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The Role of Buddhism, Theosophy, and Science in František Kupka's Search for the Immaterial through 1909

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The Role of Buddhism, Theosophy, and Science in František Kupka's Search for the Immaterial through 1909

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2012

Dedication

For Jay, on our adventure

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of several individuals. I am particularly thankful for the guidance of my advisor, Linda Henderson, while working on this thesis and during my graduate education. I am also grateful for the helpful suggestions from my second reader, Janice Leoshko. They each provided indispensable knowledge and direction in the completion of this thesis. I owe special gratitude to my supportive and encouraging husband, Jay Wright, for his continuous patience and sense of adventure. In addition, I will always be grateful for the unconditional love and support of my parents, who showed me the gift of God's grace.

Abstract

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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Czech painter František Kupka (1871-1957), who spent his active years in Paris, remains one of the most under-researched artists, given his important status as one of the first painters of totally abstract works of art, beginning in 1912. As such, his philosophical and iconographical sources have yet to be fully discussed. This thesis examines how three of Kupka's sources, Buddhism, Theosophy, and science, demonstrate his belief in the existence of an immaterial reality, which shaped his art and theory.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the notion of invisible realities was a widespread concern of individuals aware of science and/or interested in mysticism and occultism. In this context, Buddhism would have offered another model for new ways of envisioning existence and consciousness. Two of Kupka's early works, *The Soul of the Lotus* (1898) and *The Beginning of Life* (1900), show his knowledge of Buddhist, and possibly Hindu, iconography. The Musée Guimet in Paris offered a rich supply of material by which an individual could learn about Buddhism, and Kupka's imagery likely

drew upon such sources. In addition to the Musée Guimet, it is likely Kupka also encountered Buddhism through popularized Eastern thought—in part through books published in Paris on that subject as well as on Theosophy. The writings of Theosophical authors regularly addressed themes related both to Buddhism and to contemporary science, which was equally concerned with the invisible and the immaterial. Discoveries such as the X-ray, for example, affirmed the inaccuracy of human vision and the existence of a reality beneath surface appearances, which supported Theosophy in its reaction against materialism.

I argue that Kupka's 1909 painting *The Dream* serves as a culmination of his concern for alternative conceptions of reality. Painted using a formal language of transparency, *The Dream* demonstrates Kupka's interest in Buddhism, Theosophy, and science and represents his belief in the immaterial as a critical stage in his philosophical and artistic evolution.

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Introduction

In response to the exhibition of Czech artist František Kupka's (1871-1957) paintings at the 1912 Salon d'Automne, critic Gustave Kahn wrote: "The elegant chromatic arabesques based on feminine lines by Mr. Kupka are games which are not within everyone's reach. Even with the greatest sympathy for the Cubist effort, one cannot yet admire these works."[1] The paintings hung in a room dedicated to Cubist painting featuring the works of Jean Metzinger and Francis Picabia (Fig. 1).[2] Meda Mladek, in her essay for the 1975 Kupka retrospective at the Guggenheim, imaginatively describes the reception, stating, "French critics were indignant, enraged. Almost unanimously they rejected the paintings, mainly because they were incompatible with French tradition and taste."[3] As the first totally abstract paintings shown in Paris, it is no wonder *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors* (1912) and *Amorpha, Warm Chromatics* (1911-1912) received negative reviews (Figs. 2, 3).[4] Kupka, as a foreigner, presented a type of painting previously unseen, one in which recognizable subject matter had disappeared from the canvas. Since he spent his youth studying traditional painting techniques and creating illustrational artworks, one wonders, what would incite an artist to move from naturalism and illustration to total abstraction?

German art historian Wilhelm Worringer analyzed the "urge" to artistic abstraction and its importance in the history of art in his 1907 book *Abstraction and*

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[1] Gustave Kahn in *Mercure de France*, November 1, 1912, 181; as quoted in Margit Rowell, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in *František Kupka 1871-1957: A Retrospective* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1975), 184.

[2] Daniel Robbins. *Cubism* (New York: James Goodman Gallery, 1989).

[3] Meda Mladek, "Central European Influences," in Guggenheim Museum, *František Kupka 1871-1957*, 13.

[4] Rowell, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in Guggenheim Museum, *František Kupka 1871-1957*, 184. Michael Kimmelman, in his *New York Times* review of the exhibition *František Kupka 1871-1957, ou l'invention d'une abstraction*, also cites the negative reviews Kupka received at the 1912 Salon d'Automne. Michael Kimmelman, "Paris Pays Belated Respects to a True Bohemian," *New York Times*, 28 January 1990, 38-39.

Empathy. Worringer argued for a connection between abstraction and spiritual transcendence in contrast to his association of naturalism with empathy or satisfaction with the external world.[5] Mladek cites Worringer for his role in the Viennese art world in which Kupka participated prior to his arrival in Paris in 1896.[6] The connection between artistic abstraction and the spiritual, including the occultism of such organizations as the Theosophical Society, was to be the subject of an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art nearly seventy-five years later. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (1986) explored the relationship between artistic practice and spirituality in the works of many artists, including the three famous pioneers of abstraction: Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich.

Kupka worked his way through a variety of styles of modern art movements between 1896 and 1910. During those years he actively painted in Paris gradually transforming his style from Symbolist illustration to totally abstract painting. Kupka never identified with any one movement, which made him elusive for contemporary critics and has continued to do so.[7] In a February 12, 1913 letter to his friend Arthur Roessler, he wrote of his irritation at being labeled a Cubist: "In the last Salon d'Automne I had a beautiful place of honor, unfortunately in the room with the Cubists whom I am almost on a parallel. It is with me as it was with Degas, who was classified as an Impressionist."[8] For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to note that while Kupka

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[5] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), 14-15.

[6] Mladek, "Central European Influences," 23.

[7] Margit Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," in Guggenheim Museum, *František Kupka 1871-1957*, 47, 79.

[8] Kupka as quoted in Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 47. For more information on Kupka's relationship to the Cubists, see Linda D. Henderson, "Kupka, les rayons X, et le monde des ondes électromagnétiques," in *František Kupka 1871-1957, ou l'invention d'une abstraction* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).

did not become an official follower of Cubism, Fauvism, or any other movement, he did indeed borrow stylistic elements, from Fauvism in particular. Margit Rowell describes Kupka as passing "directly from a form of Fauvism to a post-Cubist idiom, in which spatial structure derived from units of color and motion, two pictorial components which were outside the sphere of pure Cubist theory and practice."[9]

Like Kandinsky, Mondrian, and, to a lesser degree, Malevich, Kupka was also deeply interested in spiritual and occult practices. However, Kupka developed his own philosophical and aesthetic opinions by combining a variety of sources in addition to the spiritual and occult.[10] In an interview with art historian J.P. Hodin, Kupka pointed to Élisée Reclus's six volume book *L'Homme et la terre* (1905) and declared, "The history of civilizations, of races, the relationship of culture and economy . . . I was never misled into pondering only on the problem of art and how it originated."[11] Kupka's sources often held one notion in common: the affirmation of his long-held belief in the presence of a reality beneath surface appearances. To that end, three particular sources are central to this thesis: Buddhism, Theosophy, and science. I want to consider these sources within the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Paris, where Kupka developed his mature style. By examining three of Kupka's sources, I hope to shed light on his move from illustration to abstraction and to demonstrate how central to this transition was his belief in the existence of an invisible, immaterial reality.

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[9] Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 74. For more information on Kupka's stylistic sources, see Margit Rowell and Meda Mladek's essays in the 1975 Guggenheim catalogue, *František Kupka 1871-1957*. Also see Virginia Spate's chapter on Kupka in *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris 1910-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

[10] Spate, *Orphism*, 87.

[11] Kupka as quoted in J.P. Hodin, introduction to *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, by Ludmila Vachtová (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 10. Ellipsis in original.

Section I: Buddhist Iconography in *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*

In 1898 Kupka created a small watercolor that contained a subject previously unseen in his work. Painted in his typical early Symbolist style, *The Soul of the Lotus* features Buddhist iconographical elements, most notably in the form of the lotus flower (Fig. 4). Two years later, he repeated the same iconography of the lotus flower and lily pond in his colored aquatint titled *The Beginning of Life* (Fig. 5). The subject matter for these two paintings is peculiar among Kupka's other works from the same time. During his early years in Paris, he produced illustrations for an anarchist press and provided drawings for anarchist books by authors such as Reclus.[12] His illustrations, including *Money (L'Argent)* from 1899, generally focused on attacking the injustice, cruelty, and hypocrisy of society (Fig. 6).[13] *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*, however, present the more positive theme of creation connected to the imagery of the blooming lotus flower.

The lotus flower is a consistent element in Buddhist religious imagery across the various countries associated with Buddhism, including Japan, China, Tibet, and India. The lotus can be seen in numerous examples: in images of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion; in Tibetan images of Avalokitesvara in the female form of Tara; in fifth to seventh century cave paintings in Ajanta, India; and in images from the transitional period of sixth century Chinese Buddhist art showing representations of pure, paradisiacal realms "often described as having ponds filled with lotuses" (Figs. 7, 8, 9,

[12] Spate, *Orphism*, 89. Kupka provided illustrations for French geographer Élysée Reclus's (1830-1905) book *L'Homme et la terre* published in 1905.

[13] Ibid.; Rowell, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," 82. In her description of *Money*, Rowell notes that Kupka periodically dealt with the theme of the "lurid fascination of money," which he repeated in his 1902 illustrations for *L'Assiette au beurre*, an anarchist publication.

10).[14] Depending on the geographical country of origin, the symbolism of the lotus can shift in its iconographical use. For the purpose of this thesis, it will be sufficient to acknowledge the proliferation of lotus iconography in Buddhist art and its general association with the sacred forms of the Buddha and bodhisattva.

