

# Okkulte Moderne

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Beiträge zur Nichthegemonialen Innovation

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**Band 2**

# Mediality on Trial

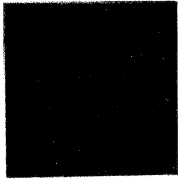
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Testing and Contesting Trance and other Media  
Techniques

Edited by  
Ehler Voss

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OKKULTE  
MODERNE

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*I desired to learn about the shaman, whether it is true /  
or (whether) it is made up and they pretend to be shamans.*

Qā'sElid

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Karl Baier

## The Therapeutic Mediologies of Animal Magnetism

Reconnecting patients through different media with what is considered to be the source of wellbeing is a common concept among therapeutic systems all over the world. In this chapter, the term “therapeutic mediology” is used to designate all manner of theoretical reflections on human mediality and technical media, such as devices and pharmaceuticals, that are considered to mediate the primal healing agent within a given medical or psychotherapeutic school.<sup>1</sup> The focus lies on the mediologies of three leading mesmerists of their time: Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), the founder of the mesmeric movement who prepared the ground for the subsequent mesmeric mediologies, and two physicians representing the heyday of mesmerism in the romantic era, namely Carl Alexander Ferdinand Kluge (1782–1844) and Dietrich Georg von Kieser (1779–1862). The latter typify two opposite positions within the spectrum of romantic medical mesmerism. Kluge’s *Versuch einer Darstellung des thierischen Magnetismus als Heilmittel* (1811) represents the pragmatic and empirical orientation of medical mesmerism that is influenced by earlier mesmeric physicians like Eberhard Gmelin (1751–1809) and Arnold Wienholt (1749–1804). On the other hand, Kieser’s *System des Tellurismus oder thierischen Magnetismus* (1822) takes the stance of a philosophically oriented mesmerism influenced by Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling’s philosophy of nature.<sup>2</sup> This line of thought dates back to Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert’s (1780–1853) highly influential *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808).

Despite their methodological differences, Mesmer, Kluge, and Kieser belonged to the same community of discourse consisting of mesmeric physicians who were rooted in therapeutic practice while, at the same time, being open to

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<sup>1</sup> It seems that the term ‘mediology’ (fr. *médiologie*) was first coined by Régis Debray in 1979 in the context of a theory of cultural transmission. His concept became popular among English-speaking academics through the translation of his major work on mediology in 2004. Cf. Debray: *Transmitting Culture*. Without reference to Debray, Albrecht Koschorke investigated the “mediology of the 18th century” and made a first move to interpret mesmerism from a mediological point of view in his *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr* (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Schelling developed his *Naturphilosophie* between the late 1790ies and 1801 in his writings *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797) and *Über den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie und die richtige Art ihre Probleme aufzulösen* (1801) as well as within the journal *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* (1800–1801) that he edited.

physical, philosophical and theological topics concerning their field. In his reflections on somnambulism, Kluge refers to Schubert. And when it comes to the medical side of mesmerism, empirically oriented works, and especially Kluge's *Versuch*, are given a prominent place in Kieser's work. Compared with, for example, Schelling's disciple Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852), he was much more empirical-oriented. Mesmer himself always tried to root his therapeutic practice in cosmological principles, albeit in a different, more physics-oriented way. In his later days, he responded to the discovery of magnetic somnambulism that had become a major influence for German romantic mesmerism and integrated it into his thought.

Besides outlining the mesmeric mediological approaches, the aim of this chapter is to bring attention to the body techniques and material culture of mesmerism that have been neglected within the academic study of animal magnetism.<sup>3</sup> For many scholars, the therapeutic body movements and devices may have looked very much like manifestations of sheer mesmeric folly. For those who were interested in mesmerism from the perspective of a history of ideas, the relationship between animal magnetism and earlier forms of *magia naturalis*, magnetic theology, the history of physics, etc. was of course more important than its material and bodily dimensions.

Before investigating the therapeutic mediologies of the three mesmerists, the conceptual frame of my analysis will be outlined. After that, a preliminary survey of mesmeric mediology will be provided that sketches the relationship between animal magnetism, human mediums, and technical media.

## The Therapeutic Tertium

My investigation of mesmeric mediologies is based on Burkhard Peter's comparative analysis of different schools within mesmerism, hypnosis, and psychoanalysis. The German hypnotherapist distinguishes several sorts of healing agents and examines their interaction within the therapeutic process. He thereby offers a fresh view on how psychotherapeutic and psychosomatic treatments function from a practitioner's perspective.<sup>4</sup> His theory of the "therapeutic tertium" is of particular importance. According to Peter, most psychotherapeutic

<sup>3</sup> There are only a few exceptions from this rule like the highly interesting chapter on the baquet in Schott, *Magie der Natur*, 630–640.

<sup>4</sup> Peter: *Ericksonsche Hypnotherapie und Peter: Therapeutisches Tertium und hypnotische Rituale*.

and psychosomatic therapies assume decisive therapeutic factors that transcend the healing potential of the dyad of therapist and patient. He distinguishes between a negative anti-therapeutic tertium as the ultimate source of the destructive forces behind disease or suffering, and a positive therapeutic tertium as the origin of health.<sup>5</sup>

In tertium-centred types of therapeutic systems, both the positive and the negative tertia transcend the capacities of the relationship between healer and patient. They are not supposed to be voluntarily controllable. If healing should take place, the dyad of therapist and patient must get in touch with the positive tertium and let it act as a healing principle that overcomes the effects of the negative tertium. For reasons of simplification, the following analysis focuses on the positive tertium and its mediation.

According to his constructivist approach, Peter conceives the therapeutic tertium as a mental construct that is created to cope with the fact that one cannot directly control and heal mental and psychosomatic diseases – and yet, therapies time and again are successful. From his point of view, the tertium functions as an imaginary but nonetheless effective bridge between voluntary/communicable and involuntary/incommunicable psychological and psychosomatic processes. Although his approach has merit, yet I think one should try to keep the analysis less normative by using Peter's concept as an analytical tool to elucidate their inner structure without evaluating the truth claims of the respective therapeutic systems.

Furthermore, a closer look at Peter's theory reveals that, actually, it is not based on a trinity of healing factors but on the interaction of five agents:

### Therapeutic tertium

#### Healing ritual:

**Therapist** Connecting with the tertium through different media **Patient**  
**Human mediums and technical media of the tertium**

Figure 1: The system of healing agents according to Burkhard Peter.

Peter refers to the figure-ground principle of perception from Gestalt psychology. He defines the therapeutic tertium as medium in the sense of an ambient medium, that is, a kind of quasi-spatial background that encompasses therapists and patients, while it simultaneously functions as an element within which both

<sup>5</sup> Additionally, in Peter: *Ericksonsche Hypnotherapie*, 7 neutral tertia are mentioned as a third kind of tertium, but they don't play a significant role within Peter's theory.

live similar to the surrounding air that they breathe. From this modality, he distinguishes the tertium as a figure, that is, a concrete medium used within the therapeutic ritual to refer to and connect with the invisible tertium *per se*.

I am not completely convinced of his Gestalt-psychological approach. Of course, the therapeutic tertium is sometimes conceived of as an ambient medium (with some conceptualizations of animal magnetism as a good example), but this is not necessarily the case. Peter rightly points out that therapeutic tertia function as hidden agents that are difficult to access and often are referred to via mediating symbols within the therapeutic ritual. However, there is no need to conceptualize the relationship between hiddenness and mediated presence in line with the figure-ground principle exclusively. Therefore, I consider it inappropriate to base a general theory of the therapeutic tertium on it. Instead of speaking of “figures” and “ground,” I simply distinguish the tertium itself from its human mediums and other intermediaries that function within the therapeutic setting as transmitters of the healing principle.

The mediation of the therapeutic tertium is of crucial importance for the healing procedures within the tertium-centered type of therapy.<sup>6</sup> The ritualized relationship between therapist and patient enacts figural representations and imaginations of the tertium to render its healing power present within the given situation. The ways in which the tertium and its activity are understood determine the roles of other agents within the healing process and the understanding of the process *in toto*.

## Animal Magnetism as Therapeutic Tertium

Therapists who work within the tradition of Franz Anton Mesmer assume that they heal through a therapeutic tertium called animal magnetism (fr. *magnétisme animal*; ger. *animalischer Magnetismus* and, sometimes, more precisely *Lebensmagnetismus*, “magnetism of life” or *vitaler Magnetismus*, “vital magnetism”). Mesmer originally conceptualized this agent as a natural force that resembles mineral magnetism (and also electricity, light, and fire) on a more subtle and covert level. According to Mesmer, animal magnetism functions as life force within organisms (especially their nervous systems) and connects them with the universe. It can be emitted from living human bodies for healing purposes.

