides with natural indifference can at any moment - which I am completely unable to elicit - *suddenly take on for me a sublime and moving aura* which words seem too week to describe. Even an absent object, clearly imagined, can inexplicably be chosen to be filled to the brim with this smoothly but steeply rising tide of heavenly feeling.[6]

At such moments of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,"[7] to use William Wordsworth's phrase, Chandos feels as if everything is suddenly pregnant with a hitherto unrealized significance:

> Everything seems to mean something: I feel a blissful and utterly eternal interplay in me and around me, and amid the to-and-fro there is nothing into which I cannot merge. Then it is as if my body consisted entirely of coded messages revealing everything to me. Or as if we could enter into a new, momentous relationship with all of existence if we began to think with our hearts.[8]

However, the paradox of Chandos' experience is that although these moments bring such ecstatic feelings of elation and illumination, they are also elusive. Chandos says,

> but when this strange bewitchment stops, I am unable to say anything about it; I can no more express in rational language what made up this harmony permeating me and the entire world, or who it made itself perceptible to me, than I can describe with any precision the inner movement of my intestines or the engorgement of my veins.[9]

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[4] Hofmannsthal, "A Letter."
[5] Ibid, 126.
[6] Ibid, 123.
[7] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 263.
[8] Hofmannsthal, "A Letter," 125.
[9] Ibid.

The inability to either understand the "language in which mute things speak to me" or to communicate this experience meaningfully to others torments Chandos, marks him as a social outsider, and even prompts him to suspect that he is haunted by a strange mental illness.[10]

For me, Hofmannsthal's story is a crucial text not just because it is a compelling and nuanced description of the psychosomatic experience of spiritual ecstasy, of the transformation of the subject brought on by this "sign and punctuation of the perception of the infinite,"[11] but more importantly, it describes the paradox, the conundrum of Romantic and Symbolist art in general. On the one hand, this ecstasy is so intense, meaningful, and illuminating that it is *the* experience that art, according to the Romantics and the Symbolists, tries to convey and preserve through aesthetic means. The experience reveals some form of Gnosis whereby the secrets to all existence can be grasped intuitively. James Joyce, ventriloquized by Stephen Daedalus, believed that "it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments."[12]

On the other hand, this experience is transient and ephemeral, "[s]ome mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us *for that moment only*," wrote Walter Pater of his own experience of revelation.[13] Moreover, the qualia - the phenomenal "whatness," the quiddity - of the experience is utterly outside the realm of the everyday to the point where the attempts to account for it in terms of the regular operation of the five usual modalities of our sensory perception break down.

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[10] Ibid, 127.
[11] Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," in *Diacritics* 22, no. 2 (1992): 15.
[12] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1963), 187-8.
[13] Walter Pater, "Poems by William Morris," in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 29.

It is felt by those who have had the experience that it cannot be adequately described or conveyed through other means. It is *sui generis*, an unmediated, pure event of the consciousness. The subject feels as if they are in vital contact with a powerful presence, a "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" in the words of Rudolf Otto, and that this encounter dissolves the awareness of the self, as if in "a cloud of unknowing," and makes the self *one* with that presence.[14] In Hofmannsthal's story, Chandos feels he is merging with the vast plenitude of the whole universe. Marcel Raymond said of the ecstatic reverie of Rousseau while boating on Lake Geneva that "[the opposition to the world has been renounced, and the self can no longer be distinguished from the cosmos."[15] How can one describe the experience of the self if such an experience is no longer circumscribed by a self? How can one describe perception if the experience is felt to be beyond perception?

1.2 INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND THE THEORY OF THE SYMBOL

This is the paradox for Romantic and Symbolist art: the incommunicability of ecstasy as a form of experience lies at the heart of its aesthetic strategies. Since the ecstatic experience is ineffable, it is strictly speaking irreproducible in art. Art relies on sensible, material, and finite

[14] Rudolf Otto's idea was articulated over a dozen pages in The Idea of the Holy. For Otto, the divine was defined as the "wholly other." He defined the ecstatic religious experience as being "numinous," and it contains two sides: one is what he calls "creature feeling" which is the feeling of being submerged by one's own nothingness and insignificance, the other, the "objective side," he said, consisted of an experience of something which escapes rational analysis altogether. He wrote, "the truly mysterious object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something which is inherently 'wholly other,' whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and dumb." See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 28. See an in-depth exposition and exegesis of Otto's theory in John Morrison Moore, *Theories of Religious Experience: With Special Reference to James, Otto, and Bergson* (New York: Round Table Press, 1938).

[15] Marcel Raymond, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism* (London: Methuen, 1950), 3.

means, but what one perceives in the moment of ecstasy when the veil of Isis is temporarily lifted is supra-sensible, immaterial, and infinite. Art can only be an imperfect messenger, a permanent aspiration. As Isaiah Berlin put it,

> What is it that I wish to convey? … I wish to convey something immaterial and I have to use material means to do it. I have to convey something which is inexpressible and I have to use expression. I have to convey, perhaps, something unconscious and I have to use conscious means. I know in advance that I shall not succeed and cannot succeed, and therefore all I can do is get nearer and nearer in some ***asymptotic*** approach, I do my best, but it is an anguishing struggle in which, if I am an artist, or indeed for the German Romantics any kind of self-conscious thinker, I am engaged for the whole of my life.[16]

What Berlin points out is that the inner experience of ecstasy is not something that can be conveyed directly. So, we can see the Romantic-Symbolist aesthetics as a direct response to and circumscribed by the incommunicability of the ecstatic experience. The problem is only further complicated by the recognition that whatever psychosomatic state required for this revelatory experience is not likely to be available to us in everyday circumstances. Everyday perception is goal-oriented and utilitarian; we cannot help but see things in their ordinary context as nothing more than what they are to us as practical objects: a watering can is a tool, not a vessel of revelation. Even if, as Romantics and Symbolists believe, everything in the physical world can become such a "vessel" and be suddenly filled with "the profundity of life," this is unlikely to happen unless we have access to what Baudelaire called the "certain supernatural states of the soul."[17]

So, what is to be done? If we organize our thinking about Romantic-Symbolist aesthetics around this problem, then we can identify two distinct approaches. The first one, the conventional one, is indirect communication through the symbolic mode. In this indirect approach, art becomes not the imitation of nature as it appears to the senses but as an index to a certain *état d'âme*, a state

[16] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 118.
[17] Charles Baudelaire, "Fusées," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard), 659.

of the soul. Objects in art become not stand-ins or copies for their real, material existence but the signal for their spiritual correspondence, whatever that might be.

That means that everything in the physical world, every sensory phenomenon, can be a symbol *in potentia*. William Blake mused on the idea "To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower."[18] Thomas Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus*, had his main character Professor Teufelsdrökh, claim that "man everywhere finds himself encompassed with Symbols, recognized as such or not recognized."[19] Baudelaire spoke of nature as a forest of symbols:

> La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
> Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.[20]

However, the principal concern of Romantic-Symbolist art, as Nicholas Halmi points out, is not in identifying, still less in interpreting, actual symbols, but instead in establishing an ideal of meaningfulness itself.[21] The concept of the symbol functions, writes Halmi, as "the theoretical justification of a disposition to discover meaning precisely where it was not intuitively evident."[22]

Furthermore, as the Romantics and the Symbolists insisted, the symbol must be distinguished from allegory. Both were against a literal reading of the work of art, but there is a crucial distinction. Although the symbol signals the presence of a meaning not available in a literal reading of the work of art, it is silent on what precisely that meaning is. It is deliberately designed as a source of indeterminate meaning.

Goethe, for instance, argues that allegories designate *directly*, whereas symbols designate

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[18] William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1982), 490.
[19] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 166.
[20] Charles Baudelaire, "Corréspondances," in *The Flowers of Evil* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), 18.
[21] Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, 19.
[22] Ibid.

indirectly. Allegories are transitive, arbitrary, and conventional, whereas symbols are intransitive, immediate, and motivated. A symbol is an image which is naturally and universally understandable. Allegories employ the particular as an example of the general; symbols *embody* the general in the particular. Symbols are, for Goethe, polysemous and indefinitely interpretable; they realize the coincidence of the contraries. And since their content exceeds the capability of reason, they express the inexpressible.[23] Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge also insisted on symbol as nonsynonymous with allegory. An allegory is, wrote Coleridge in 1816, "but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from the objects of the senses." A symbol, on the other hand, "is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial, or of the Universal in the General. Above all, by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that Unity, of which it is the representative."[24] This distinction is maintained all the way into the Symbolist movement. Henri de Régnier, in 1900, gave another formulation of the concept of symbol which more or less continues the Romantic tradition: "Un symbole est, en effet, une comparaison et une identité de l'abstrait au concret, comparaison dont l'un des termes reste sous-entendu."[25]

As Umberto Eco put it, an allegory would "immediately suggest its own key; point towards a portion of encyclopedia which already hosts the right frames for interpreting it;"[26] a symbol, on

[23] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 142.
[24] Coleridge's reflections on the symbol first appeared in an issue of the Statesman's Manual in 1816, and can be found, reproduced, in Jerome C. Christensen, "The Symbol's Errant Allegory: Coleridge and His Critics," in *ELH* 45, no. 4 (Winter, 1978), 640. See also: Mary Rahme, "Coleridge's Concept of Symbolism," in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 9, no. 4 (1969), 619-634; Nicholas Halmi, "Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol," in The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 345-58.
[25] Henri de Régnier, quoted by René Wellek, in "What is Symbolism," in The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages, ed. Anna Balakian (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 27.
[26] Eco, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language, 161.

the other hand, would leave the interpreter "face to face with the uncoded."[27] Whereas an allegory points to something concrete, a symbol projects a "nebula of possible interpretations."[28]

The symbol in Romantic and Symbolist aesthetics mirrors the metaphysics according to which the world is divided into two: one half physical, concrete, immediately available to the our "external senses," definite, bound by space and time; the other spiritual, unfathomable, beyond any sense perception, infinite and transcendent. In his 1889 book *L'Art symboliste*, prefaced by Paul Adam, the critic Georges Vanor re-affirmed that the idea of correspondence as the basis of Symbolist art: "Les choses tangibles étant la figure des choses intelligibles, celles-ci se révèlent la figure des choses divines; par déduction, chaque objet de la création correspondant à une idée, correspond à un idéal divin, est un signe de la pensée divine.[29] Therefore, the work of the Symbolist poet, consists in "découvrir l'idée à travers sa représentation figurée; de saisir les rapports des choses visibles, sensibles et tangibles du monde avec l'essence intelligible dont elles participent; de remonter des effets à la cause, des images aux prototypes, des phénomènes et des apparences aux sens mystérieux."[30] The goal of Symbolist art, therefore, "ne consistera plus dans des narrations de légendes et des analyses de passions, mais dans la divination des correspondances des choses."[31] As Thomas Carlyle put it, "In a symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here therefore, by silence and by speech acting together, comes a double significance. In the symbol proper, what we can call a symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the infinite; the infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to

[27] Ibid, 161.
[28] Ibid, 162. Carl Jung also had a theory of the symbol which is comparable to what I have been trying to describe here. For Jung, a symbol is 1) "the best formulation of a relatively unknown thing" (different from a sign, which has a definitive semiotic meaning); 2) it is a "living thing," and is only alive "as long as it is pregnant with meaning;" 3) nothing is considered a symbol unless it is apprehended in a "symbolical attitude." See Michael Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 130.
[29] Georges Vanor, *L'Art symbolist*e (Paris: Bibliopole Vanier, 1889), 41.
[30] Ibid, 38.
[31] Ibid, 38.

sand visible, and as it were, attainable there."[32] We can think of the symbol as a liminal object, one which is like a window, although concrete and physical, once opened, lets in the infinite light of the divine. As Georg Friedrich Creuzer put it, symbols are "epiphanies of the sacred."[33]

This means that a symbol is a Janus-faced object, a medium that serves as the conduit between the concrete and the abstract, between the here-and-now and the great beyond, between this world and that world. "Translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal," as Coleridge put it.[34] The success of a symbolist work of art, therefore, depends on this translucency, depends on the ability of the artwork to make the leap from the materiality of its means to the immateriality of its end.