Virginia Spate has suggested a correlation between Tantric Buddhist conceptions of the lotus flower and sexuality in relation to Kupka's *The Soul of the Lotus*. As one of the first scholars to carefully consider Kupka's iconography in this work, she identifies its Indian and Buddhist elements in her chapter, "Mystical Orphism: Frank Kupka," in *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-figurative Painting in Paris 1910-1914*:

> The lotus and the figures in Indian dress suggest that the drawing was inspired by one of the Indian religions which Kupka studied and in which the lotus often had sexual connotations as a generator of life; for example, in Tantric Buddhism the lotus was believed to be the feminine principle from whose union with the thunderbolt, the masculine principle, the phenomenal world comes into being.[15]

Spate presents a highly sexualized interpretation of *The Soul of the Lotus* and goes on to emphasize Kupka's attraction to erotic themes in other works such as *Ballade/Joies* (1901-02), but she also connects the watercolor to Kupka's overarching philosophical concerns (Fig. 11). Spate relates the work to his interest in the theme of the generation of life and the division between spirit and matter.[16] The lotus also holds connections to sexuality in Hinduism. The Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris exhibition catalogue, *František Kupka 1871-1957, ou l'invention d'une abstraction* (1989), describes Kupka's *The Beginning of Life* in terms of Hindu sexual associations with the

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[14] Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to its History and Meaning* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 88. Janice Leoshko, in her "Buddhist Art" course, discussed each kind of visual reference in the spring 2011 semester. Lecture dates corresponding to the references are as follows: Avalokitesvara, April 7, 2011; Tara, April 7, 2011; Ajanta, March 24, 2011; Chinese, April 14, 2011.
[15] Spate, *Orphism*, 97.
[16] Ibid., 97-98.

lotus: "In Hinduism, the lotus is a symbol of the procreative force of nature, resulting from the combined action of fire and water, spirit and matter."[17] Thus, Buddhism and Hinduism offered a connection between the lotus and sexuality as well as spiritualty, which, as we shall see, will come through in *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*.

The first section of this thesis focuses on possible Buddhist, and even Hindu, iconographical sources from which Kupka borrowed to create *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*. What would it have been possible for Kupka to know about Buddhist aesthetics in turn-of-the-century Paris? *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life* raise questions about his interest in Buddhism as well as his access to information on Buddhism and its iconography. One goal of this thesis is to understand from what form of Buddhism Kupka borrowed imagery, including the consideration of cultural specifics, since Buddhism and Buddhist objects span a variety of countries and cultures as noted above.

In his essay, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," Gregory Schopen analyzes the primary place of textual sources in the Western nineteenth-century study of Buddhism. Schopen argues that because of the West's placement of high value on its own religious text, the Bible, Western archaeologists and scholars continued the practice in their early study of Indian Buddhism. Even more so, the practice led to the devaluation of objects, which rendered materials irrelevant in the official study of Buddhism. Schopen's research demonstrates the need to consider objects and visual materials as of equal importance to texts in

[17] "Dans l'hindouisme, le lotus est un symbole de la force procréatrice de la nature, fruit de l'action conjuguée du feu et de l'eau, de l'esprit et de la matière." From Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *František Kupka 1871-1957*, 76. While this thesis focuses primarily on Buddhist iconography, it is important to acknowledge the presence of the lotus flower in Hinduism and its imagery.

studying and understanding a religion.[18] After identifying plausible visual sources, I will then turn in Section II to uncover possible textual sources in which Kupka could have discovered philosophical principles of Buddhism. Considering Schopen's arguments, I will begin by discussing *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life* in relation to one particular visual inspiration as an example of the many sources available in Paris: the collections of the Musée Guimet.

Kupka's interest in Buddhist iconography was not unusual for an artist of his time; several artists of the early twentieth century made use of the Musée Guimet's collection. In particular, Constantin Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp are two artists known for their interest in the museum's collection.[19] Margit Rowell has made a stylistic comparison of Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* (1909-1910) to Buddha and bodhisattva heads present in the collections of the Musée Guimet and the Louvre (Figs. 12, 13).[20] In addition to iconographical connections between the artist and Buddhism, Brancusi also maintained a philosophical concern for Buddhism: one of his favorite books was the biography of the Tibetan poet Milarepa.[21] As a contemporary of Kupka and fellow Eastern European, Brancusi serves as a strong model of the Western artist contemplating and working with Buddhist philosophy and iconography. Duchamp, who was close to

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[18] Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31, no. 1 (August 1991): 1-23.

[19] Jacquelynn Bass, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Money to Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). "Constantin Brancusi: 1876-1957," 70-77; "Marcel Duchamp: 1887-1968," 78-96.

[20] Ibid., 75. Margi Rowell, "Brancusi: Timelessness in a Modern Mode," in *Constantin Brancusi 1876-1957* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995), 38-48. According to Rowell, Brancusi incorporated the aesthetics of certain Buddhist works into his sculptural practice. For Rowell, the result of Brancusi's exposure to Buddhist sources is the transformation of his artistic philosophy and style. "The reference to an archaic form of religious art enabled Brancusi to free his work from the stylistic contingencies and constraints—both traditional and modern—of his own period: in short, to liberate it from contemporary aesthetic conventions, in both form and meaning." Rowell, "Brancusi: Timelessness in a Modern Mode," 42.

[21] Rowell, "Brancusi: Timelessness in a Modern Mode," 38.

Kupka through his brothers' shared compound in Puteaux, also showed an interest in Buddhism in his work *Draft on the Japanese Apple Tree* (1911) (Fig. 14).[22] The examples of Brancusi and Duchamp demonstrate the strong awareness of Buddhism in Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As we shall see, *The Soul of the Lotus* contains a mixture of Buddhist and possibly Hindu iconography similar to works on view at the Musée Guimet (Fig. 4). Kupka divided the continuous scene into a triptych by using thick white lines to separate the three segments. On the left, a female form, which is surrounded by an ephemeral substance, grows out of a floating, blooming lotus flower. The middle section contains the setting of a lotus flower and lily pond adjacent to an ornate structure. On the right panel, elaborately dressed female figures dance in celebration around a central decorated male figure. The male, who one might presume to be royalty, focuses intently on the other-worldly figure while pushing aside his adoring attendants. In addition to the Buddhist symbols of the lotus flower and lily pond, Kupka dressed the figures in Indian-style costume and placed them within Indian-style architecture.[23] The appropriation of symbols and styles raises questions about Kupka's iconographical sources, especially since he seems to conflate imagery from multiple religions into a single work.

The Musée Guimet offered Parisians a means to study Asian cultural artifacts, especially Buddhist materials.[24] Émile Guimet, an industrialist from Lyon, envisioned opening a museum dedicated to the religions of Asia, classical civilizations, and ancient

[22] Bass, *Smile of the Buddha*, 81. Bass notes how Redon's *Buddha in His Youth* (1904), which had been shown as part of his retrospective at the 1904 Salon d'Automne, resonated for Duchamp in *Draft on the Japanese Apple Tree*. Bass also claims the model for the work was a Japanese woman, possibly a Buddhist, who modeled for artists living in Puteaux, the Parisian suburban home of Duchamp's brothers as well as Kupka.

[23] Spate, *Orphism*, 97.

[24] A note on terminology regarding Buddhist sources: although objects displayed at the Musée Guimet appear as artworks within the museum setting, they were often used as objects of devotion with religious purpose.

Egypt.[25] The Musée Guimet (or Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet) opened in 1889 with a growing focus on Asia, which developed from "a series of expeditions undertaken in various regions of the Far East."[26] In addition to the works collected by Guimet himself during his travels in Japan in 1876, new materials came from expeditions to Korea by Charles Varat and to Tibet by Jacques Bacot.[27] By the early twentieth century, the Musée Guimet held collections of works from Japan, the Himalayas, central Asia, Korea, and India; the collections maintained a focus on Buddhist materials. With such a range of cultures from which works came, there was a wide variety of Buddhist objects, representations, and styles to be observed.

The expeditions and their impact on the holdings of the Musée Guimet were typical for Asian museum collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[28] In Paris, the Musée Indochinois at the Trocadéro, which was founded in 1882, centered on a collection of Khmer art from French explorer and curator Louis Delaporte's expeditions to Siam and Cambodia.[29] The Louvre Museum began a sub-section of its Department of Art Objects focused on Asian arts, particularly from China and Japan,

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[25] Musée Guimet, "History of the Museum" <http://www.guimet.fr/History-of-the-museum> (27 November 2011). The Guimet initially opened in Lyon in 1879, but the collections transferred to Paris when the new Paris Musée Guimet opened in 1889.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid. Varat visited Seoul, Korea in 1888 with the help of Collin de Plancy, the French diplomat to Korea. Bacot, who conducted expeditions to Tibet in 1906 and 1911, donated his collection of Tibetan objects to the Guimet in 1912.

[28] In the United States, the late nineteenth century saw the founding of major East Coast museums and by the early twentieth century, the Asian arts departments of museums were rapidly increasing. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston all began their Asian art collections by the first two decades of the twentieth century with much of their collections consisting of material brought back from expeditions. See each museum website for collection histories. A notable American example of the trend of Asian art collections beginning with expeditions or missions is the Newark Museum in Newark, New Jersey, which maintains an extensive collection of Tibetan materials that began with Christian medical missionary expeditions into Tibet. Valrae Reynolds, *From the Sacred Realm: Treasures of Tibetan Art from the Newark Collection* (Munich: Prestel, 1999).

[29] Musée Guimet, "History of the Museum."

which evolved into the Department of Asian Arts.[30] The display of Eastern materials, from the sacred to the profane, offered a glimpse into the alternative; they showed a different artistic program and presented objects reflective of beliefs divergent from traditional Christian thinking.

In its exhibition spaces, the Musée Guimet displayed a large variety of materials from their collections. Photographs from the archives of the Musée Guimet show the exhibition style of the museum in the early twentieth century.[31] Rows and rows of cases feature numerous artifacts, while the center aisles are lined with objects ranging from figurines to plant containers (Figs. 15, 16). The display cases contain architectural components, vases, and small sculptures, while other rooms showcase sculptures of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (Figs. 17, 18). The Musée Guimet presented viewers with numerous objects from which they could study and learn about Asian cultures and religion. It also produced written guides to assist the interested viewer in understanding the collection. Jacquelynn Bass notes that "from its founding in 1879, the Musée Guimet featured a large display of Japanese Buddhist art, analyzed in regularly updated 'little guides' to the collection."[32] Such guides could provide artists with a visual study guide to alternative modes of representation as seen at the Musée Guimet.

However, the quantity of objects on display at the Musée Guimet may well have given the viewer a shallow view of Asian cultures and Buddhism. The sheer amount of material in each room is overwhelming and seemingly intended to bombard the viewer with the museum's impressive quantity of objects. The photographs generally show an

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[30] Ibid.

[31] The photographs range in date from circa 1900 to 1931. I am grateful to Dr. Larisa Dryansky, who conducted research at the archives of the Musée Guimet in February 2012 on my behalf. The photographs and 1910 museum guide cited here are from the Musée Guimet's archives.