The views about the nature of this healing agent varied within the mesmeric community. Animal magnetism was usually located somewhere in-between mind

<sup>6</sup> Peter: *Ericksonsche Hypnotherapie*, 7.

and matter, being finer than usual matter but also too physical to be pure consciousness. Mesmer himself understood it as modification of a cosmic fluid of exceedingly subtle oscillating particles whose streams pervade the universe. Other mesmerists thought of it as a purely energetic phenomenon that manifests itself within different material substances, including living beings. A third party was not even certain about its existence and considered it to be at least a helpful idea that supports the physician’s personal psychic healing power.<sup>7</sup>

According to Mesmer’s therapeutic concept, sick persons have to be charged with animal magnetism in order to regain their health. The patients do not lack it completely, as every living organism, whether healthy or not, is animated by it. But in order to be cured, an additional amount of animal magnetism has to be implemented into the ill body. This surplus would be able to remove the congestions of the natural flow of the therapeutic tertium within the body and especially within the nerve fibers – congestions that, according to Mesmer, are directly or indirectly responsible for all kinds of diseases.

In his late opus magnum *Mesmerismus* (1814), the result of collaboration with the romantic physician Karl Christian Wolfart (1778–1832), he introduced the immobility (*Ruhe*) or solidification (*Festigkeit*) of matter as antagonist of the ever-changing “fire of life” or “principle of life,” i.e. the fluid. From this point of view, death is the final expiration of the movements of the fluid within the body of a living being and, thus, the victory of the principle of immobility.<sup>8</sup> Solidification and immobility oppose the fluid; but they do not function as negative therapeutic tertium. According to Mesmer, in a healthy human body both principles interact harmoniously. Their proportion naturally changes in the course of life until the second principle ultimately takes over and the person dies. If one would like to identify a negative therapeutic third within Mesmer’s system, that would be the imbalance of both principles in the form of an untimely restriction of the flow of life energy. As far as I can tell, all schools of

<sup>7</sup> Pattie: *Mesmer and Animal Magnetism*, 221: „As early as 1784, Puysegur was convinced of the importance and indeed the necessity of psychological factors: the magnetizer must exercise his will; he must strongly desire and will the cure of his patient. [ . . . ] Some of the members of Puysegur’s branch of the Society of Harmony in Strasbourg turned from physical to psychological explanations. They were by no means sure that the fluidic theory was relevant to the observed facts“. Puysegur indeed emphasized the trust, good will and benevolent attention of the magnetizer. But for him this so called „psychological“ factors had a bodily dimension and functioned very similar to the effects of mineral magnets. Thus, he was still close to Mesmer’s therapeutic approach and also did not neglect the fluidal interaction within the therapeutic relationship. Cf. Sziede: *Mesmers sechster Sinn*, 41–45.

<sup>8</sup> Mesmer: *Mesmerismus*, 163–164.

Mesmerism follow a model of balancing the life force within the patient. The second generation of mesmerists – but not Mesmer himself (although he paved the way for this) – consider an excess of life force within certain parts of the body as something that has to be removed by certain therapeutic interventions.

The idea of healing by transmission of an all-pervading natural healing agent that is primarily radiating from the magnetizer's body, but nevertheless is not a human phenomenon *per se*, implied that the therapeutic tertium could theoretically also be stored and emitted by inanimate media. Indeed, from the very beginning, Mesmer embarked upon both paths: the invention of methods to transmit animal magnetism through the body of the therapist and the use of specific substances and apparatuses as technical media.

The discovery of the therapeutic the potential of a sleep-walking kind of consciousness, called 'magnetic-' or 'artificial somnambulism' and 'magnetic sleep' by Mesmer's most important disciple Amand Marie Jacques de Chastenot de Puységur (1751–1825), added a third kind of medium to mesmeric mediology. Magnetized patients at times became what we would today call trance mediums. Within the culture of this second wave of animal magnetism, paranormal powers, such as telepathy, thought-reading, intuitive diagnosis of their own disease and the diseases of others, communication with the dead, the visit of heavenly realms, and even ecstatic union with god were ascribed to the somnambulists.

In Mesmer's therapeutic concept, involuntary non-verbal bodily reactions of the patients like sweating, trembling, weeping, shrieking and convulsive movements played a crucial role as manifestations of a cathartic crisis caused tertium that has been transferred into their bodies. The somnambulant mediums, on the other hand, articulated themselves mainly through the medium of speech. Again, animal magnetism as tertium enabled this speech and its healthy effects, but it now functioned as cause of enhanced states of consciousness and the verbally articulated insights that arose from them.<sup>9</sup> Reflections about the relation between this kind of mediumship and the other mesmeric mediums and media form an integral part of mesmeric mediology. The remainder of this chapter investigates this topic against the backdrop of changing theoretical presuppositions.

<sup>9</sup> Neumeyer: *Magnetische Fälle*, 261; Weder: *Kleists magnetische Poesie*, 77–78.

## Mesmer's Methods to Transmit and Reinforce Animal Magnetism

Mesmer emphasized that animal magnetism would not necessarily need a medium to be transported through space, even if the magnetizer would send it from a long distance. Because of the supreme subtlety of the cosmic fluid, its vibrations would permeate every other form of matter without any resistance.<sup>10</sup> Fluidal interactions would be as close to total immediacy as any kind of communication can be. The fluid had the function of a cosmic mediator, a primordial medium that connects everything with everything at utmost speed and thereby produces harmony within the universe. Human mediums and technical media are used to support the healing power of the fluid by transferring a surplus of it in case disturbances of the harmonious flow within the human body make this necessary.

Mesmer invented his therapy in 1774/75 while experimenting with the medical use of magnets and devices that generated electricity. He finally concluded that he himself would be the major source of the mysterious agent that removed the illness of his patients, be it magnetic, electric, or, most likely, another, more subtle factor. Most mesmerists, as well as later historians of mesmerism, considered this to be Mesmer's crucial discovery. It resulted in the conception of a hierarchy of media with the animated (human) body on top, followed by plants and then by inanimate substances, especially water, iron, and glass.<sup>11</sup>

The hands, and to a minor degree also the gaze and breath of the magnetizer, were the preferred media. Mesmer's favorite setting for individual therapies became a paradigm within the whole movement. The therapist should sit face-to-face with the patient, bringing his feet and knees and that of the patient in touch with each other.<sup>12</sup> The healing session would start with the therapist establishing a magnetic harmony between patient and therapist, the so-called "rapport."<sup>13</sup> For this purpose, the magnetizer for two or three times should move his hands from the shoulders or the head of the patient downward to his/her thumbs or to the pit of the stomach. This was followed by strokes that created magnetic streams from the head to the feet. These "grand courants" were

<sup>10</sup> Mesmer: *Abhandlung über die Entdeckung*, 51–52: „Schon die Erfahrung lehrt den Ausfluß einer sehr feinen Materie, welche alle Körper durchdringt, ohne ein merkliches von ihrer Tätigkeit zu verlieren. [. . .] Sie wirkt auch in der Entfernung ohne Beyhülfe eines anderen vermittelnden Körpers.“

<sup>11</sup> Beaumorel: *Lehrsätze des Herrn Mesmer*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Mesmer: *Mesmerismus*, 177. See also Beaumorel: *Lehrsätze des Herrn Mesmer*, 79–80.

<sup>13</sup> Mesmer: *Mesmerismus*, 180.

considered to have a general healing effect on the patient.<sup>14</sup> The next part of the ritual focused on specific painful and afflicted regions of the body, the investigation of the causes of the disease, and their removal through certain strokes and the laying on of hands. To discover the cause of the disease, Mesmer recommended placing the hands in the region of the belly, and especially below the diaphragm to connect with the nerve centers in this region.<sup>15</sup> To end the ritual, again certain movements of the hands were performed. The mesmeric strokes were performed in such a way that the mesmerist's hands were moved at a small distance from his/her body. The strokes could also slightly touch the patient's body, but Mesmer considered this to be a less effective method.

Several of Mesmer's therapeutic rituals differed from this standard setting. At times, the patients themselves and/or other attendants of the ritual (family members, other physicians, friends, etc.) functioned as human mediums by forming a "magnetic chain" of several people touching each other to reinforce the animal magnetism. Within the most popular form of mesmeric group therapy, patients were seated in circles around the *baquet* (see below) with their bodies as close as possible and their hands, legs, and feet touching each other. Additionally, a rope was looped around their bodies. Through this tactile connectedness, the patients would be subsumed into one large body, in which "the magnetic fluid continuously circulates and is reinforced through all points of contact."<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Mesmer was still far from conceiving of animal magnetism as a purely interpersonal issue. He continued to appreciate non-human tools as auxiliaries. As we know from a report by Ernst Seyfert, during the first year after his discovery, Mesmer still used mineral magnets and an apparatus to electrify his patients.<sup>17</sup> Mesmer himself notes that he only stopped using these technical media in 1776, because he wanted to counter misconceptions of his therapy that interpreted it as a mere variation of already existing magnetic and electrical cures.<sup>18</sup> However, this did not mean that he refrained from the application of technical media. He only started to develop devices that were better

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 180–182.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>16</sup> Mesmer: Mesmerismus, 187.