1.3 PROBLEMS OF THE MEDIUM AND THE STRATEGIES OF DE-CONCRETIZATION AND DE-ANECDOTALIZATION

Symbolist art is, therefore, a constant struggle against the limitations of its own medium. The Belgian Symbolist poet Émile Verhaeren wrote, "the symbol, therefore, purifies itself through the process of evocation as it becomes an idea; it is a sublimation of perceptions and sensations; it is not demonstrative but suggestive; it destroys any contingency, any fact, any detail; it is the highest and the most spiritual artistic expression possible."[35] This process of purification, this shedding of the "contingent details," means that in its way of signification, objects in art must be

[32] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 158.
[33] Creuzer, cited in Eco, *op.cit*, 143.
[34] Coleridge, quoted in Christensen, "The Symbol's Errant Allegory: Coleridge and His Critics," 640.
[35] Emile Verhaeren, "A Symbolist Painter: Fernand Khnopff," in *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Dorra (Berkeley: University of California Press), 61.

taken outside of their ordinary frames of reference, outside of their significance as natural objects, in order to stand in for something immaterial.

In poetry, this means nouns must take on a significance beyond what it designates in ordinary speech, they must cease to mean what they mean in everyday life, and their ultimate significance must be determined - as much as it is possible to be determined - in the realm of free mental associations. Mallarmé and his circle developed an aesthetics of suggestion, whereby poetic language is used to undermine its own representational function. In his answer to a literary questionnaire, Mallarmé wrote, "Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d'âme, par une série de déchiffrements."

The concreteness of the means of expression is a much more difficult problem in the plastic arts, such as painting, where figural representation constantly comes up against its limitations to express what is beyond visuality. Verhaeren, in an essay on Fernand Khnopff's painting, *Head Study for a Female Sphinx*, pondered whether plastic symbolism is an oxymoron. He asked, "[h]ow can one address oneself to the idea only be expressing the visible?"[36] Gabriel-Albert Aurier noticed the same problem with the notion of Symbolist, what he calls ideist, paining. For Aurier, the success of a Symbolist painting depends on the ability of the spectator not to see objects represented in art as objects *tout court* - as aiming at being a reproduction. Aurier wrote, "[the spectator] would perceive the represented objects as nothing but objects - something it is important to avoid. It is therefore essential that this confusion be prevented from occurring in an ideist work.

[36] Verhaeren, "A Symbolist Painter: Fernand Khnopff," 62.

It is also necessary that we believe that the objects in the picture have no value as objects and are but signs, words, with no importance in themselves whatsoever."[37]

The danger for the spectator to conflate symbols with the imitation of plain natural objects, therefore, prompts the prescription of certain aesthetic parameters for post-Impressionist painting. Aurier explained,

> [a]s a result, certain laws must govern pictorial imitation. The artist, in every form of art, must carefully avoid the following antinomies: concrete truth, illusionism, tromp-l'oeil. Indeed, he must not convey in his picture a false impression of nature that would act on the spectator like nature itself, without any suggestiveness, that is (forgive my barbaric neologism), ideicidally[38].

This problem with the concreteness of the medium is even more exacerbated in the theater, with both the concreteness of the physical presence of human actors and the specificity of the narrative.[39] How can the physical presence of an actor become a symbol? How can the "imitation of persons engaged in action" become more than that - a drama of ideas? Symbolists were almost uniformly theaterphobes. Mallarmé was famously averse to the contemporary theater of his time. When Edouard Dujardin asked him to write theater reviews for the Symbolist journal *Revue indépendente*, he replied that he would only do it on the condition of not being obliged to go to the theater.[40] He preferred instead to read the play as a text without seeing it represented on stage. Téodor de Wyzewa argued that "a play read will appear to delicate souls more alive than the same play performed on stage by live actors."[41] Maurice Maeterlinck, who would ironically be remembered more for his Symbolist plays than for his poetry, wrote, "I think that almost all plays

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[37] Gabriel-Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," in *Mercure de France* 2, (1891), 155-64. Translation from Dorra's anthology, 200.
[38] Aurier, in Henry Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories*, 200.
[39] See Frederick M. Tisdel, "Symbolism in the Theatre," in *The Sewanee Review* 28, no. 2 (April, 1920): 228-240.
[40] Patrick McGuinness, "Mallarmé, Maeterlinck and the Symbolist Via Negative of Theatre," in *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, ed. Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner (London: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2006), 149.
[41] Ibid, 152.

that are not mere stage-carpentry can be better appreciated in reading than on the stage … I always enjoy reading a play far more than I do seeing it acted."[42]

The problem with theatrical representation, as Maeterlinck points out, is that in the staging of a drama, the universal, symbolic aspect of a literary work of art is overshadowed by the real presence of the actors and by the specificity of the action, by, in other words, the illusionistic presence of the theatrical situation: the realistic representation of a specific action. He wrote, "the stage is where masterpieces die, because the presentation of a masterpiece by accidental and human means is a contradiction. All masterpieces are symbols, and the symbol never withstands the active presence of man."[43] As Frantisek Deak's study of the formation of the Symbolist theatrical avant-garde explained, when Villiers de l'Iles-Adam's Symbolist drama *La Revolte* was first staged in the mid-nineteenth century, the realist and illusionistic conventions of the mainstream theater of the time reduced the play, which was imagined to be a "metaphysical drama" of conflicting spiritual orientations, to a simple domestic drama between a rebellious wife and a bourgeois husband.[44]

Nevertheless, the critique of theater's theatricality engendered a unique Symbolist conception of dramaturgy and a new Symbolist theater which would become, as Patrick McGuinness demonstrates, the source of modernist theater.[45] For Maeterlinck, the real drama is not in the action, but in the interstices of the mind, in the spiritual struggle hidden in the comings and goings of everyday life.[46] Characters in a static drama are not imitations or representations of

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[42] Maeterlinck quoted in Kurt Taroff, "The Spectacle Within: Symbolist Painting and Minimalist Mise-en-scène," in Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film 42, no. 2 (2015): 217.
[43] Maurice Maeterlinck, "Menus propos: Le théâtre," in *La jeune Belgique*, (1890): 334.
[44] Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 33-39.
[45] Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[46] Maureice Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," in *The Treasure of the Humble*, trans. Alfred Sutro (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1907), 95-120.

specific personalities but are, to use Charles Lamb's phrase, "objects of contemplation:" they are bearers of symbolic, universal, timeless qualities and ideals.[47] Maeterlinck wanted a "static" drama of silence, of pauses, of absences, and of minimal action, where the meaning of the piece is not derived from action, but from the contemplation of what is not represented, the occult, the invisible, the unsaid.[48]

Besides the critique of contemporary theater and the Maeterlinckian conception of static dramaturgy, there emerged, nonetheless, a new Symbolist theater from the experimental, avant-garde productions at Paul Fort's short-lived Théâtre d'Art and Aurélien Lugné-Poe's Théâter de l'Oeuvre, which survives until today.[49] This new Symbolist theater would experiment with several innovations from acting to set decoration. Fort and Lugné-Poe used painted, two-dimensional backdrops, often done by symbolist painters such as Maurice Denis and Edouard Vuillard.[50] A gauze curtain was often used to soften the scenic image; there was often a minimal use of properties, with the general scenic image making no pretension to realistic three-dimensional sets.[51] Actors

[47] Charles Lamb, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Representation," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature Volume D: The Romantic Period*, ed. Deire Shauna Lynch and Jack Stillinger (New York and London: Norton, 2012), 512.

[48] Some of Maeterlinck's writings on theater have been translated into English by David Willinger and Daniel Gerould in Maurice Maeterlinck, *A Maeterlinck Reader: Plays, Poems, Short Fiction, Aphorisms, and Essays by Maurice Maeterlinck*, ed. David Willinger and Daniel Gerould (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). See the section "On Theatre," 295-314.

[49] See Deak, Symbolist Theater for the best treatment of Lugné-Poe and Paul Fort in English. For an earlier treatment of Lugné-Poe, see Gertrude Rathbone Jasper, *Adventures in the Theatre: Lugné-Poe and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre to 1899* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press). Catherine Taylor John's doctoral dissertation, *Symbolist Transformation: The Shift from Stage to Screen in France*, also contains useful information on symbolist theater, but is largely dependent on Deak's and other's conclusions. Another treatment is Haskell M. Block's *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977). In French, there is Jacques Robichez, *Le Symbolisme au théatre: Lugné-Poe et les début de L'Oeuvre* (Paris: L'Arche, 1957).

[50] Keith Owen Tribble, *European Symbolist Theater: Conventions and Innovations*, PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 1990, 107. Frantisek Deak also discusses various staging innovations in "Symbolist Staging at the Théâtre d'Art," in The Drama Review: TDR 20, no. 3 (September 1976): 117-122.

[51] Pierre Quillard, in an essay titled "L'Inutilité absolue de la mise en scène exacte" "The Absolute Uselessness of Precise Staging," wrote, "décor should be a simple ornamental fiction which completes the illusion by analogies with the colors and the lines of the drama. Most frequently a background with some mobile curtains will suffice to give the impression of infinite multiplicity of time and space." Translation taken from Tribble, *European Symbolist Theater: Conventions and Innovations*, 108.

often wore masks, moved slowly and lethargically, and behaved as if they were, as Maeterlinck preferred, marionettes; they spoke with a monotonous, sometimes incantatory, tone reminiscent of poetry recitals.[52] Paul Fort even imaged Symbolist mise-en-scène as something akin to painting, to a series of tableaux vivants. In January 1891, he announced the intention to close every evening at Théâtre d'Art with a static mise-en-scène of a Symbolist painting:

> The curtain will be raised for three minutes to show the tableau vivant. Actors and models will represent the immobile and silent figures … The combination of scenic music and perfumed scents relevant to the subject of the painting will prepare and subsequently perfect he artistic impact of the work ... As Baudelaire stated, the perfumes, colors, and sounds are in reciprocal correspondence.[53]

Although these tableaux vivants did not become a regular part of the repertoire, they influenced both the design of the sets and the visual mise-en-scène of the productions. Frantisek Deak described one of the typical Symbolist production this way:

> As the curtain opened, the audience saw a soft lit stage separated from them by a transparent gauze scrim immediately behind the footlights. There were no objects of any kind on stage. The scenery consisted of a single backdrop of shining gold, framed with red draperies. On this golden canvas Paul Sérusier, the symbolist painter of the Nabis group, painted in an iconlike style multicolored angels with open wings, kneeling in prayer.[54]

These Symbolist productions not only de-emphasized the personality of the characters, undermined the physical presence of the actors, but also made the scenic image look ethereal, vague, abstract, and in the words of Mireille Losco-Lena, "spectral."[55] However, what is notable is that the achievement of Symbolist theater, its innovations, were based on what Patrick McGuinness calls the "de-theatricalization of theater."[56]

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[52] Catherine Taylor Johnson, *op. cit*, 105.
[53] Deak, *Symbolist Theater*, 142.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Mireille Losco-Lena, *La scène symboliste (1890-1896): pour un théâtre spectral* (Grenoble: ELLUG Université Stendhal, 2010).
[56] McGuinness, "Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Symbolist via negative," 158.