[32] Bass, *Smile of the Buddha*, 90.

absence of informational material available within the gallery space. Although some Buddha sculptures have metal plaques, most works lack any identifying information (Fig. 13). Without specifics of artist, medium, date, or context, the viewer could construct an interpretation of the objects far from any historical reality. Thus, any source of style, function, and other art historical information is replaced by a generic knowledge of Asian materials, and by extension, what an Asian religion, like Buddhism, conveyed through its objects.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr. discusses the problem of non-specificity in understanding a foreign religion in his study of the West's introduction to Tibet in *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Lopez argues that Tibet has become separated from its concrete, physical location. As a result, the country functions as an imaginary place and an alternative way of life and thought: "Things Tibetan become not particular to a time and place, but universal, and in the process Tibet is everywhere and hence nowhere, functioning as an element of difference in which anything is possible."[33]

While I want to refrain from focusing on Tibetan Buddhism, Lopez's model offers a way to envision how the West encountered Buddhism as an Eastern religion. His research highlights the manner in which Western culture appropriated Buddhist philosophy and iconography without paying attention to the specifics of culture, date, or function. The model of the West and Tibet demonstrates how an artist from the turn-of-the-century, like Kupka, might have encountered and appropriated elements of Buddhism as an alternative to Western tradition. With the Musée Guimet, among other museums, offering a huge cache of Buddhist and other Asian materials, a viewer could easily form an idea of what Buddhism means by combining diverse ideas and iconographies. Thus,

[33] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 13.

an individual might end up with the kind of mixed iconography Kupka employed as a non-specific form of Buddhism in *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*. *The Soul of the Lotus* simultaneously shows Indian style dress and architecture next to the Buddhist imagery of the lotus and halo, which will be discussed shortly. Lopez's research sheds light on how Westerners used Buddhism and the East as an alternative world view with different concepts of creation and the division of spirit and matter, which were two major concerns for Kupka.[34]

From the evidence found in the Musée Guimet archives, it appears as if the museum offered several ways to study its collections: through lectures, through demonstrations of Buddhist practices, or by reading printed guides. Despite the absence of educational material available in the Musée Guimet displays, the museum staged several lectures on Buddhist related topics in these years. In 1908, the museum hosted a lecture given by Jacques Bacot, who led two expeditions to Tibet and subsequently brought back materials. He even returned with a Tibetan man named Adjourp Gumbo.[35] Bacot's 1908 lecture corresponded with the exhibition of materials he collected from his travels to Tibet. Bacot lectured again in 1911 on Tibetan art in connection with another exhibition, which included over three hundred Tibetan paintings, sculptures, and more, which he then donated to the Musée Guimet in 1912.[36]

An illustration from the museum archives shows a celebration that occurred at the Musée Guimet on June 27, 1898. The image shows Parisians in one of the museum salons surrounding a Tibetan monk (Fig. 19). The monk, elevated on his seat, bows in meditation while seated in front of an altar one might presume to be Tibetan in origin

[34] Spate, *Orphism*, 97-98.
[35] Bass, *Smile of the Buddha*, 76.
[36] Ibid.

(Fig. 20). On the lower left corner of the image, it is inscribed, "cerémonie célèbrée au Musée Guimet le 27 Juin 1898" (Fig. 21). The verso of the illustration cites the event as "cerémonie lamaïque célèbrée." Lamaism, as a popular turn-of-the-century synonym for Tibetan Buddhism, was a term used to distinguish "traditional" Buddhism from the specific form of Buddhism found in Tibet, often identified either as the purest form or as the most denigrated.[37] The 1910 guide from the Musée Guimet reflects this terminology in its description of the room containing Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese works. It describes Tibetan spirituality as a combination of two religions: the native Bon-pa and Buddhism under "la forme spéciale que l'on nomme Lamaïsme."[38] The language used by the Musée Guimet to describe Tibetan Buddhism as Lamaism evidences the popularity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century terminology associated with Tibetan Buddhism. For the Musée Guimet to use such language proved they were either at the forefront of Buddhist studies or at least on par with their contemporaries.

The 1910 *Petit Guide illustré au Musée Guimet* features a statue similar in dress and shape to one female figure in Kupka's *The Soul of the Lotus* (Figs. 22, 23). In the right panel, the far left dancing female figure in Kupka's watercolor is adorned with a similar necklace, headdress, and pants to the figure on the cover of the Musée Guimet guide, which is also found in the interior of the guide with the caption "Lakchmî."[39] The corresponding description of the object, which notes its location in the middle of the room, states, "Ancient bronze statue representing Lakshmi (Sanskrit, Laksmi) or Cri,

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[37] Janice Leoshko, "What is in KIM? Rudyard Kipling and Tibetan Buddhist Tradition" *South Asia Research* 21, no. 1 (2001): 58. Leoshko argues that Theosophists contributed to the growing curiosity in Tibet in the late nineteenth century because of their fascination with certain mystical elements found in Tibetan tradition. For a detailed discussion of the term "Lamaism," see Donald Lopez, "The Name," in *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 15-45.

[38] L. de Milloue, *Petit Guide Illustré au Musée Guimet*, ed. Ernest Leroux (Paris: Musée Guimet, 1910), 85. "The special form known as Lamaism."

[39] Ibid., 50.

wife of the god Vishnu, goddess of beauty and fortune."[40] Lakshmi, known as the Hindu goddess of good fortune, sometimes carries a lotus.[41] Lakshmi and Kupka's female figure share similar iconographical elements. In addition to their clothing, they both have large, full breasts and a thin waist, which accentuates their sexuality as females and is a style common to yakshi figures, which will be discussed shortly. A comparison between the Lakshmi figure and Kupka's female shows a connection between sexuality and spirituality. While Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess, is a combination of sexuality and spirituality in one form, Kupka separated the sexual and the spiritual in *The Soul of the Lotus*. Sexuality, in the dancing female forms, remains relegated to the right frame while spirituality is represented by the figure emerging from the lotus flower.[42] Through the format of the triptych, Kupka thus created a physical barrier between the sacred and the profane.

Yakshis, similar in form to Lakshmi, were also shown at the Musée Guimet. Yakshis, and their male counterparts known as yakshas, are found in both Buddhist and Hindu sculpture and architecture throughout Indian history.[43] Yakshis and yakshas first functioned as local deities connected to sacred sites and later transformed into god-like protectors of the earth associated with basic concerns, including fertility and health.[44] The yakshi figures are intricately related to Indian religious thought and visual imagery. A superb example of a yakshi found in the Musée Guimet's collection is a cast of a molding

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[40] Ibid., 51. "Statue de bronze ancien représentant Lakchmî (sansk. Laksmî) ou Çrî, épouse du dieu Vichnou, déesse de la beauté et de la fortune."
[41] Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism*, 170.
[42] In "Traverser l'eau noire," Petr Wittlich discusses Kupka's separation of sensuality and spirituality through a "motif indien" in *The Soul of the Lotus*, but he focuses on the stylistic means by which Kupka represents the two sides. Petr Wittlich, "Traverser l'eau noire," in *Vers des Temps nouveaux: Kupka, oeuvres graphiques, 1984-1912* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2002), 28.
[43] Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism,* 14.
[44] Ibid.

of the East gate of Sanchi located in the museum's courtyard until 1930 (Figs. 24, 25).[45] Sanchi, in Madhya Pradesh, India, dates from the first century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. and operates as one of the great Buddhist pilgrimage sites.[46] The yakshi figure on the Sanchi gate, in addition to the Lakshmi figure printed in the *Petit Guide*, demonstrates a standard Indian representation of human sexuality in sacred form. In *The Soul of the Lotus*, Kupka presented the motif of human sexuality and creation related to the spiritual realm. Unlike the yakshi or Lakshmi, however, he separated the two realms by placing them in different frames of the triptych. Furthermore, he placed a middle scene as a mediator between the two worlds: the lotus flower and lily pond, which in sixth century China served as representations of paradise, or "pure lands."[47] The pond not only separates the earthly, sexual sphere from the heavenly sphere but it also connects them. Thus, Kupka used the Buddhist symbolism of the lotus flower and lily pond in combination with the Indian iconography of sacred sexuality, which he possibly encountered in types of figures found in Parisian collections such as the Musée Guimet: the Hindu goddess Lakshmi and the Buddhist-Hindu imagery of the yakshi.

Many examples of circles and halos can be also found as part of Buddhist works, including those in the Musée Guimet collection. In archive photographs of the "ancienne salle japonaise," one finds a plethora of oval and circular halos, or mandalas, surrounding different forms of the Buddha (Fig. 26). The mandala iconography was used to denote sacred space, often either of the Buddha or bodhisattvas, and was a form used in various

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[45] The reverse of the photograph contains information on the gate's location and date. According to Tosi Lee, French Buddhologist Alfred Foucher gave a lecture titled "The Eastern Gate of Sanchi Stupa" at the Musée Guimet in 1910, done after Kupka's two works. Tosi Lee, "Fire Down Below and Water, That's Life: A Buddhist Reader's Response to Marcel Duchamp," in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, eds. Jacquelynn Bass and Mary Jane Jacob (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 127.

[46] Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism,* 17. For a discussion of the visual analysis of imagery at Sanchi, see Joanna Williams, "On Viewing Sāñcī," *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997/1998): 93-98.

[47] Ibid., 88.

regional Buddhist iconographies.[48] An example from the Musée Guimet *Petit Guide* from 1910 shows a Tibetan image of a halo surrounding the central figure (Fig. 27). The object is on the same introductory page as the Tibetan section that refers to Tibetan Buddhism and Lamaism as mentioned above. The halo, which appears both wave-like and ornamental in form, suggests the form found in Kupka's *The Soul of the Lotus* (Figs. 27, 28). The halos both function to set the figure apart from its surroundings and to signify the figure as sacred. Furthermore, the Tibetan object, which is identified as Tchanrési, stands upon a base adorned with blossoming lotus flowers. In *The Soul of the Lotus*, the spiritual female form does not simply stand upon a lotus flower base but emerges from it. Kupka will return to the halo imagery through his use of the circle in relation to creation in *The Beginning of Life* (Fig. 5). In *The Beginning of Life*, discussed below, the fetus is encapsulated in a circular form. As it floats in the center of the circle, the child appears as sacred and holy. The parallels in iconography serve as proof that Kupka had access to Buddhist visual material, likely from a rich source such as the Musée Guimet.