<sup>17</sup> Kerner: Franz Anton Mesmer aus Schwaben, 19–45.

<sup>18</sup> Kupsch: Franz Anton Mesmer, 232. Probably the controversy between him and the exorcist Gaßner who did not use technical media within his healing sessions also contributed to Mesmer's decision to skip mineral magnets and electrifying machines. Cf. Baier: Mesmer versus Gaßner.

tailored to his concept of animal magnetism and slightly differed from earlier mineral magnetic and electric therapeutic equipment.

One of his favourite technical mediums was the iron stick ("conductor," as Mesmer called it) that he waved like a magic wand to enhance his personal magnetism and to better direct it toward certain parts of the patient's body that needed magnetic support. In a similar way, music and mirrors served to intensify the streams of animal magnetism within Mesmer's group therapeutic assemblies.

A second kind of technical medium stems from Mesmer's belief of being able to transfer his healing power to inanimate substances, which, for a certain time, would store the intensely vibrating fluid that he transmitted to them.

I observed that the magnetic and electric matters are almost one and the same thing, and other substances propagate both. I found out that not only steel is capable of absorbing the magnetic power. I magnetized paper, bread, wool, silk, leather, stones, glass, water, different metals, wood and men. Everything that I touched became magnetic to an extent that these substances produced the same effects on the patient, as do the magnets.<sup>19</sup>

The magnetized objects were meant to supply the patients with animal magnetism independent from the healers' presence and also without mental concentration on the patients, as was the case in mesmeric distance healing. Thus, the invention of the physician as major magnetic medium went hand in hand with the invention of new technical media.

In his Paris years, when the high number of patients made it impossible to treat each one individually, Mesmer developed an apparatus, the *baquet*, a wooden tub-like device from which several patients could draw animal magnetism at the same time. The vat was filled with fragments of glass, gravel and iron and/or bottles with magnetised water. Bent iron rods protruded from the *baquet*. They were directed toward the patients whose diseased parts of the body were also connected with the rods through strings. This apparatus resembles devices in use at the time to store and transmit electric charge. The Leyden bottle and other instruments played an important role within the research on electricity, but also inspired the imagination of poets and eventually became the latest fad within European high society – the amazing sparks and electric shocks that could be produced with them added a welcome diversion to its parties.

Another invention of Mesmer was "the magic or magnetic box," a kind of mini-*baquet* consisting of a box that contained a bottle filled with magnetized substances (again water, glass splinters etc.). The boxes were used for the treatment of patients who were not able to attain the healing assemblies or whose

<sup>19</sup> Mesmer: Erstes Schreiben an einen auswärtigen Arzt, 8.

diseases were conceived of as demanding a continuous supply of animal magnetism.<sup>20</sup> They were placed on the patients' bodies or underneath their beds.

Magnetized water was of special importance in Mesmer's system. As we already saw, he used magnetically charged water for his *baquets* and for the bottles within the magnetic boxes. He also had his patients take a bath in magnetized water or wash themselves with it.<sup>21</sup> As a substitute of or addition to usual medicine, Mesmer also prescribed the drinking of magnetized water.

At the beginning of the 1880s, he introduced another non-human medium: the magnetized tree charged with animal magnetism by the mesmeric physician. The *baquet* as well as the magnetized trees and magnetized water functioned as substitutes for the therapist's radiation of animal magnetism. Both allowed the collective treatments of a larger number of people and the continuation of the healing ritual in the absence of the magnetizer. They were also used as a cheaper version of mesmeric therapy for the poor.

The most important reason for the blossoming of a rich mesmeric material culture and the great diversity of therapeutic techniques within the mesmeric movement was the fact that Mesmer supported a creative approach toward the mediation of animal magnetism. He was explicitly opposed to defining fixed rules for healing practices and detailed construction plans for technical devices. Everybody had the right to change them according to his/her intuition, the circumstances, and the individual conditions of the patients. Mesmer was afraid that detailed rules and their strict observance would produce hostile prejudices against his therapy and could eventually be perverted into mere superstition or mere repetition of the "blind empiricism" of religious ceremonies. Instead of a rigid system, he propagated a kind of intuitive healing performance art based on what he thought to be a scientific cosmology and rational medical principles.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Beaumorel: Lehrsätze des Herrn Mesmer, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 95–96, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Mesmer: Allgemeine Erläuterungen, 44: "Ein jeder kann, vermöge der erlangten Einsicht, sich auf das Studium derselben [der magnetischen Therapie, KB] legen, und von sich selbst erlernen, sie abzuändern und den Umständen und verschiedenen Lagen der Kranken anzupassen. Es hat blinder Empirismus und ungeprüfte Anwendung meiner Verfahrensart, Vorurtheile gegen diese neue Methode und voreilige Kritiken, welche man sich über dieselbe erlaubte, veranlaßt. Diese Verfahrensarten, die übrigens zu keiner positiven Weise gemacht werden können, [. . .] würden, wenn sie nicht aus Vernunftgründen abgeleitet wären, als abgeschmackte und lächerliche Grimassen erscheinen, die in der That unmöglich Glauben verdienen könnten. Ja in eine positive Vorschrift eingezwängt, würden dieselben durch zu ängstliche Observanz ein Gegenstand des Aberglaubens werden können; und es ist wohl keine zu gewagte Behauptung, wenn ich sage, daß ein großer Theil der religiösen Zeremonien des Alterthums Überbleibsel dieses Empirismus zu sein scheinen."

For this reason, Mesmer only gave examples of what mesmeric practice might look like. Detailed technical instructions are not at all prioritized in his writings. He focuses on the theoretical principles, the *Vernunftgründe* of his practice. Based on them, according to Mesmer, a limitless number of practices and apparatuses could be developed.<sup>23</sup> The way in which he describes the construction of his therapeutic devices often resembles cooking recipes that only tell the reader what to do without giving any reasons for the procedure. He simply asserts that they will mediate the fluid and that the result will speak for itself. Now and then he offers vague explanations, for example, for the construction of the *baquet*, underlining that it concentrates and intensifies the animal magnetism that was transferred to it or stirred up within the *baquet* by the mesmeric physician.

Mesmeric tools and especially the *baquet* were travesties of coeval tools, like the Leyden jar, that were used to produce, store, and transfer electricity or magnetism. They borrowed most of their plausibility from the common cultural knowledge about these machines. A more detailed interpretation of the efficiency of the *baquet* as a kind of 'empty medium' is given in the next section.

Originally, somnambulant mediumship was not part of Mesmer's therapeutic system. Although he might have known the altered states of consciousness induced by mesmeric practice, he did not mention them in his earlier writings and obviously did not consider them to contribute to the therapeutic process. After magnetic somnambulism had become very popular in mesmeric circles, he developed an explanation of it on the basis of his theory. Mesmer postulated the existence of an inner sense whose perceptions only become conscious when the outer senses are deactivated. This sense perceives the world through the cosmic fluid that runs through the nerve fibers. Therefore, the organ of the inner sense is the nerve system as a whole. Stimulated by magnetization within magnetic therapies, the inner sense in some cases overpowers the outer ones. Then, the all-pervading fluid becomes a medium of knowledge that goes far beyond the reach of the outer senses: telepathy, unexplainable knowledge about the past, precognitions, and the clairvoyant diagnosis of one's own disease and the disease of others may occur.

## Animal Magnetism on Trial

The growing popularity of mesmerism in France threatened the representatives of academic medicine and the *ancien regime*. In spring 1784, King Louis XVI

<sup>23</sup> Mesmer: Mesmerismus, 115.



(1754–1793) established two Royal Commissions. One was chosen from the Royal Academy of Sciences and from the Paris Faculty of Medicine (with Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) and Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) as its most famous members), while the other one was drawn from the Royal Society of Medicine. Both commissions published their reports in August 1784. As the report of the Royal Society of Medicine was largely repeating the results of the first commission, I focus on the report of the first commission also known as the Bailly report, because the astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736–1793) has been considered to be its editor.