We can summarize the aesthetic strategies Symbolists employed to mitigate, overcome, and circumvent the problems of the medium as falling into two broad categories: de-concretization and de-anecdotalization. The former strategy focuses on reducing or removing the naturalness of art objects. This can be done through evocation and suggestion, through the evacuation of any objects in art which the work can be said to directly refer to, describe, denotate, imitate, or represent: the deserted urban scene of Khnopff, the lonesome interiors of Hammershøi, the dead city of Bruges in Rodenbach, the ominous and spectral drama of waiting by Maeterlinck. Alain Badiou said of a Mallarmé poem, that it always

> [f]ixes the place of an aleatory event; an event to be interpreted on the basis of the traces it leaves behind. Poetry is no longer submitted to action, since no meaning (univocal) of the text depends on what is declared to have happened there in. There is a certain element of the detective novel in the Mallarméan enigma: an empty salon, a vase, a dark sea - what crime, what catastrophe, what enormous misadventure is indicated by these clues?[57]

Alternatively, this can be done through deliberate deformation of objects - "unnatural" colors, shapes, and lines that are understood to be less determined by how they appear to the senses than what they can be considered to correspond to in the artist's mind. The result of de-concretization is a metaphor in which, according to Wellek, we are left with only the vehicle but not the tenor, an image - poetic or visual - which is polysemous and indeterminate.[58]

The second strategy is de-anecdotalization, which consists in, especially in narrative forms, making the story legible and interpretable not only on a literal level but also on a generalized plane not immediately available in the text, and making characters not fully-fledged individuals with idiosyncrasies and mannerisms but universal signs.

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[57] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2007). 191
[58] Wellek, "What is Symbolism," 26.

These two strategies are ways of confronting that central paradox of Symbolist art - the incommunicability of ecstatic experience, with the recognition of the limitations of art as mediums of expression. As the Russian Symbolist poet Valery Bryusov put it succinctly, "The subject of art lies always in the conceptual world, but all the means of art lie in the material world. It is not possible to overcome this fatal contradiction; one can only make it as painless as possible by sharpening, refining, spiritualizing art."[59]

The symbolic mode therefore is about the conditioning of perception, so that the work of art can be something more than the sum of its sensory impressions, so that we approach a work of art not as imitations of nature, but as trying to convey, within its limited means, a "supernatural state of the soul."

2. ECSTASY AS A PSYCHOSOMATIC EVENT

> "They manifest an unrelenting desire to dredge up new material from within, from the subconscious, and in order to do so they attempt to forge a new and all-important mode of thought, the logic of the child, of dream, of humor, of ambiguity…"
> - Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*[60]

My argument is that *cinéma de l'esprit*'s theoretical innovation lies in its exploration of another path to revelationism. *Cinéma de l'esprit* recognized that film, despite its technological basis in the photographic recording of the surface appearance of the world, had nevertheless the potential to replicate the experience of ecstatic perception by providing an unmediated access to

[59] Valery Bryusov quoted in Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 39.
[60] Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 37.

the subconscious. Cinema's power, its revelatory capacity, comes from its ability to directly appeal to and affect our bodies, bypassing the intercession of the intellect.

If Symbolist art was to communicate the experience of revelation indirectly, obliquely, asymptotically, then, in the aspirations of *cinéma de l'esprit*, cinema was to convey that ecstasy directly: not just through the de-concretization of the image and the de-anecdotalization of the narrative, but via telepathy, rhythm, coenesthesia, and sympathetic movement, in other words, by acting, unmediated, on the most profound source of that ecstasy, which is the subconscious affective circuit of the self. Not a *via negativa* but a *via regia* to ecstasy.

This direct path to revelation would not have been conceivable if ecstatic experience had been understood to be a purely intellectual event: that it arose from the reflective consciousness of the cogito, that it is the result of the association of ideas alone, or that it is the result of the normal operation of the senses. The ineffability of revelation does not come from the deficiency of the rational thinking self to understand and articulate its own mental operations but from the fact that the cogito cannot account for the obscure origins of its subconscious *other*.

Let us begin again with Hofmannsthal's description of Chandos' ecstasy. What is notable in the way Hofmannsthal tries to come to terms with Chandos' ineffable experience is how this very ineffability is displaced onto the body. Chandos says, during his ecstasy, it feels as "[his] body consisted entirely of coded messages revealing everything to me."[61] The whole body becomes the surface on which the experience is registered and the medium through which the experience is transmitted. Chandos' failure to "express in rational language what made up this harmony permeating me and the entire world" is related to his inability to "describe with any

[61] Hofmannsthal, "A Letter," 125.

precision the inner movement of my intestines or the engorgement of my veins."[62] In other words, the "ineffability" of the experience of ecstasy arose from the inability to account for the extreme, embodied, affective experiences that lay outside the regular operation of the usual five sensory modalities.

Hofmannsthal's story was published in the same year, 1902, as William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, based on a series of lectures he delivered for the Gifford Lectures in Natural Theology at the University of Edinburgh. Hofmannsthal was a careful reader of James, and it is no coincidence that Hofmannsthal's description of the ecstasies of a mystic resembles so much of what James had to say about the characteristics of the mystical experience, which, according to James, was the foundation of religious sentiments and doctrines.[63] According to James, the mystical experience is transient, passive (feeling of submission to a more powerful presence, the dissolution of the self, the abeyance of subjective will), noetic (experience of illumination, sudden spiritual insight in some depth of meaning), and ineffable (untransferable, incommunicable).[64]

As we have seen in Chapter Two, James developed the Romantic idea that the core of religion is private, lived experience rather than doctrinal truths. His psychological study of religion shifted the focus from what religious people say to what they do, from the intellectual discourse to affective experience, from hermeneutics to phenomenology, and located the source of religious truth not in the conscious self but in the deep waters of the subconscious.

William Ernest Hocking wrote, "we should … be nearer the historic truth … to regard mysticism first as an experience, and let its metaphysics come as a resultant, an inference, a

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[62] Ibid.
[63] See Hofmannsthal as a reader of James in Hanna B. Lewis, "Hofmannsthal and America," *Rice Institute Pamphlet – Rice University Studies* 55, no. 3 (1969), 135-137.
[64] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Library of America, 2010), 342-344.

presupposition. There is a minimum of theory without which mysticism cannot develop even as an experience, perhaps this: that God is one, and that it is possible to be one with him. Beyond this minimum, it is a community of experience that unites the mystics rather than any community of explicit doctrine."[65] James Leuba, a student of William James at Harvard, pointed out in *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* that the psychological experience of the mystic and the shaman are phenomenologically similar to that of the drug-induced trance.[66] Leuba argued that "if religion has any reality, it must perforce express itself in psychic and physiological phenomena," and that "affective problems" constituted the essence of religious life.[67]

The American focus on affective experience as the essence of religion was replicated in contemporary French psychology of religion, with the addition of dynamic psychiatry under the influence of those who followed the pioneering work of Charcot. Théodor Flournoy advocated for a psychological study of religion that would exclude any discussions of "transcendence" to focus on the "biological interpretation of religious phenomena."[68] Théodule Ribot discussed ecstasy in his 1883 book *Diseases of the Will* and boiled it down to a state where the subjective, conscious will of the individual had been annihilated, while some intellectual function remained.[69] He claimed that there was no essential difference between religious or mystical ecstasy and their profane, morbid, or cataleptic types, and such ecstatic states could be theoretically activated via

[65] William Ernest Hocking, "The Meaning of Mysticism as Seen Through its Psychology," Mind 21, no. 81 (January, 1912): 39.
[66] James Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925), 157-158.
[67] James Leuba, "A Study in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena," *The American Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 3 (April, 1896): 310.
[68] Théodore Flournoy, *Les Principes de la psychologie religieuse* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), 6. See also Matei George Iagher, "Theorizing Experience: The Psychological Search for a Science of Religion" (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2016), 9.
[69] Thédule Ribot, *Diseases of the Will*, trans. Merwin-Marie Snell (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1894), 95.

"artificial processes."[70] Pierre Janet would likewise consider the ecstasy experienced by the mystic as a result of the weakening of consciousness, which, as we shall see later in the chapter, performed a psychically integrative function in the formation of the ego. For Janet, religious ecstasies can be studied as cases of psychopathological dissociation.[71]

As William Parsons pointed out, the French school had an "almost exclusive reliance on some form of the conception of the 'subconscious."[72] In some cases, such as André Godfernaux, the subconscious is understood to be related to, or even arise from, physiological processes of the body. For Godfernaux, ecstatic revelations result from the invasion of consciousness by an affective state. Religious feeling, he argued, arose from what was called coenaesthesia, or the awareness of one's whole body, one's sense of being alive, the individual's "vital tone," or the "rhythmic oscillations of energy" that traverse our body.[73] Mysticism, therefore, according to Godfernaux, is nothing but the heightened awareness of the changes inside one's body. Through coenaesthesia, the sense of one's own body, one had a direct relationship to the universal life and its vicissitudes.[74]

These ideas remained influential in France until the 1930s. When Freud argued that region was an illusion in *The Future of an Illusion* in 1926, Romain Rolland wrote to him to point out that he had not accounted for the primordial "religious sensation," which is "totally independent of all dogma, all creeds, all Church organization … the true subterranean source of religious

[70] Ribot, *Diseases of the Will*, 94.
[71] Pierre Janet, *De l'angoisse à l'extase: études sur les croyances et les sentiments*, 1928 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).
[72] William Parson, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65
[73] André Godfernaux, "Sur la psychologie de mysticism," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, no. 53 (1902): 164.
[74] Matei George Iagher, "Theorizing Experience: The Psychological Search for a Science of Religion," 149.

energy".[75] Rolland called this sensation oceanic. Freud, in response, had to concede in his subsequent *Civilization and Its Discontent* that he could not "discover this 'oceanic' feeling in [himself]," but had to acknowledge the possibility of the existence of such feeling being induced on a physiological level. He wrote,

> Let me admit once more that it is very difficult for me to work with these almost intangible quantities. Another friend of mine, whose insatiable craving for knowledge has fed him to make the most unusual experiments and has ended by giving him encyclopaedic knowledge, has assured me that through the practices of Yoga, by withdrawing from the world, by fixing the attention on bodily functions and by peculiar methods of breathing, one can in fact evoke **new sensations and coenaesthesias in oneself**, which he regards as regressions to primordial states of mind which have long ago been overlaid. He sees in them a **physiological basis**, as it were, of much of the wisdom of mysticism. It would not be hard to find connections here with a number of obscure modifications of mental life, such as trances and ecstasies.[76]

Freud's analysis of religion, however, was based on his own model of the unconscious, which, as we shall see later in the chapter, differed from the French 'subconscious', which had much stronger physiological, affective connotations, and revolved mainly around the process of individuation in the development of the ego. He largely avoided speaking about feelings and affective experiences, judging them too subjective to be the basis for a scientific psychoanalysis of religion; he wrote, "it is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible - and I am afraid that the oceanic feeling too will defy this kind of characterization - nothing reminds but to fall back on the ideational content which is most readily associated with the feeling."[77]

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[75] Romain Rolland's letter to Freud is reproduced by William Parsons, who also has a succinct exposition of the exchange between Rolland and Freud in William B. Parsons, "The Oceanic Feeling Revisited," *The Journal of Religion* 78, no. 4 (October 1998): 503.
[76] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York and London: Norton, 2010), 36.
[77] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 24-25.

The disagreement between Freud and Rolland falls on whether religion is based on a certain set of perennial experiences part of human nature or a set of culturally specific "ideational" content and reflects the fault lines within the study of religion to come. But what is significant, for my purposes, is that around the turn of the century, we have in France, in dialogue with the United States, there emerged the beginning of what American theologian George Lindbeck would call the "experiential-expressivist" theories of religion, which was to include such thinkers as Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, and Paul Tillich, all of whom was to

> …locate ultimately significant contact with whatever is finally important to religion in the prereflective experiential depths of the self and regard the public or outer features of religion as expressive and evocative objectification, (i.e., non-discursive symbols) of internal experience.[78]

In the early twentieth-century French context, this "experiential-expressivist" theory was deeply invested in the question of embodied experience, in the idea of the subconscious self as a set of psychological as well as physiological processes which had been until the late nineteenth century largely subject of philosophical speculation, rather than scientific inquiry. With the help of the new experimental psychology, which was to a large extent based on physiological discoveries of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, there emerged a new language of the body whose aim was to precisely confront the "ineffability" of that mystical experience of revelation which had tormented Hofmannsthal's Chandos.