Significantly, Kupka's use of figures associated with Indian Hinduism in addition to his borrowing of general Buddhist imagery demonstrates a conflation of styles and religious iconography. Viewed in comparison with one another, Kupka's dancing figure appears as an approximate copy of the Musée Guimet's Lakshmi or yakshi. Although the museum published this particular guide featuring "Lakchmî" in 1910, it is plausible that the same or a similar figure had been previously published in one of the Musée Guimet's guides since 1879. Additionally, the museum exhibited the Lakshmi sculpture in its galleries, and as discussed, the Sanchi gate with the yakshi figure stood in the museum's courtyard. Furthermore, the general popularity of Buddhism in Paris enabled individuals

[48] Ibid., 37. Leidy describes the halo as "an ancient Near Eastern solar symbol that was transmitted to both the East and the West . . . . and emphasizes spiritual advancement."

to have multiple ways to access visual and textual sources, with the Musée Guimet serving as one possible source. Kupka combined these form languages into his own style, which serves as an example of the non-specificity of culture and artistry borrowed by Westerners that Donald Lopez has discussed. Nevertheless, Kupka also created a strong visual representation of human spirituality and sexuality through the overarching motif of creation. Even if Kupka had not read any philosophical texts on Buddhism, the imagery available at an institution such as the Musée Guimet provided a rich study of Buddhist, as well as Hindu, notions of spirituality.

The Beginning of Life expands the iconography and theme of creation Kupka began with in *The Soul of the Lotus*. Completed in 1900, *The Beginning of Life* features the same lotus flower and lily pond seen in *The Soul of the Lotus*; however, Kupka now solely focused on the life coming from the blooming lotus. Whereas *The Soul of the Lotus* shows the female figure almost complete in formation, *The Beginning of Life* depicts the very start of human life: the fetus. The fetus itself floats within a circle with lines suggestive of swirling motion emerging from the center of the child and connecting with the outer circle. The child is also firmly connected to the radiating light contained within a second, overlapping circle, which is itself connected to the lotus. The imagery is powerful and overwhelmingly suggestive of the power of creation, life, and light. Here, Kupka makes a direct correlation between the form of the circle and creation.

In addition to the sacred halo imagery found in Buddhist objects and discussed earlier, the Buddhist visual connection between the circle and creation comes in certain images of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in his female form. One particular painting from the late nineteenth-century Japanese Meiji period (1868-1912) demonstrates the circle's relationship to creation: Kanō Hōgai's *Hibo Kannon* or *Merciful Mother Kannon*

(1888) (Fig. 29).[49] The painting features Avalokitesvara, known in Japan as Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, holding his traditional symbols, the water dropper and the willow branch, and standing on a lotus pedestal.[50] An infant, who looks up towards the bodhisattva, floats in a sphere at Kannon's feet. Chelsea Foxwell, in her article "*Merciful Mother Kannon* and Its Audiences," describes the interaction between the two characters as one moment in time, "a seminal moment: the white liquid from the dropper has just penetrated the sphere's inner nimbus."[51] It is the moment of creation and a metaphor of "conception, gestation, and birth."[52] Foxwell argues that Hōgai drew from a wide range of pre-existing images, including those from the Japanese, Chinese, and Korean tradition of depicting Avalokitesvara with a child or children placed by his feet.[53] He also followed a tradition of depicting Kannon as both male and female, which served a devotional purpose allowing Kannon to function as a metaphor for the power of creation.[54] The

[49] Dr. Janice Leoshko suggested a possible visual relationship between the two works during my colloquium on November 1, 2011.

[50] Chelsea Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences," *The Art Bulletin* XCII, no. 4 (December 2010): 328. Avalokitesvara (Sanskrit) is Kannon in Japanese and Guanyin in Chinese.

[51] Ibid., 329.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid. Foxwell argues that Hōgai's *Merciful Mother Kannon* features a combination of Western and Japanese iconography, making it accessible to audiences from both East and West. She examines the work within the context of the Meiji period (1868-1912) to discover that it "aspires to a legibility that transcends the particularities of iconography through what was assumed to be the universal truth of the human body." Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences," 329, 343.

[54] The theme of creation in *Merciful Mother Kannon* also deals with a complex notion of sexuality and gender. In *Merciful Mother Kannon*, Hōgai follows a tradition of depicting Kannon as both male and female. Foxwell discusses how the Canonical Buddhist texts describe Avalokitesvara (Kannon) as male, but in East Asian images and texts, his figure came to be portrayed as feminine. Then beginning in eleventh-century China, various stories and images describe Avalokitesvara as female. The idea of a female or feminized Avalokitesvara subsequently spread to Japan via China "leading to the coexistence of masculine and feminine depictions and frequently of masculine and feminine traits in the same painting." Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences," 330. Sherry Fowler, in her March 2012 lecture "Manifestations of Changes: The Many Faces of Avalokitesvara in Japan," spoke on the shifting guises of Kannon, including multi-gendered depictions of the bodhisattva. Fowler's research focuses not on defining Kannon as female but uncovering when the deity takes the female form. The short answer to a complicated issue of when Kannon takes female form is "When it's necessary." Sherry Fowler, "Manifestations of Changes: The Many Faces of Avalokitesvara in Japan," lecture at The University of Texas at Austin (5 March 2012).

theme of creation is so palpable in the work that Hōgai's American patron, Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) called the painting *The Creation of Man*.[55] Similar to the Lakshmi and yakshi figures discussed earlier, Kannon here comes to represent human sexuality in the sacred form of the bodhisattva.

Hōgai exhibited *Merciful Mother Kannon* in Paris in the late nineteenth century. An earlier version of the work was shown in Paris in 1884 under the title, *Composition symbolique* (or *Symbolic Composition*) (Fig. 30).[56] In 1883 and 1884, Japanese officials created the "Salon of Japanese Painters" (Salon Annuel des Peintres Japonais) and sent more than two hundred new Japanese paintings to Paris "to gauge the response to contemporary Japanese art in the West."[57] *Japonisme* was already in vogue in France in the mid to late nineteenth century with artists such as Manet and Degas using Japanese prints as inspiration for their works. The Japanese prints provided alternative modes for perspective and modeling and demonstrated different decorative patterns.[58] However, the Salon of Japanese Painters, which ran concurrently with and near to the official Salon, focused on contemporary works, and despite the *Japonisme* in France, it ultimately failed. Foxwell posits several reasons for the negative French reception, but the basic explanation lies in the disparity between the present and the past.[59] The discrepancy in time combined with subject matter the French found illegible, particularly in religious paintings with foreign themes and figures. However, Foxwell suggests the *Merciful Mother Kannon* perhaps succeeded in reaching French audiences because of its bodily form. "The painting transforms conventional Buddhist iconographic attributes into bodily

[55] Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences," 332.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 335.
[58] Gerald Needham, "Japanese Influence on French Painting 1854-1910," in *Japanese Influence on French Art, 1854-1910*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), 115-131.
[59] Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences," 335.

symbols that refer not to inaccessible religious notions but to the perceived reality of nature and of the exposed human body."[60]

The imagery of the floating infant makes a strong comparison to Kupka's *The Beginning of Life*. It is plausible Kupka came into contact with a reproduction of *Merciful Mother Kannon* considering the widespread interest in it beginning around 1900.[61] Both contain infant figures floating within the womb-like space of a sphere as a metaphor of creation. In addition, the paintings show a connection between the beginning of life and a powerful figure. While *Hibo Kannon* suggests the bodhisattva's power to create life, *The Beginning of Life* imbues the radiating lotus with the ability to create life, imagery Kupka also used in *The Soul of the Lotus*. *Merciful Mother Kannon* and *The Beginning of Life* successfully convey the theme of creation by using a language centered on the body and the symbolism of the circle. As in *The Soul of the Lotus*, Kupka portrayed human sexuality in sacred form in *The Beginning of Life*.

Although Kupka's interest in Theosophy will be discussed in the next section, there are also Theosophical associations of the circle with the theme of creation. This is hardly surprising since Theosophical authors drew on Buddhist and Hindu philosophies in their texts. Theosophists, also interested in universal symbols, used the circle to represent creation. Theosophy's co-founder Helena P. Blavatsky, in *The Secret Doctrine*, described the circle as of "ever-eternal nature, sexless and infinite."[62] Blavatsky associated the circle not only with infinity but with the reawakening of the universe.[63] She connected the "boundless circle" with the unending illusion of life, which is a

[60] Ibid., 336.
[61] Ibid., 344.
[62] Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Limited: 1888), I: 98-99; as quoted in Ann Davis, "Theosophy and the Fourth Dimension," *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 102.
[63] Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, 102.

concept belonging to both Hinduism and Buddhism. Rowell, in her chronology for the 1975 Kupka retrospective at the Guggenheim, makes a direct connection between *The Beginning of Life* and Theosophy because of the presence of lotus flowers. Rowell quotes from Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* as proof of the work's Theosophical subject matter: "Man is a little world—a microcosm inside the great universe. Like a foetus, he is suspended by all his three spirits, in the matrix of the macrocosmos; and while his terrestrial body is in sympathy with its parent earth, his astral soul lives in unison with the sidereal *anima mundi* . . . ."[64] *The Beginning of Life* shows a fetus connected by three "spirits:" the immediate circle surrounding the fetus, the circle directly above the lotus radiating with light, and the lotus itself. Perhaps Kupka demonstrated man as the macrocosm inside the universe in *The Beginning of Life*.[65]

The importance of the circle for Theosophy as well as for Buddhist iconography clearly engaged Kupka in *The Beginning of Life* and *The Soul of the Lotus*. He would return to the visual form of the circle in subsequent works as well, such as *The First Step* (1909-1913) and *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors* (1912) (Figs. 31, 2). He wrote of the circle in his 1913 treatise suggesting the association between circles, ovals, and spirals with their organic character and the ability to create life.[66] For Kupka, the circle remained a powerful visual language, which he began to use in his illustrational works. In *The Soul of the Lotus* and *The Beginning of Life*, Kupka explored the theme of creation by

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[64] Blavatsky as quoted in Mladek and Rowell, "Chronology," in Guggenheim Museum, *František Kupka 1871-1957*, 86.

[65] Dorothy Kosinski also discusses the circles in *The Beginning of Life* in relation to the "association between the microcosm of the first stages of individual life and the macrocosm of the evolution of the cosmos." Dorothy Kosinski, "Quest for Meaning," in *Painting the Universe: František Kupka Pioneer in Abstraction* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1997), 38.

[66] František Kupka, *La Création dans les arts plastiques*, trans. Erika Abrams, (Paris: Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1989), 169-170. Although finished in 1913, Kupka's major theoretical treatise, *La Création dans les arts plastiques*, was first published in Czech only in 1923 and then translated into French in 1989 by Erika Abrams. I also have access to Kupka's unpublished notebook (1910-1911) and "credo" (1913) courtesy of Linda D. Henderson via Margit Rowell.

appropriating Buddhist, and sometimes Hindu, iconography combined with his own ideas. In these two works, he demonstrated his concern for both the sexuality of creation and an interest in the realm of the invisible and spiritual translated onto the physical canvas.