A well written, thoroughly argued assessment, the Bailly report eventually became a landmark event in the history of science. As Jessica Riskin puts it:

In addition to being the first recorded instance of the use of a placebo and of, in modern terms, a method of blind assessment, the mesmerism investigation was the first known formal investigation of scientific fraud. It was therefore a crucial episode in the history of psychology, medical testing, experimental practice, and state authority to police scientific conduct.<sup>24</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to interpret the report in detail. Instead, only some main lines are briefly examined.<sup>25</sup>

In their investigations, the members of the commission collaborated with the mesmerist Charles Deslon (1750–1786), a former student and supporter of Mesmer who at that time had become his rival. Before they started with detailed observations and experiments, they participated in his group treatments and were very impressed by the dramatic “crises” that the patients underwent:

Nothing is more astonishing, than the spectacle of these convulsions; without seeing it, it cannot be imagined: & in watching it, one is equally surprised by the profound repose of some of these patients & the agitation that animates others; the various reactions that are repeated, the fellow-feeling that sets in. [ . . . ] Because of these constant effects, one can not help but acknowledge the presence of a great power which moves & controls patients, and which resides in the magnetizer.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, they decided that the usual group treatments should not be the object of their inquiry because of the large number of effects that take place there (“one sees too many things at once to see particular things clearly”, 335)

<sup>24</sup> Riskin: *The Mesmerism Investigation*, 119.

<sup>25</sup> For further analysis see Riskin: *The Mesmerism Investigation*; Chertok and Stengers: *A Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason*, 1–26; Lanska and Lanska: *Franz Anton Mesmer*.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin et. al.: *Report of the Commissioners*, 334–335.

and because they did not want to bother “distinguished patients” with their interviews and careful observations.<sup>27</sup>

Instead, they decided to focus on treatments of small groups and the magnetization of individuals separated from the emotionally-charged atmosphere of Deslon’s usual group treatments, as both allowed them to isolate the observable changes of the condition of mesmerized persons. The aim of the investigation was to prove or refute the view that animal magnetism is mediated to the patients by the different mesmeric techniques and devices: “The question of existence is primary; the question of utility is not to be addressed until the first has been fully resolved. Animal magnetism may well exist without being useful but it cannot be useful if it does not exist.”<sup>28</sup>

As the fluid itself turned out to be inaccessible by direct sensory perception, the only way to answer the first question was an evaluation of the perceivable effects of the mesmeric treatments. Are at least some of them only explainable by assuming the existence of animal magnetism as an agent? At first, the commissioners let themselves be treated by Deslon or one of his disciples while sitting around a *baquet* in a private room. The experiences within this experimental situation differed significantly from those within the usual group treatments. Calm and silence reigned; no crises appeared: “None of them felt a thing, or at least something that could be attributed to the action of magnetism.”<sup>29</sup>

The next step of their investigation consisted of experiments with fourteen sick persons, some of them “from the lower class,” the others being members of the high society, “more enlightened, more able to give account of their feelings.”<sup>30</sup> Five of them reported to have felt effects during the treatment and nine none at all. A closer look at the experiences of those who felt changes within their body led to the conclusion that only the effects felt by three lower class people might have been caused by animal magnetism, while the others were easily explainable by other reasons.

These facts permitted the Commissioners to observe that magnetism has seemed to be worthless for those patients who submitted to it with a measure of incredulity; that the Commissioners [ . . . ] did in no way feel the impressions felt by the three lower-class patients, & they must have expected that these impressions, even supposing them all to be real, followed from an anticipated conviction, & could have been the effect of the imagination.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

This interim result changed their further procedure. The commissioners now wanted to find out up to what point imagination could be the cause of all or at least a part of the effects attributed to animal magnetism. Here, only three examples from this new series of experiments can be mentioned.

A woman that claimed that she could experience effects like warmth or pain within the magnetized parts of her body was blindfolded. The parts of her body that actually have been magnetized without her knowledge did not respond at all whereas, when she was made to believe that she was being magnetized while blindfolded, she reported the usual phenomena although no magnetization had taken place.

The use of magnetized trees was also put to test. For this purpose Deslon selected a twelve-year-old boy whose sensitivity to animal magnetism had already been proven. While the boy was in the house of Franklin, Deslon magnetized a tree in the garden. Then, the blindfolded boy was brought out and was told to hug four trees in succession, one of which would have been magnetized (whereas actually the tree that Deslon had treated was not among them). His symptoms became more intense from tree to tree and finally at the fourth tree that was twenty-four feet away from the magnetized one, he had a crisis. His limbs stiffened and he lost consciousness. In a similar way, it was proven that the drinking of magnetized water is ineffective if the patients do not know that it is magnetized, whereas non-magnetized cups of water produced the usual effects if they were considered to be magnetized.

These and other experiments let the commission conclude that animal magnetism was not the real cause of the changes that patients underwent within magnetic treatments. The effects of touch, imagination, and imitation would be sufficient to explain the effects attributed to animal magnetism.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, there could be reason to believe that “the theatrical play of imagination” (ibid.) would be the most important of these three causes: “We have seen by the experiments cited that it suffices on its own to produce crises. Pressure, touching appear therefore to serve as preparations; it is through touching that the nerves are unsettled, imitation communicates and spreads the sensations.”<sup>33</sup> The commissioners refuted the counterargument that although imagination may be capable of producing crises, animal magnetism would also excite them without the help of imagination by referring to Occam’s razor. New causes, they argued, “are not to be postulated unless absolutely necessary.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 359

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 352–353.

The commission’s critique did primarily aim at the crises that used to appear within the group treatments and also seemed to be learned there by imitation. They affirmed the curative effects of imagination, faith, and hope as probable causes of the obvious successes of mesmeric therapy. Furthermore, they considered that, just as in usual medical treatments and not only with regard to mesmerism, very often it is nature itself that cures and not the remedies prescribed by the physicians. “But when the imagination produces convulsions, it acts through violent means; these means are almost always destructive.”<sup>35</sup> The habitualization of the crises through regular participation in therapeutic meetings around the *baquet* would be an additional danger. Therefore, group treatments, in which the means of animal magnetism are used, “can in the long run have only disastrous effects.”<sup>36</sup>

The commission discovered an interesting borderline case of mediality without conceptualizing it as such: the ‘empty medium’ or ‘media placebo.’ This is a technical or human ‘medium’ that combines a gesture of transference with the lack of an observable mediated content and, yet, causes the effects that the therapists who use it attribute to the mediation of the therapeutic tertium. The commissioners explained these effects through the “theatrical play” of imaginations and expectations. In doing so, they located their origin entirely within the persons who believe in the mediality of the ‘empty medium.’ But the play of imagination partially depends on the performative (“theatrical”) qualities of the media that allow them to function as a kind of teammates. Both the finger of the magnetizer that is pointing at you, as well as the bent iron rod of the *baquet* that emerges out of the hidden inside of the vat and is directed at you, have the performative quality of addressing and virtually touching someone – and through this, they are apt to change the bodily self-perception of the addressed person and stimulate the imagination of the transmission of a hidden power that affects the body. Besides the expressivity of the medium itself, additional factors contributed to the ‘filling’ of its empty mediality and thus to the enactment of the *baquet* as an effective part of mesmeric therapy: similarities with well-known functioning media; narratives of the mesmerists; the public debate on mesmerism; the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within the treatments (e.g., the mimetic behaviour that the commissioners already thematised); and last but not least the ritual context.

The results of the commissions were a heavy blow against Mesmer’s view of animal magnetism as therapeutic tertium, his group therapy, and the supposed curative power of the crises that he aimed to evoke. More than 20,000

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 361, see also 362–363.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 363.

copies of the reports were spread rapidly all across France. The public opinion about his cure changed from support to ridicule, as one can see from many satirical writings and stage plays of the time.<sup>37</sup> But, of course, the mesmerists would not give up easily.

They countered the criticism by pointing out that the commissions failed to clarify the nature of imagination. For them, a mysterious immaterial force seemed to be an implausible cause for the observable dramatic effects of animal magnetism.<sup>38</sup> Pamphlets in favor of mesmerism argued that, by means of animal magnetism, many diseases could be healed that imagination would never be able to influence. Additionally, successful cures of very small children or adults in a desperate, almost comatose state would not be explainable by the theory of imagination and imitation.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, did not contemporary physiology attribute imagination to an ethereal medium running through the fibers of the nerves, much like Mesmer's animal magnetic fluid? Maybe imagination would be nothing more than just a synonym for the activity of animal magnetism.

For Deslon at least, the results of the commission did not mean a major theoretical setback. Some years earlier he had already written: "But if Mr. Mesmer had no other secret than that of making the imagination act to produce health, would that not be a marvellous benefit? If the medicine of imagination is the best, why shouldn't we practice it?"<sup>40</sup> And luckily, the new mesmerism developed by Marquis de Puységur in the same year the research of the commissions took place (1784), abandoned Mesmer's crises and emphasized the psychological factors of mesmeric therapy.

The current debate about animal mesmerism was still unsettled in France when the French revolution put a temporary end to it. At the turn of the century, animal magnetism in France had lost most of its momentum. The center of the mesmeric movement shifted to Germany.