As Michel de Certeau observed, around the turn of the century, "the 'emotions' of affectivity and the alterations of the body" had become the "clearest indicators of the movement produced before or after the stability of intellectual formulations."[79] The thread of psychosomatic

[78] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 21.
[79] De Certeau, "Mysticism," 15.

signs, put under the gaze of psychologists and physiologists, made it possible for mystical experiences to be articulated in socially recognizable terms. Mysticism, de Certeau argued, had "found its modern social language in the body:"

> The mystic 'somatizes', interprets the music of meaning with his or her corporeal repertoire. One not only plays one's body, one is played by it. ... In this regard, stigmata, visions, and the like reveal and adopt the obscure laws of the body, the extreme notes of a scale never completely enumerated, never entirely domesticated, aroused by the very exigency of which it is sometimes a sign and sometimes a threat.[80]

The shortcut to revelation through the body, the psychosomatic conception of ecstasy, would not have been possible without a new conception of the subject, that is, a new model of both how the body relates to the mind and how the self relates to the world. That is to say, this conception of ecstasy raises the old mind/body problem anew and demands new solutions that could accommodate it.

This new subject is clearly not the Enlightenment Cartesian cogito for whom emotions, or passions of the soul, are a distraction to the serious business of contemplating abstract truth. Siri Hustvedt sardonically described the Cartesian idea of the self as:

> A man sits alone in a room and think. … How the man happens to find himself in that room is not often part of the picture. He must have been born, and he must have had a childhood, but the philosopher is a grown-up by definition. Even today, he is most often a he, not a she. There is no story or narrative, no temporal dimension to the lone cogitator seeking truth. A fully-grown man sits in a room reflecting on the contents of another room - the mental space inside his own head.[81]

[80] Ibid, 22.

[81] Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 146.

By contrast, this new subject sits at the end of a long line of Romantic critiques of the Cartesian ideal. Starting with Rousseau, Romanticism swung the pendulum from the intellect toward its unruly other, the emotions. The poet would take over from the philosophe as the model, one who is extremely sensitive to the undulations of one's feelings, the qualities of one's sensations, and the capacities of one's body. In other words, the affective side of our being was no longer just an embarrassment to the lofty intellect but the vital link between ourselves and the natural world around us. Countering the dictum "I think, therefore I am," Romanticism would put forward the maxim "I feel, therefore I am."

By the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Romantic emphasis on feeling met a new scientific discourse of the body and its affects. This new science of the mind/body, built on the extensive empirical study of the nervous system, would serve as the foundation for a new articulation of the subject that can accommodate the psychosomatic theory of ecstasy. In the following section, I will turn to two salient aspects of this new model of the subject, which served as the foundation for the movement's revelationism.

3. THE IDEA OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

The formation of the *cinéma de l'esprit* coincided with the articulation of the idea of the unconscious in European thought before the Freudian paradigm gave it the most compelling and popular interpretation. Although these pluralistic pre-Freudian articulations were never unified into one stable system in the way Freud made his, they nevertheless represented a fundamental

and resolute break with the Cartesian philosophy of mind. They completely re-organized not only the structure of the mind but also the relation between the mind and the body.

At the outset, Henri Ellenberger pointed out that "the assumption that a part of psychic life escapes man's conscious knowledge had been held for many centuries" before the late-nineteenth.[82] Lancelot Whyte, in his philosophical survey of the intellectual history of the unconscious, pointed out that although the term unconscious was not used, the idea itself was implicit in the European mystical tradition. The modern articulation arose, according to Whyte, as a direct response to the impasse of Cartesian dualism.[83] For Descartes, the doctrine of "I think, therefore I am," not only put thinking as prior to being but also separated the mind and the body into two ontologically distinct kinds of substances: while the body belongs to the category of the space-occupying, tangible, and ponderable matter - *res extensa*, the mind constituted its own kind of a-spatial, intangible, and imponderable "stuff" - *res cogitans*. Furthermore, by identifying the mind exclusively with reflective thought, i.e., with higher cognitive functions during our active awareness, Descartes and his followers would make the idea of the "unconscious mind" an oxymoron in their static, mechanical, and dualistic system. As Whyte puts it,

> Prior to Descartes and his sharp definition of the dualism there was no cause to contemplate the possible existence of unconscious mentality as part of a separate realm of mind. Many religious and speculative thinkers had taken from granted factors lying outside but influencing immediate awareness … Until an attempt had been made (with apparent success) to choose awareness as the defining characteristic of an independent mode of being called mind, there was no occasion to invent the idea of unconscious mind as a provisional correction of that choice. It is only after Descartes we find, first the idea and then the term, "unconscious mind" entering European thought.[84]

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[82] Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1994), 312.
[83] Lancelot Law Whyte, *The Unconscious Before Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 28.
[84] Whyte, *The Unconscious Before Freud*, 25.

In other words, the idea of the unconscious had to be invented to account for those phenomena which Cartesian dualism cannot explain within its paradigm. If Descartes' view of the mind sounds "mechanical" to us, it is because, in a way, it is the culmination of the Enlightenment mechanical view of nature. Animals, for Descartes, do not have minds; they are unconscious automatons. A living duck would have been philosophically indistinguishable from the ingenious, mechanical, food-digesting, self-moving duck automaton of Jacques de Vaucanson, both of which are nothing but matter moving in geometric space along pre-designated causal patterns.

But a duck is a duck after all: machines do not grow, as Claude Bernard pointed out. The mechanical worldview of the Enlightenment was ill-equipped to think dynamically. Its dichotomous system cannot accommodate the ideas of evolution and emergence; it cannot think how such a complex phenomenon as the mind can emerge out of simpler processes. As a critique, Romanticism needed the unconscious to bridge the gap between mind and nature, which Descartes had put asunder. For the proponents of *Naturphilosophie* such as Schelling, nature is not *res extensa* but "invisible spirit," and spirit (or mind) is "visible nature." Unconscious nature becomes conscious in the Ego. As S.J. McGrath sums up,

> the Cartesian self severed its relation to nature for the sake of achieving a pure self-foundational act of "I think." Schelling's early notion of the unconscious undercut the Cartesian subject by exposing the deep unity of nature overlooked by it, the primordial oneness of subject and object, consciousness and matter.[85]

Simultaneously with the speculative and philosophical approaches to the unconscious explored by Romanticism, which culminated in Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten* in 1869, there developed an experimental approach to the mind centered around the work of Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt, which articulated the idea of the unconscious based on

[85] S.J. McGrath, "Schelling on the Unconscious," *Research in Phenomenology* 40 (2010): 74.

experimental findings on the nervous system, especially its sensory-motor circuits.[86] Experimental psychology was able to articulate the idea of a threshold, the level of intensity below which sensory stimuli acting on the nervous system can no longer be detected or differentiated by the conscious mind. By the early twentieth century, the existence of the unconscious mind had been known for a long time and was no longer controversial in many circles. It had become an effective idea in explaining a myriad of mental and physiological phenomena, although the nature and makeup of the unconscious and the proper terminology were still being debated. [87] Hartmann's great tome, near 1000 pages, was translated into French as *Philosophie de l'Inconscient* in 1877 and was quickly assimilated into the French lycée philosophy curriculum, influencing a generation of French intellectuals. While in the new psychical research initiated in Britain around Frederick Myers and his coterie at Cambridge University, Myers' idea of a "subliminal self" was proposed as the explanatory mechanism underlying "supernormal" phenomena such as automatic writing, hypnotism, mediumship, and telepathy.[88] In the context of psychology, the term subconscious became accepted as the standard in French and the United States, and psychologists debated the various ways of charactering it.[89]

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[86] Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 313.

[87] Discussions of Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt's work, as well as early contributions to the understanding of the nervous system can be found in the following sources: The most accessible account of the history of experimental psychology as it relates to the mind/body problem and the idea of the unconscious can be find in: Robert H. Wozniak, *Mind and Body: René Descartes to William James* (Washington, D.C.: National Library of Medicine, 1992). This is a catalogue accompanying an exhibition for the centennial celebration of the American Psychological Association. Another short introduction to the topic is by George Mandler, *A History of Experimental Psychology: From James and Wundt to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2007). The earliest comprehensive historical account of the history of experimental psychology is by Edwin G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology* (New York: The Century Co., 1929). Boring's work has been critiqued and updated by Per Saugstad, *A History of Modern Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[88] Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 314.

[89] For the debate around the best ways of characterizing the subconscious, see Hugo Münsterberg, Theodore Ribot, Pierre Janet, Joseph Jastrow, Bernard Hart, and Morton Prince, *Subconscious Phenomena* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1910). The debates revolved around whether the subconscious should be considered to be mental, physiological, cerebral, or some combination of the three.

The idea of the unconscious was as commonplace among the theorists of the *cinéma de l'esprit* as it was among French intellectuals of the time. However, it was Jean Epstein who provided the most sustained and systematic engagement with the idea of the subconscious among the theorists of the movement. In the writings of Epstein, the term "le subconscient" "the subconscious" was used consistently over the term "unconscious," following the French clinical and psychological traditions which culminated in the work of Pierre Janet.

The French term "subconscious" was coined by Pierre Janet in his study of "psychological automatisms," psychic states and processes which have not reached the level of reflective consciousness of the Ego.[90] Janet saw his model of the mind as a direct repudiation of Descartes and summarized the problems of Cartesian dualism in the following way:

> Certains philosophes, à l'exemple des cartésiens, se sont représenté la conscience comme quelque chose d'invariable et d'immuable, sans nuances et sans degrés. Pour Descartes, la pensée existait complète avec le doute, la réflexion, le raisonnement et le langage, ou bien n'existait pas du tout et se trouvait remplacée par le mécanisme pur et simple, par l'étendue et le mouvement.[91]

For Descartes, reflective thought, intelligent judgment, and reasoning are the sine qua none of the mind's existence, the a priori condition for sensation and perception: "I think" takes place prior to "I feel." Building upon the empiricist philosophies of the mind and the French clinical tradition, Janet argued the reverse. For Janet, the mind is hierarchical, consisting of an array of processes from the simplest, the most rudimentary, to the more complex and self-reflective.

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[90] Pierre Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique: essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieurs de l'activité humaine* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889) Janet's theory has been relatively neglected in comparison with Freud's. See, for an assessment, Onno Van der Hart and Barbara Friedman, "A Reader's Guide to Pierre Janet: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage," *Dissociation* 2, no.1 (1989): 3-16. For a concise overview, see Karl-Ernst Bühler and Gerhard Heim, "Psychopathological Approaches in Pierre Janet's Conception of the Subconscious," in *Psychopathology* 42 (2009): 190-200; Karl-Ernst Bühler and Gerhard Heim, "General Introduction to the Psychotherapy of Pierre Janet," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 55, no. 1 (2001): 74-91; Ellenberger, "Chapter 6: Pierre Janet and Psychological Analysis," in *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 331-417.

[91] Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, 36.

The *cogito* is not the precondition to sensations and perceptions but the pinnacle that emerges from a synthesizing process that organizes sensations' raw materials into perceptions and integrates perceptions with a conscious self-awareness.