While this section addresses visual sources to help explain Kupka's iconography in two early works by discussing the rich supply of Buddhist visual material available in Paris at the turn-of-the-century, the next section explores Kupka's interest in philosophies of the immaterial. By examining the presence of Buddhism, Theosophy, and science in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Paris, I hope to shed light on sources that would have stimulated his interest in the invisible world and that provided a critical impetus for Kupka's move from Symbolist illustration toward total abstraction.

Section II: Kupka and Buddhist, Theosophical, and Scientific Sources

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Kupka's 1913 treatise, *La Création dans les arts plastiques*, contains several recurring themes. From the issue of abstraction versus illustration to the function of both painter and painting, a unifying subtheme underlies his major concerns: the nature of reality. Like many artists and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kupka questioned the human ability to understand nature based solely on visible observations. The quest for immaterial reality stood in direct opposition to the model of positivism. Popular in the nineteenth century, positivism relied on objective knowledge gained through the observation and study of the exterior world.[67] French philosopher Édouard Shuré wrote of positivism in his well-known text on esoteric teaching, *Les Grands Initiés: esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions*: "As a result of materialism, positivism, and skepticism, men of the present time have reached a false conception of truth and progress."[68] From scientists to spiritualists, the existence of an invisible and immaterial reality beyond human perception was a major concern for many individuals. To better understand Kupka's exploration of the nature of reality, particularly an immaterial one, it will help to explore three of his sources: Buddhism, Theosophy, and science. The three sources chosen for this thesis represent only a selection of Kupka's intellectual and philosophical interests. Nevertheless, they provide important insights, individually and collectively, into Kupka's concern for the immaterial.

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[67] Patricia Townley Mathews, *Aurier's Symbolist Art Criticism and Theory* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 19.

[68] Édouard Shuré, *The Great Initiates: Sketch of the Secret History of Religions* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1889), xii. Shuré also wrote of positivism, "And what are the positivism and the skepticism of the present day now producing? A barren generation, devoid of ideal, light or faith, believing neither in the soul, in God, nor in the future of the race; neither in this life nor in the next, lacking in willpower, doubting both itself and human liberty." Shuré, *The Great Initiates*, xv.

Kupka connected an invisible, immaterial reality to the notion of essences and the subjective world of the artist. In his notebook, he discussed the "essence" of nature in a rejection of surface appearances.[69] In his treatise, he also noted the idea of an "essence" as pure and original among other associations with the term.[70] Of the subjective, he wrote, "The two worlds, subjective and objective, have their own reality."[71] Kupka's notion of the subjective was quite different than the late nineteenth century Symbolist idea of the subjective. Critic Gustave Kahn wrote that the goal of Symbolism was to "objectify the subjective."[72] The Symbolists thought to envision the world objectively meant to experience it subjectively.[73] A pessimistic attitude toward the visible world often accompanied the Symbolist ideas of subjectivity, most notably adopted from the ideas of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, to whom I will later return in relation to the discussion on Buddhism in Paris.[74] For Kupka, however, the subjective world equaled the mental world of the individual, in which the artist endowed with special abilities could perceive the existence of another reality.[75] The mind thus served as a conduit to higher reality. Kupka experienced a three-part relationship to subjectivity in which the artist perceived the material world, internalized such visions, and then finally externalized the product of his mental activities onto the canvas surface.[76] In his chapter "Émission, Réalisation," he wrote, "Yet this vision is the result of an amalgam of

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[69] Kupka, unpublished notebook, 60, 45.
[70] Kupka, *La Création*, 87, 186, 231, 244, 254, etc.
[71] Ibid., 261. "Les deux mondes, subjectif et objectif, ont leur réalité propre."
[72] Kahn, as quoted in Mathews, *Aurier's Symbolist*, 40.
[73] Mathews, *Aurier's Symbolist*, 42-43.
[74] Ibid., 43. Mathews discusses the dichotomy in nineteenth-century idealism between matter and spirit with the exterior world being characterized as evil and deceptive and cites the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer (1788-1860) taught that "la douleur," pain and suffering, was positive because it forced people to turn from the negative, exterior world to the spiritual.
[75] Kupka, *La Création,* 245.
[76] Ibid., 232, 235-236.

assimilated impressions; it is a kind of synthesis, a 'second nature,' another reality, reconstructed, but always closely associated to concrete images of possibilities of expression."[77] Kupka expressed a constant struggle in his thoughts and work: the desire to physically represent an immaterial and fleeting other reality, stating, "Very often the model kills the idea."[78] For Kupka, the artist served the higher purpose of translating and communicating the subjective world to an audience.[79] Kupka's negotiation between the subjective and objective in his aesthetic and writings demonstrates his interest in an immaterial and alternate reality, which is a concern that had originated in his childhood.

Kupka's artistic and philosophical education in Bohemia, Prague, and Vienna laid the foundation for the development of his art theory and practice, which eventually led him to abstraction.[80] Born in the small town of Opočno in eastern Bohemia, Kupka grew up in a family of modest means. His artistic training began with an apprenticeship to a saddle maker, Josef Šiška, in the rural village of Dobruška. Šiška proved to be a powerful mentor for Kupka, introducing him to his first patron and the world of Spiritism by hosting séances at his home.[81] Soon Šiška helped send Kupka to Alois Studnička, the director of the School for Crafts at Jaroměř; after taking private lessons with Studnička, Kupka entered the Prague School of Fine Arts.[82]

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[77] Ibid., 232. "Cette vision est pourtant le résultat d'un amalgame d'impressions assimilées; elle est une manière de synthèse, une 'second nature', une réalité autre, reconstruite, mais toujours étroitement associée à des images concrètes de possibilités d'expression." While the 1989 French edition of Kupka's treatise uses the chapter title, "Énoncé, Réalisation," Kupka's original French manuscript for the treatise uses the term "émission" rather than "énoncé." Linda D. Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space," in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda D. Henderson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 394-395.
[78] Kupka, *La Création*, 244. "Très souvent, le modèle tue l'idée."
[79] Ibid., 235-236.
[80] For more information on Kupka's biography and training in Bohemia, Prague, and Vienna, see Maldek, "Central European Influences," 13-37.
[81] Vachtová, *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, 15. She describes Šiška's Spiritist activity as common in the Bohemian region. Kupka's first patron was a local major known as Archleb.
[82] Ibid., 15-17.

At the Prague School of Fine Arts, Kupka studied under the Nazarene painter František Sequens in the Academy's Historical and Religious Painting department.[83] Ludmila Vachtová characterizes Kupka's paintings during his time in Prague as historical and patriotic with some attention to native Slav dress and culture. According to Vachtová, Kupka's thinking at this time was "an admixture of Slavophilism, romanticism, and metaphysics."[84] In Prague, he again became involved in Spiritist circles working as a spirit medium, which helped to support him financially. He continued working as a medium through 1891 when he relocated to Vienna.[85]

In the fall of 1892, Kupka enrolled at the Vienna Academy where he entered the class of August Eisenmenger, who was also a Nazarene academic, allegorical painter. Kupka received his first major commission to paint *The Last Dream of the Dying Heine* for the Vienna Kunstverein in 1893. While Kupka continued to create allegorical paintings, he also began to study philosophy and the sciences.[86] Kupka's stay in Vienna introduced him to Theosophy. Through his roommate Milos Meixner, a student from Prague, Kupka met Karl Diefenbach, a Theosophist who encouraged and mentored Kupka in his occult and mystical interests.[87] At this time, Kupka's interests extended to astrology, Eastern religions, and the occult sciences, and he delved into new philosophies, religions, and ways of life.[88] The education Kupka received in Vienna stayed with him as he moved in 1896 to the contemporary art capital of the world: Paris.

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[83] Mladek, "Central European Influences," 20.
[84] Vachtová, *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, 17.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Mladek and Rowell, "Chronology," 305-306. In their timeline on Kupka's life, Mladek and Rowell list his philosophical and scientific interests. According to Mladek and Rowell, he read Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the German romantics and studied the sciences of astronomy, chemistry, natural history, and anatomy.
[87] Maldek, "Central European Influences," 26. With Diefenbach he also "further developed ideas about the reciprocal relationship of music and painting, and he became a sun worshipper."
[88] Mladek and Rowell, "Chronology," 305-306.

Kupka's early mystical and occult pursuits establish clearly his openness to spiritual and subjective realms—as well as the invisible and immaterial.[89] In discussing the plastic or visual means with which an artist renders the subjective world of the artist, Kupka declared in his treatise of the artist, "Subjective representations, far from being simply an 'other' reality, become for them an autonomous world, in which they live, a concrete world, alive with undeniable existence."[90] For the artist, the subjective and often invisible world becomes an alternate reality. The philosophical principles of Buddhism and Theosophy along with the ground-breaking discoveries of modern science enabled Kupka to more fully explore the existence of such an immaterial reality.

PART A: BUDDHISM

Buddhism offered Kupka, as a European, an alternative mode of thought, and he was far from alone in his attraction to Buddhist thought. Historian of religion Thomas Tweed has noted that although Westerners have been commenting on Buddhism for several centuries, a real study of the religion did not begin until the nineteenth century.[91] Donald Lopez, who has written much on the encounter between Buddhism and the West, also roots the Western study of Buddhism in the nineteenth century: "The 'scientific' study of Buddhism began in Europe in the early nineteenth century as an offshoot of the new science of philology. From that point the academic discipline of Buddhist studies

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[89] Jean Cassou and Denise Fédit also acknowledge Kupka's continued fascination with the occult. "All of this might be summed up as a primordial and essential aptitude for the metaphysical. At heart, and from his earliest years, Kupka was an idealist, a contemplative, a mystic, a 'spiritual' creature." Jean Cassou and Denise Fédit, *Frank Kupka* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 6.

[90] Kupka, *La Création*, 103. "Des représentations subjectives qui, loin d'être simplement une 'autre' réalité, deviennent pour eux un monde autonome, dans et par lequel ils vivent, un univers concret, animé d'une existence indéniable."

[91] Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), ix, xix.

developed in the wake of the projects of European (and later Japanese) colonialism."[92] Thus, Western access to information on Buddhism began within the larger context of colonialism, including missionary expeditions to Asia that returned to Europe and America with Buddhist materials as discussed in Section I, and a long history of eighteenth and nineteenth-century orientalism.[93]

Due in part to France's colonial activities, Paris offered a variety of ways to access information on Buddhism. As previously discussed, Paris provided easy access to a wide range of Buddhist iconographical sources—from the Musée Guimet to exhibitions on contemporary Japanese art. Published sources on Buddhism also enabled Parisians to study Buddhist philosophy, and as the French author and adventurer Alexandra David-Néel noted in the introduction to her 1911 book on modern Buddhism, "The necessity of a new book devoted to Buddhism may seem questionable. No shortage of books on the subject."[94] Before discussing available turn-of-the-century textual information on Buddhism, it is useful to examine basic principles of Buddhist thought.