## Kluge's Systematization of Mesmeric Mediology

Carl Alexander Ferdinand Kluge's *Versuch einer Darstellung des animalischen Magnetismus als Heilmittel*, first published in 1811, is the best treatise on the

37 Pattie: Mesmer and Animal Magnetism, 185–198.

38 Riskin: The Mesmerism Investigation, 137–140.

39 Pattie: Mesmer and Animal Magnetism, 173–175.

40 d'Eslon: Observations sur le magnétisme animal. London & Paris 1780, 46–47, quoted according to Pattie: Mesmer and Animal Magnetism, 105.

medical use of animal magnetism of his time.<sup>41</sup> The widely read book has been reprinted in two editions (1815, 1818) and was translated into several European languages.<sup>42</sup> According to Alan Gauld's seminal work on the history of mesmerism and hypnotism, Kluge's work is

one of the most useful books in the whole history of animal magnetism. It encapsulated the literature of the subject – and by no means only the German literature – at a time when in Germany at least, the magnetic movement was trying to achieve some degree of scientific and medical respectability.<sup>43</sup>

The book represents an upcoming new genre of mesmeric literature that relies heavily on case studies published in earlier decades and tries to systematize them.<sup>44</sup> At the time of its publication, Kluge already was a high-ranking military doctor. Later he became director of the Charité in Berlin.

It is significant for the state of affairs of medical mesmerism within the era of romanticism that Kluge sets himself distinctly apart from the founder of animal magnetism. He blames Mesmer's arrogant character and imprudent political behavior.<sup>45</sup> The mesmeric doctrine is described as a mixture of truth and madness.<sup>46</sup> Mesmer's most fundamental error would have been the wrong principle 'one sanity, one cause of disease and one remedy.'<sup>47</sup> Kluge also criticizes Mesmer's view of the human body as a kind of magnet with two poles (feet/head), a central axis running through the spinal cord and several minor magnets that form additional poles (left arm/right arm, thumb/little finger, etc.), a theory that the experiments of the Bailly commission had already debunked.<sup>48</sup> Within the mesmeric therapeutic practice, only two similarities between animal magnetism and mineral magnetism would be observable. The magnetization

41 The only comparable manual that I know is Joseph Ennemoser: Anleitung zur Mesmerischen Praxis, written in the late romantic era.

42 Without giving references, Barkhoff mentions translations into English, French, Italian and Russian (Barkhoff: Magnetische Fiktionen, 93). Mielich adds Dutch, Swedish and Danish to this list, also without bibliographical data (Mielich: Karl Alexander Ferdinand Kluge, 17).

43 Gauld: A History of Hypnotism, 99.

44 Neumeyer: Magnetische Fälle um 1800, 264.

45 Kluge: Versuch einer Darstellung, 55–60.

46 Cf. *ibid.*, 53: "Dieses auf Wahrheit und Wahn zugleich beruhende System."

47 Cf. *ibid.*, 57: "Er [Mesmer, KB] ging nämlich von dem falschen Grundsatz aus: *Es gibt nur Eine Gesundheit, Eine Krankheit und auch nur Ein Heilmittel*" (emphases by Kluge).

48 Franklin et. al.: Report of the Commissioners, 345. Kluge: Versuch einer Darstellung, 69–71 blames the commissioners for having been biased against animal magnetism from the very beginning of their investigations and therefore not having been able to see its truth behind the surface of quackery. But he nevertheless adopts some of their points of criticism.

would in both cases depend on strokes in one direction and it would be nullified by strokes into the opposite direction.<sup>49</sup> These phenomena, according to Kluge, could be explained through the condition of the human organism (without reference to magnetism).<sup>50</sup>

His therapeutic concept follows "the animal magnetism improved by Puységur."<sup>51</sup> Kluge appreciates Puységur's calm treatment that replaces Mesmer's convulsive crises (which, in his view, only contributed to the bad reputation of animal magnetism) by the different stages of somnambulism. For him, Puységur strikes a balance between two extremes: On the one side, Mesmer's school that focuses on intense physical interventions and the creation of heavy bodily reactions; on the other side, the "spiritualistic school" of Chevalier de Barberin, who considered the will and faith of the magnetizer to be the only agents of animal magnetism, and abandoned the bodily transmission of a healing force completely.<sup>52</sup> Puységur's mesmerism would successfully connect both the physical and psychical treatment.<sup>53</sup> Kluge himself contributed to the Puységurian theory of magnetic somnambulism by developing a detailed classification of the different stages of somnambulism that became quite influential within the mesmeric community.

As already mentioned above, Puységur and his followers made the therapist's good will and positive attitude toward the patient a crucial therapeutic factor. They considered the universal fluid to be nothing more than a hypothesis, and had no interest in deducing mesmeric therapy from unproven cosmological principles. Nevertheless, they maintained the idea that, within the therapeutic relationship, the therapist's body functions as medium of a healing power that resembles mineral magnetism. At least within the initial stages of therapy, the Puységurists worked with the laying on of hands on the head and/or stomach and different passes very much in line with old-style mesmerism. Only strong therapeutic interventions, like the intense rubbing of different parts of the body or the strong pressure of fingers on the lower abdominal area, which belonged to Mesmer's repertoire, were abolished.<sup>54</sup> The sensation of heat in the

<sup>49</sup> Kluge: *Versuch einer Darstellung*, 47–48, 329.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 55: "Eine dritte Schule bildete die unter der Direction des Marquis von Puységur entstandene *Société harmonique de amis réunis* zu *Strasburg*, welche sich [. . .] vorzüglich dadurch auszeichnete, daß sie auf eine glückliche Art die physische und psychische Behandlung miteinander vereinigte, und so zwischen dem Mesmer'schen und Barbarin'schen Magnetismus das Mittel hielt." (Kluge's emphases)

<sup>54</sup> For this and the following see Puységur: *An essay of instruction*, 65–66.

hollow of the hands of the therapist and the transference of this heat into the body of the patient were important. Additionally, the *baquet* and magnetized trees were used. As in Mesmer's writings, technical details, like the differentiation between the altering effects of different movement of the hands or detailed construction plans of devices etc., did not matter. Once the higher grades of somnambulism would be reached, the fluid or psychical healing power would flow in-between therapist and patient without any of these mediations.<sup>55</sup>

Kluge assumes that the animal-magnetic fluid exists, but he leaves open the question of its nature. It would remain uncertain if the fluid would be something that is produced by a chemical process within the organism and belongs exclusively to the living body, or if it would be a part of a world-soul that according to the views of the ancients animate the whole nature, or if it would be identical with or similar to the electric, galvanic, or magnetic fluids.<sup>56</sup> Whatever it might actually be, in any case it would function as a mediator between body and spirit.<sup>57</sup> Without categorically excluding cosmological or metaphysical interpretations, Kluge himself conceived the fluid as a physiological phenomenon closely connected to the nervous system.

The lack of methodology in Mesmer's and Puységur's work was not helpful for Kluge's project to establish animal magnetism as a scientific, academically recognized medical treatment. Luckily, he could rely on German mesmeric physicians like Arnold Wienholt (1749–1804) and Eberhard Gmelin (1751–1809), who had already started a kind of systematization by developing a special terminology for and classification of the mesmeric therapeutic techniques. Their line of investigation was based on physiological and vitalistic theories about the activities of a life force within, around, and in-between human bodies. With regard to mesmeric practice, Puységur influenced both. Their physiological Puységurism recently had been strengthened by the work of the famous physician, physiologist, and pioneer of psychiatry Johann Christian Reil (1759–1813). Like Schubert before him, Kluge used Reil's refined version of Eberhard Gmelin's concept of two antagonistic nerve systems, the cerebral system and the ganglia system, to explain the somnambulant states of mind.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Stieglitz: *Ueber den thierischen Magnetismus*, 345.

<sup>56</sup> Kluge: *Versuch einer Darstellung*, 220. The German romantic discourse about the platonic concept of a world-soul was mainly influenced by Schelling: *Von der Weltseele*.

<sup>57</sup> Kluge: *Versuch einer Darstellung*, 221.

<sup>58</sup> Barkhoff: *Magnetische Fiktionen*, 97–98.

## Kluge's Systematic Mediology

Kluge distinguishes a "simple treatment" as the fundamental method of mesmeric therapy, where no devices are used, from a "composed treatment" that combines the simple treatment with the use of tools. Very much like Mesmer's mediology, his therapeutic system is based on the primacy of the therapist as medium of the therapeutic tertium. Several technical media are considered to be mere extensions of the healer's body. But, as we will see, his classification of media also takes into account a certain agency of non-human media.