Thomas Reid, the Scottish empiricist philosopher, defines sensation as "the simple phenomena which passes in me when I see, when I hear, etc." Janet points out that the "I" in Reid's definition is excessive, for sensations take place without the requirement of an a priori "I." What Janet calls "sensation simple" is anterior to, independent from, and not a consequence of, "l'idée du moi." In *L'Automatisme psychologique*, Janet cited Maine de Brian as a "précurseur de la psychologie scientifique et expérimental" and quoted from him, "entre la conscience complète et le mécanisme cartésien, il y a place pour des êtres qui ont la sensation sans conscience, sans moi capable de l'apercevoir."[92]

This "sensation sans conscience," or "sensation sans moi," for Janet, is the most elementary material of psychic life - its building blocks. He posited the existence of a mental state below and before conscious reflection and the awareness of the self, a rudimentary form of psychic life that humans shared with animals. Janet called this state "état affectif," which is "purement affective, réduite aux sensations et aux images, sans acune de ces liaisons, de ces idées de relation qui constituent la personnalité et les jugements."[93]

The postulate of a state of the mind which is purely affective and emotional, without the addition of concepts, without the contamination of the intellect, and without even the awareness of the self, resonated with Epstein. For him, such a conception of the subconscious, which is purely affective, provided the intellectual support for the supposition of a subject who is capable of what

[92] Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique,* 41.
[93] Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, 44.

he called the "lyrosophical" state of the mind whereby subconscious "feelings" ("sentiments" in French) are projected onto the same, unified mental plane as conscious thoughts. However, for Epstein, which distinguishes his thought from Janet's, the subconscious is not considered a rudimentary, crude form but elevated to an entirely independent mode of engaging with the world, which Epstein called "connaissance par armor."[94] This purely affective way of "knowing," or "knowing by feeling," which Epstein saw "savages" once used before they were able to reflect upon their purely sensory experiences, makes no distinction between the mind and its environment and is not bound by the logical abstractions of science.[95]

Taking Jewish Kabala as the example of and precursor to "lyrosophy," Epstein saw the greater aim of his intellectual project as bringing together two modes of "knowing" - one intellectual and conscious, the other affective and subconscious, in productive harmony. This synthesis of the affective and the intellectual depends on the ability of the subconscious to "emerge in the conscious," and to be projected onto the same mental plane:

> Cette éruption produit un état mental où le domaine affectif et le domaine raisonnable empiètent l'un sur l'autre, s'enchevêtrent, se confondent. L'intelligence est alors sentimentale et raisonnable presque à la fois, bi-logique, bicéphale, hermaphrodite. La fécondité de cet hermaphrodite donne le jour à une petite fille. Cette petite fille s'appelle lyrosophie.[96]

Interestingly, just as Epstein identified cinema as the daughter born of the hermaphrodite union of intellect and feeling, Pierre Janet was aware that the state of what Lucien Lévy-Bruhl later called participation could be brought into being in specific situations:

[94] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 24.
[95] Ibid, 119.
[96] Ibid, 66-67.

> … devant un spectacle qui nous passionne, nous n'avons dans la conscience que les sensations de ce spectacle sans faire de retour nous-mêmes, sans distinguer ce qui est intérieur et ce qui est extérieur.[97]

However, for Janet, the subconscious state, where the subject is "réduits à la vie purement affective sans connaissance et sans réflexion," is looked upon with a clinical, scientific gaze as it is also the description of the experience of catalepsy and psychosis.[98] In Janet's writing, the subconscious results from the pathological inability of the conscious personality to synthesize anonymous sensations into a coherent experience related to a stable self. When the "field of consciousness" is narrowed, psychological automatisms could become dissociated from the main personality to form *idées fixes*, which could, in turn, become the pathological nucleus of an alternative personality hidden from the conscious self.[99]

Epstein's valorization of the subconscious differs from this predominantly clinical and pathological interpretation and has more in common with the broader cultural translation and proliferation of the clinical concept. Edward Abramowski, whose 1914 book *Le Suconscient normal* was cited by Epstein in *La Lyrosophie* at length, postulated a normal as opposed to the pathological subconscious, whose function was to preserve, on an embodied level, all the sensory experiences of an individual throughout its lifetime, and to serve as the continuous reservoir of the self.[100] Abramowski related this subconscious existence to our ability to sense our bodily existence, our coenesthesia:

> C'est notre individualité "cénesthésique," le sentiment de nous-même, qui conserve son unié et sa continuité malgré toutes les variations dans les conditions de la vie, de la santé et de pensée; c'est la base profonde de notre caractère et de notre tempérament, à

[97] Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, 43.
[98] Ibid, 44.
[99] Ibid, 191.
[100] Édouard Abramowski, *Le Subconscient Normal: Nouvelles recherches expérimentales* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1914).

> l'édification desquels a concouru toute le passé, tous les accidents, toutes les impressions de la vie. [101]

Epstein follows Abramowski in this conception of an embodied reservoir of what Théodule Ribot called "affective memory" - memories that have only an emotional tone but are emptied of all ideational content, recalled not as ideas but as feelings. Ribot wrote, in *La psychologie des sentiments*, "y a-t-il des états affectifs purs, c'est-à-dire vides de tout élément intellectual, de tout contenu réprésentatif, qui ne soient liés ni à des perceptions, ni à des images, ni à des concepts, qui soient simplement subjectifs, agréables, désagreables ou mixtes?"[102] Ribot's hypothesis was yes, and that these pure affective memories will be stored in the body's cénesthésie/coenesthesia.[103] The preservation of embodied affects in the subconscious, and our awareness of our body's internal state, for Epstein, determines the quality of our spiritual life:

> La coenesthésie n'est autre chose que l'ensemble des notions que la sensibilité possède à un moment donné sur la vie végétative. La coenesthésie, on se la rappelle, détermine la qualité du subconscient. **Le subconscient à son tour détermine la religiosité**. Un premier retentissement d'une vie végétative un peu bruyante sera **un regain de mysticisme**.[104]

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[101] Abramowski, *Le Subconscient Normal,* 137. Epstein reproduces several passages of Abramowski at length in *La Lyrosophie*, 56-57.

[102] Théodule Ribot, *La psychologie des sentiments* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896), 7. For an in-depth explanation of the idea of affective memory and its relation to the Proustian idea of involuntary memory, see Jacqueline Carroy, "Psychologie des sentiments et mémoire affective. De Ribot à Proust," *Revue philosophique*, no.4 (2016): 509-520; Douglas W. Alden, "Proust and Ribot," *Modern Language Notes* 58, no. 7 (November 1943): 501-507; E.B. Titchener, "Affective Memory," *The Philosophical Review* 4, no. 1 (January, 1895): 65-76; Marina Trakas, "No Trace Beyond Their Name? Affective Memories, A Forgotten Concept," *L'Anée psychologique* 121 (2021): 129-173.

[103] The idea of coenesthesia is similar to the notion of interoception, our internal sense of bodily organs, our feeling of wellbeing or illness. See: Erik Ceunen, Johan W.S. Vlaeyen, and Ilse Van Diest, "On the Origin of Interoception," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, (May 2016): 1-17. Ribot's definition of "cénesthésie: 'La cénesthésie, c'est-à-dire . . . la conscience de notre corps en tant que vivant et agissant." Ribto, *Psychologie des sentiments*, 120. For a discussion of the use of this sense in French literary culture in the nineteenth century, see Lauren Silvers, "Beyond the Senses: The Cenesthetic Poetics of French Symbolism," *Modern Philology* 112, no. 2 (November 2014): 381-404. For a historical account of the idea of interoception, or "coenesthesis," "common feeling," see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), especially Chapter XXII, "Coenaesthesis" and Chapter XXIII, "Phantoms," 237-270. Georges Vigarello, "Ribot et le 'sens du corps," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 206, no. 4 Théodule Ribot (October-December 2016): 501-508.

[104] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 155.

Epstein's positive evaluation of the subconscious coincided with the transvaluation of the intellect in certain intellectual circles at the turn of the century. Michael R. Finn points out that the final years of the nineteenth century saw the word "intellectual" take on the connotation of artificiality as opposed to profundity: "writers such as Valéry, Gide, and Proust prized not the intellectual but what was more dynamic and unpredictable, and thus authentic, something intuitive and unconscious." [105] In the preface of his posthumously published collection of essays entitled *Contre Sainet-Beuve*, Proust confesses:

> Chaque jour j'attache moins de prix à l'intelligence. Chaque jour je me rends mieux compte que ce n'est qu'en dehors d'elle que l'écrivain peut ressaisir quelque chose de nos impressions, c'est-à-dire atteindre quelque chose de lui-même et la seule matière de l'art.[106]

Proust considers the intellect as possessing no creative potential but performing the function of classifying and organizing. Therefore, for the artist, it is inferior to instinct, which is free, creative, immediate, and spontaneous. Proust, therefore, calls for a re-evaluation of the relative priority of intellect versus instinct:

> Et cette infériorité de l'intelligence, c'est tout de même à l'intelligence qu'il faut demander de l'établir. Car si l'intelligence ne mérite pas la couronne suprême, c'est elle seule qui est capable de la décerner. Et si elle n'a dans la hiérarchie des vertus que la seconde place, il n'y a qu'elle qui soit capable de proclamer que l'instinct doit occuper la première.[107]

In the psychological literature, there is a growing recognition that the source of artistic creativity does not arise from conscious intellect but the deep reserves of the subconscious. Théodule Ribot's *Essay sur l'imagination créatrice* connected creative imagination in all domains - artistic, scientific, mystical - directly to the dynamic operations of the subconscious. He wrote, "Ce que les poètes appellent l'inspiration, n'est-ce pas un travail cérébral, involontaire, presque

[105] Michael R. Finn, *Figures of the Pre-Freudian Unconscious From Flaubert to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 8.
[106] Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 43.
[107] Ibid.

inconscient, ou qui, du moins, n'arrive à la conscience que sous forme de résultats?"[108] Paul Chabaneix, who was a reference for Epstein, surveyed a group of contemporary artists and scientists about the role of the subconscious in the creative aspect of their work.[109] Chabaneix's *Le Subconscient chez les artistes, les savants et les écrivains* (1897) was then received very positively by Remy de Gourmont in his essay "La Création subconscient." Gourmont made his point by quoting Ribot, "neither reflection nor will power can take the place of inspiration for the purpose of original creation."[110]

The subconscious also attracted the attention of psychical researchers at the end of the nineteenth century. For most psychical researchers, many of whom came from a natural sciences background, the supernatural spirit hypothesis was unacceptable. Although they are "supernormal," as Myers puts it, phenomena such as mediumship, telepathy, and automatic writing have natural explanations without the need to postulate the existence of communication with the spirit of the dead. Many psychical researchers who observed séances noted the profound alteration in the medium's personality, as if the medium suddenly becomes, or possesses, a different self. So, the question boils down to locating the origin of these phenomena outside the normal conscious personality since automatic writing, telepathic communications, and mediumistic messages must come from somewhere outside the normal, conscious self.

Frederick Myers accounted for the ostensibly doubling or splitting of the self with the concept of the "subliminal self," a layer of personality below the threshold, the "limen," of the conscious self. As Myers defines it, the subliminal self consists of

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[108] Théodule Ribot, *Essai sur l'imagination creatrice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900), 139.
[109] Paul Chabaneix, *Le Le Subconscient chez les artistes, les savants et les écrivains* (Paris: Baillière, 1897).
[110] Remy de Gourmont, "Subconscious Creation," in *Decadence and Other Essays on the Culture of Ideas* (London: Antipodes Press, 2017), 150.

> thoughts, feelings, &c., lying beneath the ordinary threshold (limen) of consciousness, as opposed to *supraliminal*, lying above the threshold. Excitations are termed subliminal when they are too weak to rise into direct notice; and I have extended the application of the term to feeling, thought, or faculty, which is kept thus submerged, not by its own weakness, but by the constitution of man's personality. The threshold (Schwelle) must be regarded as a level above which waves may rise, like a slab washed by the sea, rather than as an entrance into a chamber.[111]

Myers considers the subliminal self to be also a stream of consciousness "in some kind of co-ordination with my organism, and forming some part of my total individuality."[112] Different from Pierre Janet's view of the subconscious, Myers does not consider this subliminal self to be intrinsically abnormal and pathological. Myers even conjectured the existence of a mythopoetic, or myth generating, function of the subconscious.[113]

This creative function of the subconscious was seized upon by the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy, who conducted a five-year study of the famous psychic medium Hélène Smith, culminating in a widely influential account of his research, *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, published in 1899. During Flournoy's observations, Smith would enter into a trance state and recount several past lives, which Flournoy classified into the Hindu, Royal, and Martian cycles. Smith claimed to be a reincarnation of Marie Antoinette, a fifteenth-century Arab princess married to a Hindu prince, and to have visited the planet Mars. Smith produced not only paintings demonstrating Martian landscapes and "reproduced" a Martian language during her automatic writing sessions.[114]

What is remarkable about Flournoy's conclusion is that he steered away from answering the questions of facility and instead focused on the affective dimensions of the medium's

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[111] Frederic W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), xxi.
[112] Myers quoted in Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 283.
[113] Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 314.
[114] Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars: Étude sur un cas somnambulisme avec glossolalia* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900). For a discussion of Symbolists' fascination with Hélène Smith's somnambulism, see Allison Morehead, "Symbolism, Mediumship, and the 'Study of the Soul That Has Constituted Itself as a Positivist Science.'" *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 34, no. 1 (2009): 77–85.

representations and reports, as opposed to their "authenticity" or "objectivity.[115] Flournoy considered Smith's revelations to be expressing wish fulfillments, some of which sexual in nature, anticipating Freud.