Buddhism began as an Indian religion in the fifth century B.C.E. It grew out of the context of Indian Vedic culture, which advocated releasing oneself from the cycle of continuous death and rebirth.[95] Born about 485 B.C.E., Siddhārtha Gautama, the

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[92] Donald S. Lopez, Jr. *The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan Monk Gendun Chopel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 249.

[93] For a classic, historical discussion of orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said asserts that "Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and the Bible lands" (5). Said proves how European culture created a strong identity of "Occident" by establishing itself in opposition to the "Orient." He also explores the construction of "self" by the definition of "other" and analyzes how systems of education perpetuate such ideas.

[94] Alexandra David, *Le Modernisme bouddhiste et le bouddhisme du Bouddha* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1911), 1. "La necessite d'une nouveau livre consacre au Bouddhisme pourra paraitre discutable. Les ouvrages ne manquent pas sur la question."

[95] Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism* (Birmingham, England: Windhorse Publications, 1994), 16. To release oneself from the cycle depended on a two-part process: first, to search for "the basis of the external phenomenal world, the underlying essence of all external objects," known as the brahman; and second, to find the "ultimately existent thing *within* the individual, that which supports life and

historical Buddha, rejected his inherited wealth to explore the Noble Quest in a search for an answer to his idea that another option existed instead of the continual acceptance of suffering and death.[96] After following several teachers and practicing extreme asceticism, the Buddha one day meditated beneath a tree by the river Nairañjanā:

> Taking this as indicative of a more balanced and harmonious approach to his quest, during the course of the night, through contemplating the mystery of death and rebirth, he eventually gained a new and profound insight into the nature of our condition, into the way things really are, for which reason he came to be called Buddha, the 'one who has awoken.'[97]

The Buddha began to teach shortly after his enlightenment, leading many disciples to follow in the hope of escaping the endless cycle of death and rebirth.[98] He taught the Middle Way as a balance between over-indulgence and acute deprivation, which he himself previously explored. Furthermore, the Buddha taught that the world was impermanent, with nothing existing permanently or independently, but rather that the world operates as a result of cause and effect. Known as dependent origination, the principle asserts that each moment arises out of causes and conditions that subsequently affect other moments. When applied to ethics, the idea of karma enters this model. The Buddha showed that all actions, or karman, have consequences. Most importantly, by understanding the principle of dependent origination, one can transcend the cycle of reincarnation.[99]

The Buddha's insight about the world and people in it transformed his entire being and released him from death and rebirth. This insight is the foundation of wisdom

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consciousness in each of us," termed the ātman. The concepts of brahman and ātman, along with a prominent teaching that the two components were one in the same, provide a picture of the Buddha's religious background, albeit a simplified one.

[96] Ibid., 19-21.

[97] Ibid., 22-23.

[98] Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), 38-39.

[99] Summary from Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 38-38 and Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism,* 22-31.

(prajñā) in Buddhism, which is an understanding that requires experience rather than intellection.[100] When the Buddha became enlightened and began "seeing things as they really are," he saw the world characterized by three qualities (or lakṣaṇas): the transitory or impermanent, the painful or unsatisfactory, and that devoid of a self or essence.[101]

The three lakṣaṇas, or qualities of the world, outline three main tenets of Buddhism. Of the first quality of impermanence, where all beings live and die, Andrew Skilton explains:

> This is reflected in the cosmology of Buddhism, which depicts a universe of infinite space and time in which innumerable universes arise and then disappear; as also it is reflected in the microcosmic world of the smallest perceptible particles, which are conceived not as static atoms (a concept rejected by modern physicists too), but as ever-changing patterns of interacting energy. Moreover, the universe is not made up of regions occupied by the eternally damned or saved, but is formed by objectified mental states. In other words, subjective states of mind are experienced as perceptible worlds which, though they may last for aeons, are bound to a dissolution upon the exhaustion of the mental impulses that created them. The individual person too, is born and dies, and throughout a fleeting life changes from day to day, from moment to moment. Nothing remains unchanged.[102]

As we shall see, the Buddhist focus on flux and on immaterial, subjective reality is highly relevant for understanding Kupka's beliefs about the subjective world as well as early twentieth-century scientific ideas. Henry S. Olcott, the Theosophical Society's co-founder, wrote about impermanence in his 1881 text *The Buddhist Catechism*. "We do not believe in miracles; hence we deny creation, and cannot conceive a creation of

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[100] Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 25-26. There are three levels of wisdom in the Buddhist tradition. First is the shallow stage in understanding where one hears and understands based upon trusting the word of another individual. Second is understanding through thinking. Third is wisdom that is a "complete assimilation of a set of ideas into the depths of one's being." The third and highest wisdom may only be attained through active meditation.

[101] Ibid., 27.

[102] Ibid., 28.

something out of nothing. Nothing organic is eternal. Everything is in a state of constant flux, and undergoing change and reformation, keeping up the continuity according to the law of evolution."[103] Olcott here addressed the Buddhist idea of flux as well as dependent origination where there is no sense of the eternal or a creator deity.

The constant state of change connects to the second lakṣaṇa, suffering, which is the subject of the Four Truths of the Noble Ones. The Four Truths posit that the joys and pains of life interconnect in a succession of cause and effect. The Four Truths follow an ancient medical formula of identifying: first, the problem of suffering; second, the cause of suffering (i.e. greed and hatred); third, the possibility for transcending suffering; and fourth, the means to succeed in transcending suffering. The latter is known as the Middle way often detailed in Eightfold Path of Noble Ones and is discussed below.[104]

Finally, the third lakṣaṇa is the absence of selfhood. The principles of impermanence and continuous change inevitably apply to the individual. As such, the notion of a soul is notably absent from Buddhist belief. Rather, the individual is "an uninterrupted flow of mental states and events which arise upon conditions and in their turn set up further mental states."[105] The third lakṣaṇa is a warning against falsely perceiving the world as static and solid. In fact, to believe in the concrete existence of oneself and the world is delusional.[106] Paul Carus's 1904 *The Gospel of Buddha* addressed the necessity of differentiating between self and truth.[107] As Carus explained, "The extinction of self is salvation; the annihilation of self is the condition of

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[103] Henry Steel Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism* (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1947), 110.
[104] Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 39; Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 28.
[105] Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 30.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha: According to Old Records* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1904), 3.

enlightenment; the blotting out of self is Nirvâna."[108] The individual must transcend the world characterized by the three lakṣaṇas to attain Enlightenment.

Buddhism hinges on two main ideas: first, the Buddha's insight into the human condition as discussed above, and second, his means of creating change. The two components form the basic foundations of Buddhist teachings, despite the many forms of Buddhism found throughout the world from China and Japan to Tibet and Southeast Asia.[109] There are many practices that lead to freedom, but the most popular or famous is the Eightfold Path of Noble Ones, which consists of eight factors that if practiced perfectly result in liberation from death and rebirth: Right Understanding, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.[110] In order to succeed, one must realize that to transcend suffering requires the breaking of ten specific obstacles; the arhat, or 'worthy one,' breaks all ten obstacles and receives Enlightenment.[111] In contrast to the redemptive character of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which revolve around the redemption of mankind through God, Buddhism centers on one's own abilities. For followers of Buddhism, no divine god-like figure exists; instead, salvation comes from the inside and is independent of God or anyone else.[112] Kupka himself expressed a similar viewpoint in his treatise,

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[108] Ibid., 4.

[109] Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 32. See Skilton's chapters on "Buddhism Beyond India" in *A Concise History of Buddhism*.

[110] Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 39.

[111] Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 36-37. Skilton lists the ten obstacles: belief in separate selfhood, skeptical doubt, attachment to rules and rituals for their own sake, sexual desire, ill will, desire for existence in the world of form, desire for existence in the formless world, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

[112] Tenzin Gyatso, *The Meaning of Life: Buddhist Perspectives on Cause and Effect*, ed. Jeffrey Hopkins, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000). The Dalai Lama directly states Buddhism's "emphasis on self-creation, there is no creator-deity" and also explains "…the actual protector and the actual destroyer are your own karma. If you ask what really helps, it is your own virtuous actions. If you ask what really harms, it is your own nonvirtuous actions." Gyatso, *The Meaning of Life*, 67, 75.

"The artist's life is a struggle, each hopes to report of personal conquest. Everyone is his own redeemer."[113]

To consider the world as illusion is an intrinsic part of the Buddhist worldview. In his introduction to *The Meaning of Life*, Jeffrey Hopkins uses a Tibetan image of "the wheel of cyclic existence in six sectors," also known as the wheel of life, to help clarify the notion of dependent origination (Fig. 32). Janice Leoshko has analyzed the presence of the wheel of life in Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim*, critiquing its use as solely an explanation of Buddhist principles without consideration of the painting's aesthetics.[114] With this in mind, the illustration does provide a visualization of three main sources of suffering found in the center of the wheel: ignorance as a pig, desire as a rooster, and hatred as a snake (Fig. 33).[115] The image of the pig as ignorance remains the most important for this thesis because ignorance, and the actions it produces, keeps the individual mired in the endless cycle of death and rebirth.[116] Hopkins describes the Sanskrit origin of the term "buddha" as "'to awaken'" or "'to spread' and thus . . . 'to awaken from the sleep of ignorance and spread one's intelligence to everything that can be known'—to overcome ignorance and become omniscient."[117] As such, when an individual reaches enlightenment, ignorance and the suffering associated with it are broken; the cycle of death and rebirth concludes.

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[113] Kupka, *La Création*, 254. "La vie de l'artiste est une lutte dont chacun espère rapporter des conquêtes personnelles. Chacun est son propre rédempteur."
[114] Leoshko, "What is in KIM? Rudyard Kipling and Tibetan Buddhist Tradition," 66-72. Leoshko notes that images of the wheel of life have been found in the Ajanta caves as the only known Indian example, but they are popular in nineteenth and twentieth-century Tibetan paintings.
[115] Gyatso, *The Meaning of Life*, np. For a full explanation of the image, see Jeffrey Hopkins, introduction to *The Meaning of Life*, 1-28.
[116] Hopkins, introduction to *The Meaning of Life*, 2-3.
[117] Ibid., 2.