The so-called "manipulation," that is, the use of the hands as medium, is of pivotal importance within the simple treatment.<sup>59</sup> Like in Mesmer's writings, two other body techniques are mentioned in passing: breathing on the patient (*Adspirieren*) and looking into the eyes of the patient with a firm gaze (*Figieren der Augen*). He also mentions the concentration of thought on the absent patient (*Figiren der Gedanken*). Kluge believes that this "pure psychic treatment" is effective, but does not recommend it because, through it, the patient might get acquainted to the more subtle influences of animal magnetism and may develop a kind of hypersensitivity. Because of this, the mesmerist should only use his or her physical potential in the sense of the magnetism mediated through his/her body.<sup>60</sup>

He differentiates between three forms of manipulation. Magnetic passes are performed with direct contact or from a small distance. Only in the case of very sensitive patients are the passes performed from a longer distance. Besides this, the most basic technique is the laying on of hands on different parts of the body (*figirte Manipulation*) in the form of a gentle touch, a pressing, or massage. Additionally, he knows certain distant operations of the hands different from passes: the techniques of sprinkling (*Spargiren*), compressing (*Comprimiren*), and fanning (*Ventiliren, Calmiren*).

The passes should always be directed from the center to the periphery of the body (i.e., downward and outward). The opposite way of moving them (upward as well as from periphery to center), the so-called *Gegenstriche* ("counter-strokes"), would create negative reactions like anxiety, unease, and cramps. They should therefore be avoided.

The passes are differentiated according to the parts of the hands that are turned toward the patient. They can be performed with the palms or fingertips

(*Volar-Manipulation*), the sides of the hands (*Marginal-Manipulation*), or the back of the hand (*Dorsal-Manipulation*). Most important is the *Volar-Manipulation* that directs life energy into the different parts of the body with the help of the palms (*Palmar-Manipulation*) or fingertips (*Digital-Manipulation*).

## Kluge's Simple Treatments

Methods of Treatment	Variations		
<b>Vagirende Manipulation</b> Manual treatment based on strokes with body contact or close to the patient's body	<b>Volar-Manipulation</b> Palms or fingertips directed to the patient <b>Palmar-Manipulation</b> (palms): heating <b>Digital-Manipulation</b> (fingertips): cooling	<b>Marginal-Manipulation</b> Sides of the hands directed toward the patient Removing excesses of the fluid or reducing its flow	<b>Dorsal-Manipulation</b> Back of the hands directed toward the patient No magnetic effects, used to move the hands back to their initial position after a stroke
<b>Manipuliren mit Contact</b> Manual treatment with local body contact	<b>Manipuliren mit sanftem Contacte</b> (Manual treatment with soft contact) The laying on of hands in the form of a soft touch	<b>Manipuliren mit starkem Contacte</b> (Manual treatment with strong contact) Massage	
<b>Manipuliren in Distans</b> Manual treatment from a larger distance	<b>Spargiren</b> (Sprinkling) The fingertips are brought close to the palms and then they are moved fastly towards the patient as if one would sprinkle him/her with a certain liquid	<b>Comprimiren</b> (Compressing) One starts with fingertips close to each other and pointing towards the patient. Then the hands approach the patient with the palms pushing forward so that, in the end, they form one flat surface with the fingers	<b>Calmiren, Ventilieren</b> (Fanning) Fast movements of the hands as if one would like to create a kind of breeze

<sup>59</sup> Kluge's description of the manual techniques comprises 79 pages (see Kluge: Versuch einer Darstellung, 324–394) whereas his treatment of technical devices takes him only 30 pages (see *ibid.*, 394–424).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 201–205, 299, 327.

(continued)

Methods of Treatment		Variations	
<b>Einfache magnetische Behandlung ohne Manipulation</b>	<b>Adspiriren</b>	<b>Figiren der Augen</b>	<b>Figiren der Gedanken</b>
Simple magnetic treatment without the use of the hands	Breathing on different parts the patient's body	(Fixation of the eyes) Looking into the eyes of the patient with a firm gaze in order to induce magnetic sleep	(Fixation of thoughts) Distance healing by concentration of whole-some thoughts on the absent patient

As already mentioned, the composed treatment is a combination of direct treatment by the therapist and the use of outer tools that are understood as supplementary to the manipulations. Kluge's mediology comprises two categories of technical media and thus articulates a distinction that had not been clearly drawn before him: 1) Agents that directly or indirectly reinforce the animal magnetism that radiates from the therapist (*Verstärkungsmittel*). They are used to enhance and direct the therapeutic tertium in situations in which the magnetizer is present and acts as the primary medium of the therapeutic tertium; and 2) magnetic substitutes (*Substitute*), that is, media that are able to store animal magnetism for the sake of distributing it in situations where the magnetizer is absent.<sup>61</sup>

## Kluge's Categorization of Technical Tools

Technical Tools	Variations	
<b>Verstärkungsmittel</b> (Media to reinforce animal magnetism)	<b>Direct</b> <b>wirkende Verstärkungsmittel</b> (Direct reinforcements)	<b>Indirect</b> <b>wirkende Verstärkungsmittel</b> (Indirect reinforcements)
Technical devices and other factors that reinforce animal magnetism within the immediate encounter between therapist and patient	Conductor Isolatorium Electricity Mirrors Music	Physical and psychological influences that strengthen the vitality of the therapist: Rapport with helpers, self-magnetization, connecting with the stars at midnight, healthy lifestyle

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 394–424.

(continued)

Technical Tools	Variations
<b>Substitute</b> (Substitutes)	Magnetized water Magnetized glass
Technical devices that are able to radiate animal magnetism by themselves in the absence of the therapist	Magnetic battery ( <i>baquet</i> ) Magnetic tree

The first sort of tools consists of things that we know already from Mesmer's practice like the conductor, electricity, mirrors, and music, and adds the electric insulator (*Isolatorium*) that has been introduced into German mesmerism by Gmelin and Wienholt.

Technical devices of the second sort transmit the tertium to animated beings that enter their atmosphere. (As Gmelin before him, Kluge thinks that animal magnetism surrounds things and living beings like a halo.) In order to become agents of animal magnetism, the substitutes have to be charged with the fluid by physicians. After this procedure, which differs from one sort of device to the other, they are able to produce essentially the same effects than the magnetizing physician, albeit in a weaker way. All substitutes that Kluge describes were already introduced by Mesmer: magnetized water and glass, the magnetic battery as Kluge calls the *baquet*, and, of course, the magnetic trees.

The third form of mesmeric mediality, the voice of the somnambulistic trance medium as mediator of wholesome insights, is treated in a differentiated way. Very much like other mesmerists within the romantic era, Kluge concedes the possibilities of error and fraud but nevertheless affirms the reports that attribute paranormal perceptions and abilities to the magnetic somnambulists. Their competence as therapeutic mediums encompasses the ability to diagnose diseases (one's own and those of others with whom the medium came in magnetic rapport), anticipate the course of disease, and give therapeutic prescriptions.<sup>62</sup> In a typical manner, he only quotes selected references and ignores reports of unsuccessful experiments and remaining insecurities.<sup>63</sup>

With regard to the highest stages of somnambulistic trance, he is more cautious than the romantic philosophers and theologians of his age from Schubert onward. Nevertheless, probably influenced by the romantic milieu he was living

<sup>62</sup> Weder: Kleists magnetische Poesie, 81.

<sup>63</sup> Barkhoff: Magnetische Fiktionen, 95.

in, Kluge evaluates them less negative than the skeptical Eberhard Gmelin, who warned that it would be harmful for the patients as well as for the whole mesmeric movement if the somnambulists would be used as oracles who reveal higher truths.<sup>64</sup> Kluge accepts phenomena like telepathic communication between magnetizer and patient, visions of the heavenly world and the after-life, and the transformation of the somnambulist through the union with god, but sets up boundaries of their scientific explanation. As these phenomena would already belong to the spirit world, they would transcend the realm of knowledge of the natural sciences that is restricted to insights based on sensual perceptions.<sup>65</sup>

At the current state of science, even an explanation of the more earthly but still extraordinary insights of the magnetic somnambulist (like their ability to diagnose diseases) would be impossible. Presumptions and probabilities would be the highest reachable goal.<sup>66</sup> In this regard, he favors the physiology of the nervous system and especially two of Johann Christian Reil's ideas. Following Reil, Kluge thinks that the nerves are not containers but conductors of a sensitive atmosphere, a subtle fluid, or stream of life that surrounds them. This stream does not move inside but alongside the nerves.<sup>67</sup> As already mentioned above, he furthermore adopts the theory of two basic nervous systems, the cerebral- and the ganglia system from Reil.<sup>68</sup> Kluge supposes that the mesmeric treatment charges the ganglia system with the subtle fluid and concentrates it within the solar plexus.<sup>69</sup> This process would finally lead to an awakening of the solar plexus as center of an altered state of perception.

## Non-Human Media as Agents *Sui Generis*: Kieser's Animistic Concept

The therapeutic mediologies of Mesmer and Kluge center on the human magnetizer as main transmitter of the therapeutic tertium. The efficiency of the technical media depends on the personal magnetism of the mesmerists who use the devices to reinforce it or to store and radiate it outside face-to-face situations. In both cases, the technical medium functions as a kind of expansion of the

<sup>64</sup> Weder: Kleists magnetische Poesie, 100.