He also conjectured that Smith's representation of her past lives, her "somnambulistic romances," are nourished by a subconscious self. Some of the details of Smith's reports, Flournoy argued, are results of what he called "cyptomensia," memories of books Smith had read as a child but "forgotten" by her conscious, adult self. Others were prepared by what Flournoy called "subliminal incubation," whereby subconscious mental elements combine to produce new representations:

> I do not refer to a conscious preparation, but to a subliminal incubation or elaboration, unknown by her, showing itself on the level of ordinary personality in the form of fugitive gleams and fragmentary images during her sleep a night or the moments of awaking in the mourning. […] So far as her great cycles or her detached messages are concerned, they are fabricated in her in spite of herself, and without her having a word to say about their production, any more than one has in the formation of his dreams. When it is recollected, on the other hand, that the phenomena of incubation, of subliminal preparation, unconscious cerebration, are universal facts, playing their rôle in the psychology of every human being, we can rely upon finding them also among the mediums, and upon their holding a place with them much more important than with others, owing to the fact that their subconscious life is much more fully developed.[116]

Emphasizing the affective, creative function of the subconscious over its dissociative, pathological underside allowed Epstein to formulate an aesthetic theory based on art's ability to directly address the subconscious as what he calls an "aesthetic domain," circumventing or suspending the intellect's cognitive processing of sensations. As Epstein says of Cocteau and

[115] Brower, *Unruly Spirits*, 91.
[116] Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Lanugaes*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 48.

indeed of the modernist tendency in poetry, the modus operandi is "**sentir avant de comprendre**" "to feel before to understand."[117]

Modernist poetry's precise attention to the undulations of our immediate sensations, its spontaneity and impulsiveness, and its refusal to be bound by grammar or logic are not just signs of a new style of literature but indications of a new style of being in the world, a new personality type, an "esprit nouveau." This is, according to Epstein, the inevitable outcome of the mind adjusting to the modern world. The measured pace of reflective contemplation no longer catches up to the velocity of modern sensory stimulations. So, the authors of a modern literature *par excellence* must first and foremost attend to the new reality, to use a phrase by Remy de Gourmont, of the "tyranny of the nervous system."

For conservative commentators around the turn of the century, surrendering to the subconscious, returning to a purely affective life, and reconnecting with the pre-logical life of the human-animal, was prelude to madness and social degeneration. Gustave Le Bon understood the danger of the modern crowd precisely as conditioning the domination of instinct over intellect; he wrote, "In the collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individual, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened." Le Bon argued that should the "unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand," the modern man "descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization."[118]

For Epstein, the reverse is true. Not only is letting ourselves temporarily be dominated by the subconscious not a neurasthenic illness, but it is also the conditioning of perception required for that lyrosophical state of mind which leads to ecstatic revelations. Epstein fully recognized that

[117] Jean Epstein, *La poésie d'aujourd'hui: un nouvel état d'intelligence* (Paris: Éditions de la Sirène, 1921), 111.
[118] Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 9.

in the modern condition of living, "la santé d'aujourd'hui est colorée de fatigue."[119] However, unlike Angelo Mosso, who saw intellectual fatigue, which the modern urban subject is increasingly exposed to, as a social problem to be resolved, Epstein thought that this weakening of the intellect brought on by chronic, widespread fatigue across the modern masses "liberates … the subconscious from the subjection in which intelligence holds it."[120] When intellectual fatigue reaches a certain point, it becomes "paralyzed," and the subconscious, in turn, is "delivered from its rein, takes more completely and almost sole possession of our personality."[121] As a consequence of widespread intellectual fatigue, modern civilization, Epstein argued, "contains the cause of mysticism."[122]

Epstein's conception of the subconscious as the reservoir of affective memories, as an "aesthetic domain," as an embodied coenesthetic mode of relating the body and the mind puts him at odds, in the early 1920s, with the Freudian idea of the unconscious, which started to gain popularity in France.

For Freud, the unconscious is the repository of socially unacceptable ideas, desires, drives, and traumatic experiences, much of which are sexual. Although inaccessible to us most of the time, the unconscious is still linguistically structured and contains latent meaning, which can be rationally understood once we gain access to it either in dreams or in therapeutic settings. Once its

[119] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 108-109.
[120] For a background of the nineteenth century sociological and medical discourse about fatigue, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), especially Chapter One, "From Idleness to Fatigue," 19-44. Rabinbach wrote, "the ability of fatigue to move fluently between science and literature reveals the tendency of nineteenth-century thinkers to equate the psychological with the physical and to locate the body as the site where social deformations and dislocations can be most easily observed," 21. Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 99.
[121] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 99-100.
[122] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 105.

messages are decoded, the unconscious can reveal those truths about our personality previously hidden from our conscious selves. The unconscious, for Freud, is the result of repressive mechanisms whereby ideas that threaten the conscious Ego are segregated to form a repository of forbidden ideas.

Freud thought of the unconscious as consisting of ideas, which in the "manifest content" of the dream or the slips of the tongue, became disguised and scrambled beyond recognition. If only the psychoanalyst could find the key, the cipher, they could then, in a reverse-engineering process, decipher the original meaning of those snippets of information dispatched from the unconscious and understand what the unconscious is trying to communicate to us.

However, it is precisely the idea of detection, of applying logical rules to the subconscious, that Epstein found absurd. In an essay he penned for Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's journal *L'Esprit nouveau*, Epstein called the Freudian school of psychoanalysis "le nick-carterisme du psychologie," after the eponymous dime novel detective who was gaining widespread popular readership in France.[123] According to Epstein, whose tone was somewhat mocking, Freud's clue-hunting in slips of the tongue, word association games, and the analysis of dreams constituted a childish "fortune-telling etymological symbolism."[124] For Epstein, the subconscious does not have, as Freud thought, any ideational content and obeys an entirely different set of rules for its organization and expression.[125]

According to Epstein, Freud's error was his application of the associationist laws of contiguity and similitude to the organization of the ideational contents of the subconscious.[126] The idea that human thought follows specific implicit rules of operation goes back to Plato and

[123] Jean Epstein, "Freud, ou le nick-cartérisme en psychologie," *L'Esprit nouveau*, no. 16 (1922): 1857-1864.
[124] Ibid, 1861.
[125] Ibid, 1861-1862.
[126] Ibid, 1859-1861.

Aristotle in their accounts of memory as a sequential mental process. The laws of contiguity and similitude were "laws" which attempted to explain how one thought follows another in recollection: two "ideas" can either be connected by necessity, meaning there are analogous or contrasting, or become connected by temporal contingency, meaning that the two ideas in question once occurred one after another sometime in the past. Similitude and contiguity, therefore, explained, for Plato and Aristotle, the sequence in which ideas occur our mind in memory.[127]

The notion of contiguity and similitude as rules of memory underwent a transformation in the discourses of Empiricist philosophy in the Enlightenment period and the associationist psychology of the nineteenth century to become laws that explained the formation of the mind and all mental activities.

Both Empiricism and Associationist Psychology were responses to the Cartesian philosophy of the mind. According to Descartes' Rationalism, our senses are not reliable sources of knowledge; knowledge about the world can only be derived a priori by applying innate reason. Empiricism would turn this idea on its head and argue that knowledge can only come from sensory experiences. John Locke, for instance, argued that our mind contains nothing innate; it was a *tabula rasa* like a wax tablet on which sensory experience left its marks[128]. Similarly, the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac designed a thought experience in which he imaged a statue becoming increasingly sentient and en-souled as it becomes endowed, one by one, with the five human sensory modalities.[129] British associationist philosophers then took the laws of contiguity and similitude as mechanisms that explained how complex "ideas" can be derived from

[127] Howard C. Warren, *A History of the Association Psychology* (New York, Chicago, and Boston: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 25.
[128] Ibid, 266.
[129] Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Treatise on Sensations* (Los Angeles: School of Philosophy, USC, 1930). For a concise summary of the arguments, see Warren, *op.cit*., 183-186.

simple ones and how reflective consciousness can arise out of simpler forms such as sensation and perception. In France, Théodule Ribot introduced British associationism to French psychology in the second half of the nineteenth century with his *La Psychologie anglaise contemporaine* in 1870. Ribot combined British associationism and German laboratory methodology with the French clinical tradition in developing the French school of experimental psychology.[130] It should not come as a surprise that Freud should also apply the law of association to mental operations in the unconscious, as it had already been done by Ribot and Janet, both disciples of Jean-Martin Charcot, as was Freud.

Epstein, however, deviated from the mainstream use of the laws of association. For Freud, the laws of contiguity and similitude applied to ideas, whereas for Epstein, these laws operated not with ideational contents but in the realm of feelings ("sentiment"). They are, for Epstein, not laws of the intellect but laws of affect. Epstein charges Freud with committing the same kind of error British anthropologist James Frazer made in the *Golden Bough*.

Frazer developed the idea of his predecessor E.B Tylor that magic was "mistaking an ideal connection for a real one," and argued that among primitive peoples, the practice of "imitative" and "contagious" magic was nothing but misapplying the psychological laws of contiguity and similitude to the physical world which do not obey the laws of the mind: "men mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature, and hence imagined that the control which they have, or seem to have, over their thoughts, permitted them to exercise a corresponding control over things."[131] Frazer's ideas were received approvingly by Freud and applied by him to the study of "obsessional

[130] Larry Sommer McGrath, "The Bergsoninan Moment: Science and Spirit in France, 1847-1907" (PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2014), 116-120.
[131] James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1925), 11-12.

neurotics," who, according to Freud, suffered from the illusion of the "omnipotence of thoughts."[132]

Epstein, however, thought Tylor, Frazer, and Freud had a false understanding of magic and a faulty understanding of the laws of contiguity and similitude. For him, these laws are not laws governing the organization of ideas, which "primitive" magic projects falsely onto the physical world: "Frazer a eu le tort assez grave d'appeler les lois de similitude et de congiguïté, lois de l'enchaînement des idées, Les idées s'enchaînent autrement, c'est de sentiments qu'il s'agit ici."[133] Magic does not work with objects in the real world as much as it takes affects to be its raw material and the domain of the subconscious as its field of operation. Epstein distanced himself from Freud but moved closer to Jung and Bachelard.