A key part of overcoming ignorance and therefore illusion is rethinking the nature of reality. The way one envisions reality applies to concerns such as existence and selfhood, division between spirit and matter, and separation between subject and object. Hopkins explains ignorance as "the conception of inherent existence whereas in actuality the phenomena do not inherently exist."[118] The Dalai Lama discusses a consciousness that "*innately* misapprehends, or misconceives, phenomena as existing under their own power, as not dependent."[119] The ignorance leads to false divisions within the self as well between self and other beings with "an exaggerated sense of I."[120] Carus described the sense of self as sinful and a source of illusion, "Self is the beginning of all hatred, of iniquity and slander, or impudence and indecency, of theft and robbery, of oppression and bloodshed."[121] The Buddhist practitioner must thus transcend false perception and consciousness created by illusion and caused by ignorance. This principle of illusion, often known as Maya, as it relates to consciousness and conceptions of the self, differs dramatically from a Western, Christian point of view, which often relies upon a clear identification of the self with an eternal soul.

Kupka's treatise demonstrates his interest in the visual arts of countries associated with Buddhism. As part of his advocacy for studying the arts of all times and all peoples, he paid careful attention to the arts of Japan, China, and even Tibet.[122] For example, in the context of his treatment of color, Kupka discussed the negative and positive associations of the color yellow, writing, "Yellow . . . much appreciated in the time of the Roman Empire, is in Tibet the color of the Grand Lama, the imperial color in China, and

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[118] Ibid., 10.
[119] Gyatso, *The Meaning of Life*, 44.
[120] Ibid., 45.
[121] Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*, 5.
[122] Kupka, *La Création*, 170. References to Japanese art: 140, 153, 171, 192. References to Chinese art: 139-140, 169, 192, 250. References to Tibetan art: 139-140, 250.

that of mourning in Egypt."[123] In discussing Japanese painting techniques, Kupka declared, "For the Japanese, the teaching of drawing is a set of rules to follow about body posture and respiratory function. That's what we Westerners do not even think!"[124] Kupka's treatise makes clear his engagement with Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan art, which offered him examples of visual languages outside Western traditions.[125] Whether he encountered this art through reproductions or at an institution such as the Musée Guimet, as discussed earlier, he also engaged the philosophy behind it, including Buddhism.

In his writings, Kupka's references to Buddhism also reflect Theosophical ideas. As I will discuss in the next section, Theosophy functioned as a conduit for various, and often divergent, philosophies through authors who drew on them in presenting Theosophy's core tenets. In his treatise, Kupka viewed religion negatively for its strong hold over the visual arts, particularly Christianity.[126] However, he also showed an interest in Buddhism through references to the Buddha. In his first chapter, "Idea, Subject, Tradition," Kupka posited the continuity of culture with a recycling and reusing of past images and ideas.[127] He argued that Jesus Christ, in addition to drawing from Platonism and stoicism, also borrowed from the teachings of Buddhist missionaries who preached in Palestine and Syria.[128] "Legends about the miracles of Christ are identical to those, born seven hundred years ago, which tell of the wonders of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the

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[123] Ibid., 239-240. "Le jaune…Très apprécié au temps de l'Empire romain, il est au Tibet la couleur du grand lama, la couleur impériale en Chine et celle du deuil en Egypte."
[124] Ibid., 171. "Chez les Japonais, l'enseignement du dessin comporte un ensemble de règles à suivre concernant la posture du corps et la fonction respiratoire. Voilà à quoi nous autres Occidentaux ne pensons même pas!"
[125] Ibid., 153, 169.
[126] Ibid., 62.
[127] Ibid., 43-72. Chapter 1 is "Idée, Sujet, Tradition"
[128] Ibid., 58.

future Buddha."[129] This view by Kupka reflects two Theosophical ideas proposed by Blavatsky: the continuity of culture and Buddhism as a root of all religions. In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky posited that Buddhism, as the "once universal religion," is the foundation of all religions, both in chronological development and philosophical ideas.[130] In comparing Christianity and Buddhism, she noted, "The motive of Jesus was evidently like that of Gautama-Buddha, to benefit humanity at large by producing a religious reform which should give it a religion of pure ethics; the true knowledge of God and nature having remained until then solely in the hands of the esoteric sects, and their adepts."[131] As we shall see in the following section, Blavatsky incorporated numerous elements of Buddhism in addition to the teachings of the other major world religions into her Theosophical synthesis, making Theosophy one of the key routes by which Kupka learned about Buddhism.[132]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, books on Buddhism circulated in Paris; frequently the texts were French translations of English and American writings, and often they were by authors associated with the Theosophical Society.[133] A primary example is Colonel Olcott's *The Buddhist Catechism*. Olcott initially published *The Buddhist Catechism* in 1881, and it was subsequently translated into French as *Le Catéchisme bouddhique* and published in Paris in 1891.[134] The book functioned as a tool in the "Buddhist educational movement" founded by Olcott for the study and

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[129] Ibid. "Les légendes concernant les miracles du christ sont identiques à celles, nées sept cents ans auparavant, qui narrent les prodiges du prince Siddhartha Guatama, le futur Bouddha.
[130] Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1998), II: 123.
[131] Ibid., II: 133.
[132] Kupka quoted from Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* on page 3 of his unpublished notebook.
[133] Information obtained from WorldCat online library catalog searches, WorldCat, <www.worldcat.org> (16 August 2011).
[134] Olcott, inside cover material, n. p. French publication information found on WorldCat, <www.worldcat.org> (16 August 2011)

dissemination of Buddhism throughout the world.[135] Translated into twenty languages, by 1903, the publication was already in its third French edition.[136] Other Theosophical authors, including Blavatsky and Charles Webster Leadbeater, referenced Buddhist ideas in their texts, which will be discussed later in this chapter.[137] Of course, non-Theosophist authors also published on Buddhism. In 1891, Leon de Rosny published his text *La Morale du Bouddhisme* in Paris and Ryauon Fujishima had his text, *Le Bouddhisme japonais: doctrines et histoire des douze grandes sectes bouddhiques du Japon*, published in Paris in 1889.[138] These texts are two of many examples of philosophical, historical, and cultural inquiries into Buddhism published at the time.[139] Texts on Buddhist philosophy might not contain images of Buddhist materials to suggest important religious iconography. However, a specific source available in Paris at the turn-of-the-century did provide a visual "database" for an individual, like Kupka, to draw upon for inspiration: the Musée Guimet, as discussed in Section I.

Aside from the Musée Guimet, as a primary example, Paris offered a number of textual sources on Buddhist philosophy. In addition to Olcott's publication *The Buddhist Catechism*, there are four other early twentieth-century French publications we may note that served as sources on Buddhism in Paris: Paul Carus's *L'Évangile du Bouddha*, Elme-

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., xi, xiii. The purpose of the *Catechism* is to assist beginners in understanding the Buddha's teaching and to allow practitioners to more easily follow the Dharma, or teaching. The book uses a question and answer format with hypothetical questions a Western convert to Buddhism might ask. It covers the life of the historical Buddha, doctrine, the monastic order, a history of Buddhism, and Buddhism's relationship with science.

[137] A note to the reader: It is important to remember that although Blavatsky, Besant, and others studied and incorporated Buddhist ideas into their texts, the sources of their knowledge and the path of its dissemination is complicated and convoluted. It is a topic deserving of more attention to understand from where, from whom, and how each learned about Buddhism and what ideas prevailed in their philosophies.

[138] Information obtained from WorldCat online library catalog searches, WorldCat, <www.worldcat.org> (7 March 2012).

[139] Lee, "Fire Down Below and Water, That's Life: A Buddhist Reader's Response to Marcel Duchamp," 127. Lee lists numerous books on Buddhism available in Paris in the early twentieth century, including Paul Carus's *The Gospel of the Buddha*.

Marie Caro's *Le Pessimisme au XIXe siecle: Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartman*, Alexandra David-Néel's *Le Modernisme bouddhiste et le bouddhisme du Bouddha*, and Édouard Schuré's *Les Grands Initiés: esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions*.

Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha: According to Old Records* was in its ninth edition in 1904 and had been published in Paris in 1902 under the title *L'Évangile du Bouddha*.[140] Carus, the German-American editor of *The Monist*, played a key role introducing Buddhism to the West.[141] *The Gospel of Buddha* serves as an early example in the study of comparative religion. Carus put Buddhism in conversation with Christianity and translated the tenets of Buddhism into a recognizable form for Christian readers: the format of the Gospel. In discussing the historical Buddha, his teachings, and legacy, Carus assumed a Christian audience and spoke directly to his readers about the parallels between the Christian gospels and those of the Buddha. In the same manner as other Western authors writing on Buddhism, he also included recommendations from Eastern practitioners of Buddhism, such as the King of Siam, the Grand Lama of Tibet, and other "High Priests" of Buddhism, which lent an air of authenticity to his work. Carus also openly acknowledged the variation in his sources: some are copied verbatim, while others are reproduced through the filter of the author, rearranged, and abbreviated. The most important theme Carus emphasized was the Buddhist attitude toward the idea of self. According to Carus, "The consciousness of self dims the eyes of the mind and hides the truth. It is the origin of error, it is the source of illusion, it is the germ of sin."[142] As suggested earlier, unlike the Western dualisms of mind and matter, body and soul,

[140] Carus's book remains in the library collection of the Musée Guimet today.
[141] Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, 65-67.
[142] Carus, *The Gospel of the Buddha*, 5.

Buddhism is monistic. Carus emphasized that an overdeveloped sense of self leads to illusion, to ignorance, and to the inevitable cycle of death and rebirth.

In 1878, Elme-Marie Caro, a prominent philosopher and professor at the Sorbonne, published his book *Le Pessimisme au XIXe siecle: Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartman*.[143] In his chapter titled "Les Expédients et les remédes proposés par Schopenhauer contre le mal de l'existence. — Le Bouddhisme moderne," Caro argued that Schopenhauer exemplified the modern Buddhist because he worked along the model that desire equals suffering.[144] Caro drew a parallel between Schopenhauer and Buddhism even citing the Buddha as the philosophical ancestor to Schopenhauer: "It is almost in the same terms that the philosophical ancestor of Schopenhauer, Sakyamuni, posed and resolved the problem of deliverance."[145] Although they offered different paths, both aimed for the same goal: nirvana or freedom from suffering through the extinguishing of desires as illusions in life.[146] According to Caro, the Buddha offered the Middle Way as an individualistic means to escape reincarnation, while Schopenhauer argued for group salvation based upon asceticism and chastity.[147] In the course of the chapter, Caro discussed the Four Noble Truths, nirvana, and illusion and included quotes from the

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[143] Title: *Pessimism in the Nineteenth Century: Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartman.* Chapter title: "The expedients and remedies proposed by Schopenhauer against the evil of existence. — Modern Buddhism."
[144] Elme-Marie Caro, "Les Expédients et les remédes proposés par Schopenhauer contre le mal de l'existence. — Le Bouddhisme moderne," in *Le Pessimisme au XIXe siecle: Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Hartman*, 4th ed. (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1889), 232-235. Caro is also published and referenced under the following derivations of his name: E. Caro, Ernest Caro, and Erasmo Maria Caro.
[145] Ibid., 232. "C'est presque dans les mêmes termes que l'ancêtre philosophique de Schopenhauer, Çakya-Mouni, avait posé et résolu le problème de la déliverance."
[146] Ibid., 231-232; 245-254.
[147] Ibid., 240-241. Without a specific reference to Caro's book, Mark Cheetham, in *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting*, notes Caro's discussion of Schopenhauer's thought that "'the object of art . . . . is an *Idea* in Plato's sense'" and it is "in the perception of the Idea that art offers salvation from the ontologically wanting world of appearance." Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 17.