<sup>65</sup> Weder: Kleists magnetische Poesie, 88–89.

<sup>66</sup> Kluge: Versuch einer Darstellung, 213.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 217–220.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 223–234.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 276–278.

magnetizer's body. Dietrich Georg von Kieser challenged this paradigm in his *System des Tellurismus oder Thierischen Magnetismus* (1822) and related articles in the periodical *Archiv für den Thierischen Magnetismus* (1817–1824). The *Archiv* was at that time the most important journal of animal magnetism.<sup>70</sup> Commentators often criticize the verbose, baroque, and quite redundant style of Kieser's writings and especially of *System des Tellurismus*, which is more than a thousand pages long.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to dive into his very special mesmeric world and have a closer look at some of his innovative ideas.

A professor of medicine at the University of Jena, pioneer of psychiatry, and president of the Leopoldina, the German Academy of Natural Sciences, Kieser was a leading representative of philosophically oriented romantic medicine.<sup>72</sup> According to the subtitle of *System des Tellurismus*, it is meant to be a handbook "for investigators of nature and physicians." Whereas Kluge's sole intention was to treat animal magnetism as a therapeutic method for physicians, Kieser also addresses physicists and philosophers who investigate nature.

Actually, he bases the theory and practice of mesmerism on speculations about polarity as basic structure of the universe that were common in Schelling-inspired medicine and philosophy. In Kieser's system, every natural process is built upon the interaction of a positive, solar and a negative, telluric (from lat. *tellus*=earth) power that manifest themselves in countless ways. The principle of life would be nothing else than the "organic tension" between those opposites that generates an oscillating movement, similar to the constant succession of day and night.<sup>73</sup>

Insofar as this oscillation is identical with life itself, the whole of nature is alive. One could call Kieser's philosophy an integral animism: "All things in this world are *alive* and *organic*. [. . .] In relation to a *higher wholeness* they are necessary, integrative and organic parts or *organs* of this wholeness. But with regard to themselves they have to be conceived as *living organisms* with a higher or lesser degree of independence (individualisation)."<sup>74</sup> Because of

<sup>70</sup> For the close relationship between the Kieser's *Archiv* and his treatise on Tellurismus see Scheuerbrandt: Die Stimme der Natur. Kieser was the main contributor and *spiritus rector* of the *Archiv*. He also functioned as editor, together with three other important scholars, namely Friedrich Nasse, Carl August von Eschenmayer and Gottfried Daniel Nees von Esenbeck.

<sup>71</sup> Gauld: A History of Hypnotism, 144 and Barkhoff: Magnetische Fiktionen, 119.

<sup>72</sup> For Kieser's life and work see Brednow: Dietrich Georg Kieser.

<sup>73</sup> Brednow: Dietrich Georg Kieser, 41–43.

<sup>74</sup> Kieser: System des Tellurismus. Vol. 1, 3. For the contemporary discussion of animism as a category within cultural and religious studies see Albers and Franke: Animismus.

these essential relations that derive from the primal polarity, everything is driven by an inclination toward assimilation to the greater whole and, at the same time, by an instinct of self-preservation. Whenever two entities get in touch with each other, an organic vital process of mutual interaction takes place, in which one entity functions as ruling, positive, solar pole whereas the other one constitutes the ruled, negative, telluric pole.

Like all other modes of being, human life differentiates itself according to the primal polarity. Kieser distinguishes a night life (darkness, sleep, dream, emotion, imagination, passivity, femininity, submission, connectedness) manifesting the telluric force, and a day life (light, waking state, ordinary sense perception, reason and will, masculinity, domination, independency) enacting the solar force. This anthropological polarity mirrors Schubert's polarity of a light-side (reason and will, ordinary sense perception) and dark-side (pre-rational figurative thought, emotion, intuition) of knowledge, as well as Reil's antagonism between the sphere of the cerebral nerve system as organ of consciousness and the nerve system of the ganglia in the lower trunk as organ of the unconsciousness. Being a theoretician of mesmerism and the somnambulistic states, Kieser emphasizes the telluric side. For him, the mesmeric treatment is an intentionally enhanced form of telluric life. Animal magnetism and the somnambulistic states are considered to be manifestations of the power of the encompassing spirit of the earth (*Kraft des allgemeinen Erdgeistes*).<sup>75</sup>

This does not mean that he neglected the solar life or that he even propagated a kind of return to a paradisiac telluric nature. Similar to other mesmerists of his time (Windischmann, Eschenmayer, Ennemoser), for Kieser enlightenment and romanticism are not contradictory to each other. They all wanted to use the romantic turn toward the night side of life in order to create a higher form of enlightenment and the enhanced dominance of male European rationality.<sup>76</sup> Kieser is very outspoken about this. The somnambulists that are ruled by the telluric force represent the oriental "childhood days of mankind," whereas the male mesmeric therapist stands for the masculine and occidental age of science and reason.<sup>77</sup> The nocturnal clairvoyance of the somnambulists as highest form of emotional life and basis of the religions of the "old world" has to be transformed into the scientific knowledge of the day that rules the "new world."<sup>78</sup> He openly criticizes other romantic supporters of mesmerism (like Gotthilf

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>76</sup> Scheuerbrandt: *Die Stimme der Natur*, 246–247.

<sup>77</sup> Kieser: *System des Tellurismus*. Vol. 2, 283.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 284–285.

Heinrich von Schubert, Johann Friedrich von Meyer, and Franz von Baader) for rating religious views higher than scientific knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

With regard to the description and categorization of the different kinds of interaction between the mesmeric physicians and their patients, Kieser very much follows the lines of Kluge's system. He complements it, makes some terminological changes, and adds further differentiations. The real innovative element of his theory is the importance he attributes to the inanimate nature as agent of the therapeutic tertium (tellurism/animal magnetism) and, in particular, his use of the non-magnetized *baquet* as therapeutic tool.

He supposes that metals, water, and other natural phenomena (e.g., plants) possess an unknown power that is not identical with mineral magnetism, chemical, and other physical properties but springs from their "organic totalities."<sup>80</sup> The power of the spirit of the earth, tellurism, would manifest itself as mineral spirit, plant spirit, etc. In an unconscious, mythic way, these powers would have been already treated in folk tales about sylphs, goblins, mermaids, gnomes, and the like.<sup>81</sup> The truth of mythical stories about nature spirits could be reformulated in the language of modern physics if the usual non-organic physics would be complemented by a kind of higher "organic physics," which investigates these living powers within nature.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, Kieser approvingly quotes the early romantic physicist and philosopher Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810): "It almost seems that in relation to the developed organic life the dead substance gets the outlook of life as if – released from its fetters – it would at least for a little while show effects and powers in relation to life that are higher than those in relation to its equals."<sup>83</sup>

This reference is highly significant. Ritter's late work is the most important source for Kieser's concept of organic physics and his idea of the agency of inanimate substances. Ritter and Kieser were both deeply impressed by the effects of minerals on those who sense them intuitively (*Metallfühler*) with the help of dowsing rods or pendulums.<sup>84</sup> In line with Ritter, Kieser thought that

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 290. For a critical evaluation of Kieser's rationalistic agenda see Gruber: *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, 80–85.

<sup>80</sup> Kieser: *System des Tellurismus*. Vol 1, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>82</sup> Kieser: *Das magnetische Behältnis*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Ritter: *Der Siderismus*, 15: "Daß aber, dem entfalteten Organischen gegenüber, der todte Körper selbst den Schein des Lebens anzunehmen, und, wie erlöst von seinen Banden wenigstens auf Augenblicke Wirkungen und Kräfte auf das Leben äussern müsse, die höher sind, als die er gegen seines Gleichen übte, scheint es beinahe." Referred to in Kieser: *Das magnetische Behältnis*, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Kieser: *Das magnetische Behältnis*, 29 calls the experiences with dowsing rod and pendulum "diese, ein höheres Leben der anorganischen Körper verkündenden Erscheinungen".



these kinds of phenomena would be the best indicators of a “higher life of the inanimate things.”<sup>85</sup> Of course, both do not represent a straightforward animism. They respect the approach of modern physics, but nevertheless suppose the existence of “higher forces” that only appear within the interaction between human beings and nature.

During the last years of his short life, Ritter lived in Munich, where he was in close contact with Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling and Franz von Baader (1765–1841).<sup>86</sup> He not only studied the phenomena of somnambulism, but engaged himself in the end of 1806 (encouraged by Schelling and Baader) into experiments with the famous dowser Francesco Campetti in Tyrol. At the beginning of 1807, he returned together with Campetti to Munich, where many private séances with the dowser took place. Ritter’s experiments with divining rods and pendulums attracted a great deal of attention and were discussed in several periodicals.<sup>87</sup> For a short period of time, their use became a fashion within the networks of romantic intellectuals. Ritter and the mesmerist Nasse, who later functioned as co-editor of Kieser’s *Archiv*, claimed important similarities between the reactions of sensitive persons in the subterranean presence of metals or water and the effects of animal magnetism. On the other hand, they argued, magnetized somnambulists would react intensively on the presence of certain metals etc., just like the dowsers do.<sup>88</sup> Animal magnetism and the use of dowsing and similar technologies started to converge.