4.1 MUSIC AND SYMPATHY

One exception to the Symbolist concerns over the concreteness and the materiality of the medium impeding spiritual revelation was music. In the fin-de-siècle Symbolist circles, music was considered to be the Symbolist medium *par excellence*. Walter Pater famously declared that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."[134] For Pater, music was the holy grail of Symbolist expression as it is unencumbered by materiality and does not refer to anything concrete in the physical world. He wrote, "[f]or while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the

[132] For a discussion of Frazer's influence on Freud, see A.S. Byatt, "'The Omnipotence of Thought': Frazer, Freud and Post-Modernist Fiction," in *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence*, ed. Robert Fraser (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 270-308.
[133] Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, 49.
[134] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124.

constant effort of art to obliterate it."[135] Schopenhauer, from whom the Symbolists derived their philosophy of music, also privileged music above all others as the only art form which is not a mere imitation of the world as it appears to the senses. He wrote, "music expresses in an exceedingly universal language, in a homogenous material, that is, in mere tones, and with the greatest distinctness and truth, the inner being, the *thing-in-itself* of the world, which we think of under the concept of will, according to its most distinct manifestation."[136] In other words, music expresses the soul without needing any material intermediary. Schopenhauer wrote, "music is an unmediated objectivation and copy of the entire will," and as a result, music is "unlike the other arts, which "speak only of the shadows while music speaks of the essence."[137]

The privileging of music as an exceptional art form capable of communicating emotions in a universal and immediate fashion is diffused in the artistic discourse of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Symbolist poetry tried to produce the effect of musicality by foregrounding the tonality and rhythm of words over their meaning. Reading becomes not scanning for meaning but, first of all, feeling for the rhythmic vibration of a series of sounds. Verlaine opened his poem "Art poétique" by declaring, "De la musique avant toute chose."[138] René Ghil redefined the poet's role as a "musician of words," and imaged poetry as "une poésie instrumentale, où sont des mots les notes."[139] Mallarmé emphasized words in poems as "vocables" as having first and foremost an sonorous, affective tone, before a meaning. As Lauren Silvers wrote, for Mallarmé, poetry becomes incantatory, "vibratory to the point not only of being felt in the body but coinciding with

[135] Ibid.
[136] Arthur Schopenhauer, quoted in Philip Alperson, "Schopenhauer and Musical Revelation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40, no. 2 (Winter, 1981): 159.
[137] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I, trans., and ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 285.
[138] Paul Verlaine, "Art poétique," in *French Symbolist Poetry*, 34.
[139] René Ghil, *Traité du verbe, avec avant-dire de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Chez Giraud, 1886), 23.

the body's animating force."[140] When Debussy asked permission to set Mallarmé's "Afternoon of a Faun" (1876) to music, Mallarmé responded: "But I thought I had already done that!"[141]

This musical analogy is carried over into the visual arts as well. Symbolist painters theorized their works not as imitating the outer appearance of nature as much as arranging colors, lines, and shapes according to the abstract rules of harmony and rhythm. For instance, in a letter to André Fontainas, Paul Gauguin wrote, "color, which, like music, is vibration, can reach what is most general and consequently most vague in nature; its inner power."[142]

As Laurent Guido's wide-ranging *L'Age du rythme* demonstrates convincingly, by the early twentieth century, the ideal of musicality, the obsession with rhythm as a metaphor and an aesthetic principle have reached a point of saturation in a variety of artistic disciplines.[143] Rhythm became, Guido argues, a "point de convergence des différentes sources d'influence du cinéma," and can be considered one of the central notions around which the formal aesthetic speculations of *cinéma de l'esprit* revolved.[144] Dulac, for instance, considered film not as a primarily a narrative form, but something more akin to instrumental music. She wrote, "Le cinéma peut certes raconter une histoire, mais il ne faut pas oublier que l'histoire n'est rien. L'histoire, c'est une surface."[145] She defined "action" in film, not as representations, "facts," but primarily as "sensations" that the filmmaker orchestrates together rhythmically. A filmmaker plays with images just like a musician plays with sounds, for a film, claimed Dulac, is a "visual symphony."[146]

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[140] Lauren Silvers, "Beyond the Senses," 403.
[141] Richard Sieburth, "1885, February – The Music of the Future," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 796.
[142] Paul Gauguin, "Letter to André Fontainas (1899)," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 209.
[143] Guido, *L'Age du rythme*, 9.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Germain Dulac, *Écrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937),* 108.
[146] Tami Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations*, 141-142.

On the one hand, Dulac's conception of cinema as visual music harks back to its Romantic-Symbolist predecessors and connects her with various tendencies in modernist art which attempted to produce, theoretically as well as practically the condition of synaesthesia – the simultaneous correspondence of two or more sensory modalities in aesthetic experience. On the other hand, Dulac's theory had a cinematic specificity: it depended on what I call a double-aspect theory of movement, or the equivalence of interior and exterior movement – a sympathetic relationship between movement on screen and psychological movement, this for Dulac, is what separates cinema from the other arts. She wrote,

> L'art du mouvement, voilà ce qu'est le cinema, et j'entends par mouvement le déroulement de la vie même avec les faits extérieurs qui se succèdent et le mouvement d'esprit qui les cause. Tout est mouvement, autour de nous dans l'inconnu des choses, dans les faits perceptibles et non perceptibles. Physiquement, moralement, le mouvement nous emporte et c'est cette course effrénée de nos âmes, de nos corps, du monde où nous sommes, qui est l'essence de la vrai pensée cinématographique.[147]

For Dulac, not only should the goal of the cinematic art be the expression of "spiritual nuances," of psychological movements, but interior and exterior movements are already, on a theoretical level, two aspects of the same interconnected phenomenon.

> Mouvement, vie intérieure, ces deux termes n'ont rien d'incompatible, quoi de plus mouvementé que la vie psychologique, avec ses réactions, ses multiples impressions, ses ressauts, ses rêves, ses souvenirs. Le cinéma est merveilleusement outillé pour exprimer les manifestations de notre pensée, de notre coeur, de notre mémoire. Son but réel doit être la vision de la vie intérieure …[148]

[147] Dulac, "Le cinéma, art des nuances spirituelles," in *Écrits sur le cinéma*, 51.
[148] Dulac, "Les Procédés expressifs du cinématographe," in *Écrits sur le cinéma*, 37.

The movement on screen, for Dulac, corresponds to an interior movement in the spectator's soul. Exterior movement becomes the index of exterior movement, mirroring it, sympathetically, unmediated, as if spooky action at a distance.

Another attempt to link interior and exterior movements in aesthetic experience was the notion of *Einfühlung,* which was developed in German art history and aesthetics theory around 1900.[149] Although not the originator of the idea, Theodor Lipps gave the notion of *Einfühlung* its most popular interpretation. Lipps believed that there was an innate psychological inclination of humans to "feel into" ("sich einfühlen") objects and people, to internally mimic the world around us, and to subconsciously duplicate its forms and movements and then project it back onto the world. Aesthetic enjoyment, for Lipps, is "the pleasantness of my ego, insofar as it is felt into the object," it is "objectified self-enjoyment:"

> I give expression to this kind of *Einfühlung* in everyday life when I say that the line stretches or bends, surges up and away again, confines itself; and when I say that a rhythm strives or refrains, is full of tension or resolution etc. This is all my own activity, my own vital, internal movement, but one that has been objectified. [150]

For Lipps, we can be internally moved by a static image because we animate it ourselves. The "rising" of the mountain, the zig-zag cadence of the line in decorative patterns, and the flow of curves are virtual movements that result from us projecting the actual movement of the mind back onto the static image. Movement originates in the mind of the spectator, who mimics, inwardly,

[149] Susan Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2018). Lanzoni gives a concise history of the idea in "Part I: Empathy as the Art of Movement," 21-100. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, "Introduction," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-18; Magdalena Nowak, "The Complicated History of Einfühlung" *Argument* 1, no. 2 (2011): 301-326; Robert Vischer, "On the optical sense of form: a contribution to aesthetics," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics*, trans. H.F Mallgrave and E. Ikonomou (Santa Monica: The Getty Center Publication Programs, 1994), 89-123.

[150] Theodor Lipps, quoted in Robin Curtis, "*Einfühlung* and Abstraction in the Moving Image," *Science in Context* 25, no. 3 (2012): 429.

through sensory-motor coupling, the suggested movement of the static image. We animate the image, as Robert Tichener put it, with "the muscles of our mind."[151] Movements in aesthetic enjoyment, for Lipps, originate inwardly; it is the "Ausdruck," the "expression" of the interior movement which imbues the static image with a sense of movement that it does not intrinsically possess.

The theory of *Einfühlung* became influential in the German-speaking context and became, in the works of Wilhelm Worringer, the theoretical ground for understanding Gothic art, which, according to Worringer, embodied the tortuous spirituality of the German national psyche. The geometric abstraction of Gothic art, Worringer explained, was the objectification of internal spiritual struggles that the German ancestors were prone to experience. Rudolf Kurtz, in *Expressionism and Film*, based his explanation of the aesthetics of German expressionist film on the idea of *Einfühlung* as the theoretical justification and explanation for the use of static sets, deliberately deformed, standing in for the psyche of the characters as the expression of interior struggles.[152]

I reference the German theory of *Einfühlung* here because, on the one hand, both Dulac's and Lipps' understandings of how the image affects us were reliant on a certain notion of sensory-motor coupling, of internal mimicry, of a mirroring mechanism which brings the exterior and the interior in some correspondent, synchronous unison, so that movement in one is connected with the movement in the other. On the other hand, there is a significant difference. The theory of *Einfühlung* emphasized the **projection** of movement from the will of the subject to the form of

[151] Robert Titchener, quoted in Gustav Jahoda, "Theodor Lipps and the Shift from 'Sympathy' to 'Empathy'," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 161.
[152] Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1997); Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionism and Film*, ed. Christian Kiening and Ulrich Johannes Beil, trans. Brenda Benthien (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2016).

the object. The movement must be generated from within on the part of the subject. Without the will of the subject supplying the mimicry, without the mind "completing" the image, supplying stasis with animation, the chain of empathy between the subject (the spectator) and the object (the image) breaks down. For Lipps, ultimately, *Einfühlung* supplies a theory of how one enjoys the self in the other, of how one sees the self in the image, whereas I argue the film counterpart outlined by Dulac and the *cinéma de l'esprit* was the reverse. The movement originates from the image, it is a real, not an implied, movement, and it replaces the movement of the will. We cannot help but feel the movement of the other as a movement that is simultaneously within the self and indistinguishable from it.

What kind of a subject is implied here, then? How is the movement exterior to the subject duplicated in the interior of the subject? For Dulac, this duplication is automatic, unmediated by the intellect. It is not the output of an "image processing" procedure, not the result of a reflective cognition; the mind does not translate the exterior movement of the film image into interior movement via a series of cognitive operations but simply mirrors it. To use an old metaphor, exterior movement does tug on our invisible heart strings.

I claim that Dulac's theory was a revival of that old idea of sympathy, which, throughout Western thought, had been the name given to the phenomenon that Eric Schliesser called "coaffectability."[153] Sympathy, derived from the Greek meaning "together feeling," had been used by numerous thinkers from the stoics onwards to explain a plethora of phenomena. The Stoics used sympathy to explain how human perception worked; philosophers and physicians used it to explain how the body and the mind were correlated in an otherwise mysterious, co-affective bond. Sympathy was used to explain the interconnectedness of the nervous system, the resonance of

[153] Eric Schliesser, "Introduction," in Sympathy: A History, ed. Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

musical strings, and the distant action of magnets. It was used to explain how we seem to be able to recognize the emotion and intention of others instantaneously even when it is "hidden" inside the mind of another; it was used by anthropologists such as Tylor and Frazer as the mechanism of "primitive" magic.[154] However, what these phenomena have in common, as Schliesser points out, are five characteristics:

1. Sympathy is used to explain apparent action at a distance.
2. The very possibility of sympathy presuppose that it takes place among things/events/features that are in one sense or another alike, often within a single being/unity/organism (which can be the whole universe) …
3. The cause(s) of sympathy is/are invisible to the naked eye.
4. The effect(s) of sympathy can be (nearly) instantaneous.
5. Sympathy is, in principle, bidirectional even if the elements or agents that enter into a sympathetic relationship vary in their power to do so.[155]

For Dulac, there is an equivalence between the exterior movement of the image and the interior movement in the spectator's mind precisely because the two terms are implicitly conceptualized as two elements in a sympathetic relationship. The link between them is immaterial as well as unmediated. They work at a distance, are linked by an invisible causality, and the effect works instantaneously (without the intercession of the intellect) and potentially bidirectionally (the image's moving quality can be enhanced by the interior movement of the mind when it is projected back onto the image). I would even go as far as to say that this sympathetic conception of the relation between the image and the subject is magical.

However, the crucial question is this: Schliesser pointed out that the possibility of a sympathetic relationship between two elements depends on some notion of similitude. What, one must ask, is the similitude between exterior and interior movements, between the image and its sensory impact?

[154] See various chapter in Eric Schliesser's *Sympathy: A History*.
[155] Eric Schliesser, "Introduction," 6-9.