The craze ended only one year later, mainly because several articles in the *Annalen der Physik* criticized that the experiments insufficiently excluded sources of error, especially subconscious movements of the hands. A commission of the Academy of Science that should clarify the case was dissolved at the end of 1807 because of controversies with Ritter.

Around ten years later, from 1818 onward, Kieser’s *Archiv* takes up the case again. Several articles deal with pendulum and dowsing rod and connect with

concepts developed within the earlier romantic research on these topics. Kieser himself complains that both the practice of dowsing (at least in the northern parts of Germany) and the research on it have been almost forgotten and he makes a plea for starting the experiments again.<sup>89</sup> Pendulum and dowsing rod differ from the mesmeric therapeutic media. They do not function as transmitters of the therapeutic tertium but as sensors of its presence. In the case of Kieser, they make the all-pervading influence of the spirit of the earth perceivable and, thereby, nourish his view of nature as animated. He assumes that the sensitivity of dowsers might be a state of conscious somnambulism or a capacity of somnambulism that might, at least for some people, be active during the normal waking state.<sup>90</sup> Iron and other substances would obviously cause somnambulist states. The pendulum and dowsing rod would therefore also indicate altered states of consciousness.

Consequently, he blurs the boundaries between human mediums and technical or natural media of animal magnetism (or, in his terminology, of tellurism, the powerful spirit of the earth). Within the mesmeric movement before Kieser, the terms “somnambulist” and “magnetizer” have been used exclusively for human beings. Now, the human magnetizer is but one among many others. Insofar as minerals and plants radiate their own telluric energy, Kieser does not hesitate to call them “magnetizers.” In case they have been magnetized, he speaks of “non-organic somnambulists.”<sup>91</sup> Somnambulism can be caused through human interaction or through the organic influence of metals, water, etc. Accordingly, he understands the *baquet* as a kind of unconscious, unintentional magnetizer.<sup>92</sup> Kieser thinks that the operative substances within the vat are identical with those that affect people who react sensitively on subterranean metals or water veins. The *baquet* is a fullfledged magnetizer, an agent empowered by its own mesmerizing life force. Accordingly, Kieser introduced the non-magnetized *baquet* into the repertoire of therapeutic media. Its name “sideric *baquet*” alludes to the term “siderism” that Ritter used to refer to the higher powers of metals. In Kieser’s view, it would only be counterproductive to magnetize the *baquet* before its use or to combine its use with an interaction between the physician and his patients, because a human magnetizer would only disturb the effect of the sideric *baquet*.<sup>93</sup>

Kieser thinks that the animal magnetism that radiates from a human magnetizer is of a supreme order compared to mineral or plant-based telluric forces.

<sup>85</sup> Kieser: Das magnetische Behältnis, 29.

<sup>86</sup> Wetzels: Johann Wilhelm Ritter, 44–53.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. the articles of Klinkenstroem: Beitrag zur Geschichte der Wünschelrute and Klinkenstroem: Die Stellungnahme der ‘K. Akademie der Wissenschaften’ zu den Experimenten Ritter’s mit Campetti.

<sup>88</sup> Kluge: Versuch einer Darstellung, although written only shortly after the debate, is only briefly mentioning dowsing (see *ibid.*, 250–251). He refers to the recent discussions and ironically assumes that the truth will be found somewhere in the middle between the opinions of the opposing parties. The whole debate only interested him insofar, as it helped him to support one of his favourite ideas, the existence of what later occultists would call the ‘human aura’. According to Kluge, the ability of some persons to feel metals or water hidden in the earth is only explainable by supposing the existence of a sensitive atmosphere that surrounds the whole human body and connects it in a hidden way with its surrounding.

<sup>89</sup> Kieser: Das magnetische Behältnis, 23 (footnote).

<sup>90</sup> Kieser: Das magnetische Behältnis, 27–28.

<sup>91</sup> Kieser: System des Tellurismus. Vol. 1, 310.

<sup>92</sup> Kieser: Das magnetische Behältnis, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Kieser: System des Tellurismus. Vol.1, 441.

There is a hierarchical order within his animistic world. But this does not mean that in all cases human magnetism should be preferred. The use of both kinds of media has its advantages and disadvantages.<sup>94</sup> With regard to the patient, the sideric *baquet* is more secure concerning disturbances and incorrect treatment because of diseases, emotions, moral impurity, or concentration lapses of the human magnetizer. For the physician, the use of the sideric *baquet* means a facilitation of his work, because his presence is not needed for the treatment. Moreover, it protects the physician from the danger of being too much influenced or even dominated by the patient. On the other hand, the power of the sideric *baquet* is less vivid and intense than the telluric force radiated by human beings. Additionally, the will of the human magnetizer is able to direct the telluric power more precisely toward certain organs or parts of the body and concentrate it there. The physician has to consider all these factors in order to decide in each case which kind of treatment would be preferable.

Kieser's upgrading of the *baquet* did not prevent its final decline within the mesmeric movement. The development of the *baquet* stagnated. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854) notices that *baquets* would only rarely be used. Some mesmerists would say that they are unnecessary; others would even argue that their use would be defamatory because mesmerists who work with them would be considered to be charlatans.<sup>95</sup> The magnetic healers who were responsible for the revival of mesmerism at the end of the century preferred manual therapy. Those of them who were still interested in technical devices replaced the old-style *baquets* with new tools, like the sun-ether radiation-apparatuses of the chemist Oskar Korschelt (1853–1940). The *baquet* became the forgotten prototype of a great many "empty media" used within alternative therapies until today.

## Conclusion

In order to analyze the therapeutic mediologies of mesmerism and to foster the understanding of therapeutic systems and processes in general, I suggested a theoretical model based on Burckhard Peter's concept of the therapeutic tertium. This model allows differentiating several basic therapeutic agents. Furthermore, it conceives healing rituals and the whole therapeutic process as events that aim at connecting therapists and patients through specific media with the supposed

therapeutic tertium, that is, a source of health that transcends the capabilities of the healers and their clientele as well as those of their interpersonal relationship.

From this theory follows that therapeutic mediologies must alter according to the different ways in which the therapeutic tertium is construed. In the main section of this chapter, I examined this implication by investigating three mesmeric mediologies. It turned out that, at least within the history of mesmerism, a strong connection exists between the conceptualization of the therapeutic tertium, therapeutic mediology, and the healer-patient-relationship.

Mesmer regarded the therapeutic tertium as a subtle fluid that consisted of extremely small particles that pervade the universe and preserve the cosmic order. In his later works, he tended to understand animal magnetism as a purely energetic phenomenon. As already Kieser clearly saw, he never overcame this theoretical ambiguity. According to Mesmer's inclination towards modern physics and technics, technical devices were quite important for him. His openness to new techniques and tools, if they would only corresponded to his general physical principles, encouraged the creativity of his disciples. Mesmer's shifting between corpuscular physics, energy physics, and vitalism also allowed mesmerism to develop into different directions.

The Bailly report seriously challenged Mesmer's claim that a cosmic fluid exists and is transmitted to the patients by several media within mesmeric treatments. From a mediological point of view, the report – for the first time in the history of modern science – takes some steps in order to explain the effectivity of "empty media."

For Kluge, who knew about the results of the Bailly report and the new direction mesmerism took with Puységur, the nature of the animal-magnetic fluid is still unknown. Most probably it would be a kind of sensitive atmosphere that runs along the nerve fibers and also encircles the whole human body connecting it with the surrounding. In his systematization of mesmeric techniques, the interaction between therapist and patient is central. Technical media are, compared to Mesmer, of minor importance. Especially, his detailed description of a whole range of manual treatments shows how subtle the medium of bodily interaction between healer and patient within German mesmerism had become.

Kieser embedded his therapeutic practice within a Schelling-inspired *Naturphilosophie*, which envisions the therapeutic tertium as the immaterial activity of the telluric life process. His theory was inspired by earlier experiments of German romantics with dowsing rods and pendulums. It could be described as a modern form of animism. Kieser's view of tellurism/animal magnetism challenged the predominance of the human magnetizer and caused an upgrading of non-human media as independent agents within the therapeutic process.

<sup>94</sup> Kieser: System des Tellurismus. Vol. 1, 444–447.

<sup>95</sup> Ennemoser: Anleitung zur mesmerischen Praxis, 209–210.

Their new importance is reflected in Kieser's discussion of the pros and cons of equipment-based mesmeric medicine.

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