4.2 THE VIBRATORY SENSORIUM

The common term which described both, for Dulac, was rhythm, but I would suggest that behind the musical metaphor lies an affinity on a deeper level. There was a co-affective bond between the image and the spectator because, on the level of physiology and psychology, sensation and perception were understood to be, in the early twentieth-century modernist context, both vibratory mechanisms that responded to the universal vibration which traversed the physical world. The reception of the image was taken to be a case of sympathetic vibration because the human sensorium was considered to be vibratory at its most basic level.

This vibratory understanding of the human sensorium can be traced back to the discovery of the protoplasm in the nineteenth century and the role it played in the evolutionary biology of the mind. In 1869, Thomas Henry Huxley gave a lecture entitled "On the Physical Basis of Life" to a Sunday evening gathering of Scottish Presbyterians in Edinburgh.[156] In what proved to be a very influential and controversial talk, Huxley argued that all living beings are unified from an evolutionary perspective because they all shared one single matter in their constitution, which is called protoplasm. This nitrogenous, semi-fluid, elastic substance could be found, according to Huxley, in both plants and animal cells; it was understood to be the basic substance that carried out the animating actions of life, which had been previously understood to be some mysterious, immaterial "élan." For Huxley, the existence of protoplasm vitiated the need for any vitalist explanations of life. Protoplasm was the physical basis of life itself. He wrote, "all vital action may,

[156] Huxley, "On the Physical Basis of Life."

with equal propriety, be said to be the result of the molecular forces of the protoplasm which display it."[157]

By the time Huxley gave his lecture in 1869, the existence of such a substance in both plant and animal cells had been verified by scientists in France and Germany. A scientific consensus had formed regarding the properties of protoplasm, and the German biologist Ernst Haeckel was able to proclaim the idea of protoplasm as the physical basis of life had been "almost universally recognized" in the scientific community by the end of the century.[158]

What proved to be both more controversial and more productive, however, was Huxley's claim that the existence of protoplasm also proved the perennial unity and monogenesis of all life forms.[159] The sharing of this basis life-giving substance across all life forms proved that they once evolved from a single origin. Huxley claimed that the implication of protoplasm's discovery was like placing one's feet "on the first rung of a ladder which, in most people's estimation, is the reverse of Jacob's and leads to the antipodes of heaven."[160]

Controversial as it was in the late nineteenth century, the discovery of protoplasm as the proof of monogenetic evolution nevertheless stimulated an entire industry of research around it. Soon, the notion of protoplasm escaped its biological context and was transplanted into a variety of other disciplines and translated into the general cultural milieu of the fin-de-siècle; it fueled a cultural phenomenon that the historian of science Robert Michael Brain has aptly dubbed "protoplasmania."[161]

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[157] Huxley, "On the Physical Basis of Life," 154. See also Gerald L. Geison, "The Protoplasmic Theory of Life and the Vitalist-Mechanist Debate," *Isis* 60, no. 3 (Autumn, 1969), 282.
[158] Geison, "The Protoplasmic Theory of Life," 278.
[159] Geison.
[160] Huxley, *op.cit.*, 154.
[161] Robert Michael Brain, "How Edvard Munch and August Strindberg Contracted Protoplasmania: Memory, Synesthesia, and the Vibratory Organism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 35, no. 1 (March, 2010): 7-38. Robert Michael Brain, "The Vibratory Organism: Protoplasm and General Physiology," in *The*

As it turned out, protoplasm was, as the name suggests, plastic; its physical form was responsive to changes in its chemical and physical environment: changes in temperature, light, pressure, and chemical condition produced corresponding changes in its material form, and repeated external stresses could be registered as permanent changes in its structure. In other words, protoplasm can respond to and remember its environment. Based on these characteristics, Ernst Haeckel proposed a neo-Lamarckian physiological theory of heredity in his 1875 treatise *Über die Wellenzeugung der Lebensteilchen oder die Perigenesis der Plastidule* as a challenge to Darwin's molecular theory.[162] Whereas Darwin conjectured that living cells shed tiny particles called gemmules which collected in the animal's reproductive organ before fertilization, Haeckel proposed that it was the protoplasm that carried hereditary information. Protoplasm registered and recorded, argued Haeckel, the waveform vibrations of the external world as active vibrations in its colloidal structure. These waveform vibrations in the protoplasm would, over time, develop into different physiological functions, which would then be passed down to the next generation. Protoplasm, therefore, explained the differentiation among life forms in the course of evolution.

The mimetic and mnemonic properties of the protoplasm also served as the basis for a theory of the evolution of sense organs in animals and humans. Because the protoplasm was a responsive material, even the most primitive animals appeared to display properties of sensibility typically found in animals with a nervous system. The French physiologist Raphaël Du Bois provided a general theory of sensation based on his studies of the common piddock, a mollusk species. He observed that this mollusk possessed a siphon through which it could sense all forms of external stimuli – light, sounds, touch, and smell. Different from "higher animals" with nerves,

Pulse of Modernism: Physiological Aesthetics in Fin-de-Siècle Europe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 37-63.

[162] Brain, "The Vibratory Organism," 39.

ganglia, and brain, in which the protoplasm is differentiated to perform various physiological functions so that sensory apparatuses developed specialized modalities, the mollusk had a single sense organ which functioned simultaneously as the animal's eye, ear, finger, and nose. For the mollusk, all senses are reduced to one modality; all sensations are experienced a-modally as different frequencies and intensities of vibration. Put it simply, the mollusk is a synaesthetic animal.[163]

Since all sensations were understood to be vibrations that acted on the protoplasmically-based nervous system, they could be, in theory, cross-wired, confused, or even re-united. The prospect of such a synaesthetic sensory experience was seen from radically different perspectives around the turn of the century. For conservatives like Max Nordau, whose aversion to the Symbolist style of "decadence" extended to its obsession with synaesthesia, the correspondence of the senses that the Symbolists sought after was not just symptomatic of a disease of the mind but also the sign of an atavistic "degeneration." What for the Symbolist would be a Neoplatonist epistrophic return to the primordial oneness of being, for Nordau, was a regression to the condition of an oyster.[164]

The French philosopher and biologist Félix Le Dantec, a "friend of the artistic avant-garde," developed upon Haeckel and Du Bois' arguments and based the mimetic and mnemonic functions of the protoplasm in its colloidal structure, which is the reason for its vibratory responsiveness. For Le Dantec, while there are "specific resonators" such as the pipes of an organ that only "imitate" – resonate with – a specific range of frequencies, the colloids of the protoplasm are "indifferent resonators" which are capable of imitating all frequencies of vibrations. The colloidal structure also ensures that the mimetic vibrations brought about in the protoplasm by incoming vibrations

[163] Brain, "How Edvard Much and August Strindberg Contracted Protoplasmania," 17.
[164] Ibid.

will be maintained long after their sources have disappeared. Since our nervous system is colloidal in structure, these stored imitative vibrations are the basis of our memory.[165]

Le Dantec defended synaesthesia against its conservative detractors. He maintained that in higher organisms, there was a capacity - and a drive - to reunite the senses toward the modality of vision. According to Le Dantec, the collaboration of the senses gave us a complete picture of the external world, especially when aided with prosthetics of scientific instruments such as graphical recording devices, which translated all sensory modalities into vibrations and rendered them to the eyes in graphical forms. For Le Dantec, these recording devices subsumed all senses into vision and helped humans overcome sensory compartmentalization bequeathed by evolution to recover the protoplasmic unity of the senses exemplified by the common piddock.[166]

In his book *L'Art et le geste* (1910), Jean d'Udine developed another theory of synaesthesia based on the work of Le Dantec and Émile Jacques-Dalcroze. According to d'Udine, it was the sense of touch, rather than vision, that was the one which the other senses returned to before they could be cross-referenced in synaesthesia. For d'Udine, sense impressions are reducible to vibrations which the artist, being a sensitive "resonator," must be able to detect, respond to, and remember in order to then synthesize in themselves and, in turn, reproduce in art the rhythmic vibrations which are best able to elicit a sympathetic resonance in the body of the receiver.[167]

Thus, we return to the question of the sympathetic relationship between the moving image and the movement of the soul in Dulac. The vibratory understanding of both sensations and our sense organs provided the implicit theoretical support for such a relationship. *Cinéma de l'esprit*,

[165] Félix Le Dantec, *De l'Homme À La Science* (Paris: Flammarion, 1907), 160–73.
[166] In Brain, "Protoplasmania" 111-112.
[167] Jean d'Udine, *L'Art et le geste* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1910).

in this respect, can be seen as part of the phenomenon of vibratory modernism which Linda Henderson described.[168]

This brings me to the question posed in Chapter Three: how should we describe the ideal spectator in the theory of *cinéma de l'esprit*? What kind of subject are they, and what relationship does the subject enter into with the image on screen? First, this subject has traveled a long way from the Cartesian cogito who "sits in a room reflecting on the contents of … the mental space inside his own head." The Abbaye de Créteil writer Georges Duhamel, who "detest[ed] film and [knew] nothing of its significance" according to Walter Benjamin, nevertheless obliquely landed on one of its consequences for the modern subject when he wrote, "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images."[169] And for Benjamin, this inability of the spectator to contemplate the image, to "abandon himself to his [mental] associations" as they could before a painting, changes completely the relation between the image and the subject. This reconfigured relationship, for Benjamin, was both an opportunity and a danger, aesthetically and politically. Where was cinema to lead the modern subject in the multi-dimensional matrix of modernity with participation-individuation as one axis and rationality-affect as another?

For *cinéma de l'esprit*, the moving image – this modern muse born from mechanism – appeals directly to the biologically-hardwired affective circuit of our boy, works directly on our subconscious and makes us surrender to the sympathetic magic of its vibrations. In the hands of the cinéastes, the cinema is a shortcut to revelation by conditioning our perception and making it ecstatic without effort, without the intercession of the intellect. The subject becomes, in the cinema,

[168] See the collection of essays on "vibratory modernism" in Anthony Enns and Shelley Trower, eds., *Vibratory Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[169] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico1999), 231.

a tuning fork in the vibratory energies of the image, which traverses the bodies of the crowd. We are touched, inwardly and involuntarily, by its music. For the price of our autonomy and rational intelligence, which, according to *cinéma de l'esprit*, had dominated us for too long and turned us into atomized, disenchanted individuals "out of tune" with the *musica universalis*, we could return to that primordial mentality of participation where the boundary between the self and the world had not been defined, we could have a taste of that pre-linguistic, pre-logical, affective *harmonia mundi* of the world.

When Mallarmé reflected on the state of French verse on the occasion of Victor Hugo's death, he accessed the crisis and the innovation of poetry in the modern epoch as constituting not a "revolution," but as "a trembling of the veil" that is "far from the public square."[170] Symbolist made no secret of their aversion to the crowd, to the "public square," to the modern world of machines and mass movements. Jacques Rancière, in his study of the political dimension in Mallarmé's work, argued that Mallarmé's work constituting a placeholder for a future crowd to come. Mallarmé maintained a distance from the modern masses because "the conditions do not yet exist for the union of poet and crowd in the 'hymn of spiritual hearts.'"[171] In recognition of this condition, the poet must choose a self-imposed exile and wait, in the fulness of time, for the rending of the veil.

In an essay entitled "Plaisir sacré," Mallarmé wrote, "la musique s'annonce le dernier et plénier culte humain," "music announces itself as the last total human religion."[172] In the

[170] Mallarmé's words were: "Qui accorde à cette fonction une place ou la première, reconnaît, là, le fait d'actualité : on assiste, comme finale d'un siècle, pas ainsi que ce fut dans le dernier, à des bouleversements ; mais, hors de la place publique, à une inquiétude du voile dans le temple avec des plis significatifs et un peu sa déchirure."
[171] Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, 33.
[172] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1897), 296.

aspirations of *cinéma de l'esprit*, cinema was to replace music to become a new surrogate for religion. Its birth was another trembling of the veil, this time in the middle of the public square facing the crowd. What *cinéma de l'esprit* aspired to, of course, was nothing less than its rending.

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