Buddha and Schopenhauer. Both Schopenhauer and Caro point to the goal in Buddhism of transcending the illusory world of appearances and false consciousness.

Belgian academic Alexandra David-Néel wrote extensively on her first-hand experience with Buddhism. In 1911, she published under the name Alexandra David, *Le Modernisme bouddhiste et le bouddhisme du Bouddha*. David-Néel's text covers the historical life of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, meditation, karma, nirvana, and the sangha, concluding with a chapter on two contemporary problems in modern Buddhism, including the place of women in social and spiritual life.[148] She emphasized all the primary points of basic Buddhism. Of the goal of liberation from suffering, she declared, "This belief, not only inspires it in all its manifestations, but it alone constitutes Buddhism, it is its sole raison d'etre."[149] David-Néel also acknowledged the role of ignorance: "The road leading to deliverance is the exposition of a method of salvation, the tactic to employ in the pursuit of knowledge that should dispel ignorance."[150] She called for a return "to Päli scriptures and a rejection of the ritual and sacerdotalism that had infected the tradition since the Buddha entered nirvana."[151] For David-Néel at this point prior to her adventures and subsequent publications on Tibet, Buddhist modernism equaled the Buddhism of the Buddha, despite hundreds of years of variation and its spread across countries and cultures.[152] Her use of the phrase "modern Buddhism"

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[148] Alexandra David, *Le Modernisme bouddhiste et le bouddhisme du Bouddha* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1911), 233. On the title page, David is listed as "Professeur a l'Université Nouvelle de Bruxelles."
[149] Ibid., 87. "Cette croyance, non seulement l'inspire dans toutes ses manifestations, mais elle seule constitue le Bouddhisme, elle est son unique raison d'être."
[150] Ibid. "La Voie conduisant à la Déliverance est l'exposé d'une méthode de salut, la tactique à employer dans la poursuite de la Connaissance qui doit dissiper l'ignorance."
[151] Lopez, *The Madman's Middle Way*, 249.
[152] Ibid. Two of David-Néel best known works are *My Journey to Lhasa* (1927) and *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (1929). Interested in Theosophy, she wrote *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* as a sequel to her popular travelogue *My Journal to Lhasa*, which recorded her 1924 expedition to Tibet at a time when it was closed to foreigners.

reflects a late nineteenth-century terminology, which authors such as Caro used in his chapter title to describe Schopenhauer.[153]

Édouard Schuré published his two-volume *Les Grands Initiés: esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions* in 1889. The French philosopher and Theosophist suggested a continuity of religion maintained by an underlying esoteric teaching.[154] Schuré's idea of religious continuity with Indian religion as the foundation runs parallel to ideas set forth by Blavatsky and echoed by Kupka, as discussed earlier. In his study of comparative esotericism, Schuré listed six great initiates: Rama, Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and Jesus.[155] While Schuré does not consider the Buddha an initiate, he described Buddhism as having the same "metaphysical base" as Brahmanism, which is the beginning of all initiates.[156] He placed Buddhism in hierarchical relationship to Krishna and Brahmanism: "Buddha, who according to the chronology of the Brahmans came two thousand four hundred years after Krishna, simply shows forth another side of occult teaching, that of metempsychosis and of entire series of existences, bound together by the law of Karma."[157] Schuré repeatedly referred to Theosophy in his text and stated the "essential principle of esoteric doctrine may be formulated as follows: Spirit is the only reality."[158] While he devalued Buddhism by omitting the Buddha as an initiate and classifying it as a lesser form of Indian religion, he also presented a fascinating late nineteenth-century account of esoteric and occult

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153 Ibid. Lopez notes, "Also in the nineteenth century, in apparent response to Christian missions, Asian elites (often monks) across their continent created what scholars have recently begun to refer to as modern Buddhism." He also states that "The conjunction of the terms *Buddhism* and *modern* has a long history" at least tracing to 1871.

154 Schuré, *The Great Initiates*, xvii

155 Ibid., xiv, xvi.

156 Ibid., xvii.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid., xxii.

principles. His text also provides an example, as did Olcott and David-Néel, of the ways in which Theosophist authors relayed information about Buddhism, or other Eastern religions, to a Western audience.

In *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*, Thomas Tweed focuses on three concepts—knowledge of Buddhism in the West, the way transplanted religions function, and the identification of foundational values of Victorian America—and identifies three types of individuals interested in Buddhism in this period: "esoterics, rationalists, and romantics."[159] He also highlights the pivotal role Theosophy played in the dissemination of information on Buddhism and notes that those interested in Buddhism were often involved in Spiritualism or Theosophy.[160] Kupka, in fact, exactly fits Tweed's model with his early involvement in Spiritism and his interest in Theosophy.

PART B: THEOSOPHY

Theosophy, like Buddhism, offered an alternative mode of thought to Westerners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Also akin to Buddhism, Theosophy promoted a distrust of the abilities of the human eye and a belief in the existence of an unseen, immaterial reality. Despite connections between Buddhism and Theosophy, very little scholarly research has examined this relationship, which is a topic deserving more study.[161] Theosophy, as the major synthetic spiritual system of the late nineteenth

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[159] Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, xix-x.

[160] Ibid., xxi. According to Tweed, new or transplanted religions succeed when they affirm the dominant beliefs of the prevailing religions and cultures. To this end, Buddhism in Victorian America confirmed four major values: optimism, individualism, theism, and activism. Tweed views his book as a case study for exploring how communities of the "other" reflect the values of the dominant culture. Although Tweed's book focuses on the United States, it offers a model for how and why a Westerner, like Kupka, might approach and appropriate Buddhism.

[161] Lopez states, "The influence of Theosophy on the study of Buddhism in Europe and America remains a largely unexplored topic . . . . Links between Theosophists and Tibetan Buddhism also merit a book-length study." Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 234. Although Lopez's book was published in 1998, email

century, combining elements from the primary world religions permeated European culture in the early twentieth century. It also had an impact on artists such as Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky.[162]

Before turning to the tenets of Theosophy, it is important to emphasize that Theosophical texts were readily available in Paris. Blavatsky's three primary texts, to be discussed shortly, were each translated into French and published by the early twentieth century. *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Technology* (1877), in Volume I: Science and Volume II: Theology, appeared in Paris in 1913. Volume I: Cosmogenesis of *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (1888) was published as early as 1899 with Volume II: Anthropogenesis in 1901 and Volume III: Continuation and Indices in 1904. Finally, *The Voice of Silence: Being Chosen Fragments from the "Book of the Golden Precepts"* (1889) was published in 1907; each text had subsequent republications in the follow years.[163] Many of Annie Besant (1847-1933) and Charles W. Leadbeater's (1854-1937) works were also translated and published in Paris, including the texts of importance to this thesis. Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms* (1901) was published in Paris in 1905. Leadbeater's *Clairvoyance* (1899) was translated and printed by 1910, and his *Man Visible and Invisible*: *Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained*

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correspondence with Dr. Lopez confirms that such research has yet to be conducted. Donald S. Lopez, <dlopez@umich.edu> "Prisoners of Shangri-La question," 11 April 2011, personal e-mail (11 April 2011).

[162] By the early twentieth century, the Theosophical Society had centers across the globe, including the United States, England, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and India. For Mondrian and his Theosophical involvement, see Robert Welsh, "Mondrian and Theosophy," in *Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944, Centennial Exhibition* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971). For Kandinsky and his interest in Theosophy, see Rose Carol Washton-Long, "Kandinsky and Abstraction: The Role of the Hidden Image," *Artforum* 10 (June 1972): 42-49. Also on Kandinsky, see Sixten Ringbom, "Art in 'the Epoch of the Great Spiritual:' Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 386-418.

[163] Information obtained from WorldCat online library catalog searches, WorldCat, <www.worldcat.org> (11 April 2012). French title translations of Blavatsky's works are as follows: *Isis Unveiled – Isis dévoilée; The Secret Doctrine –La Doctrine secrète; The Voice of Silence – La Voie du silence.*

Clairvoyance (1902) followed its original English publication dated closely with a French translation in 1903.[164] In addition to the numerous Theosophical texts, with only a select few mentioned here, an active Theosophical Society operated in Paris by at least 1881.[165]

Paris also offered an active Theosophical periodical culture. Mark Morrisson has argued for the importance of public circulation of periodicals for the occult revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[166] In particular, he notes that four of the numerous Theosophical magazines printed in the early twentieth century were published in Paris.[167] Among the periodicals generally listed in the back of French Theosophical publications are the monthly *The Theosophist*, the quarterly *Theosophical Review*, *Le Lotus bleu*, and the bi-monthly *Theosophical Annals*. Thus, French followers of Theosophy had monthly access to the Society's news and articles that promulgated its doctrines.

Blavatsky (1831-1891) and Olcott (1832-1907) founded the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875.[168] In his foreword to *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*, Joscelyn Godwin describes Blavatsky as the most important figure in the modern Western esoteric tradition.[169] According to Godwin, "She and her Theosophical Society stand at the crucial historical moment when

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[164] Information obtained from WorldCat online library catalog searches, WorldCat, <www.worldcat.org> (11 April 2012) French title translations of Besant and Leadbeater's works are as follows: *Thought Forms – Les Formes-pensees; Clairvoyance – Du la Clairvoyance; Man Visible and Invisible – L'Homme visible et invisible.*

[165] Damodar K. Navalanhar, "Supplement to *The Theosophist,*" *The Theosophist* 2, no. 5 (Bombay: June 1881), 1.

[166] Mark S. Morrisson "The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 1-22.

[167] Ibid., 9.

[168] Carel Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism: Dutch Symbolism and Early Abstraction," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1980* (New York: Abbeville Press Inc., 1986), 94.

[169] Joscelyn Godwin, foreword to *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*, by K. Paul Johnson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), xv.

it seemed possible to unite science and occultism, West and East, in a 'divine wisdom' (*theosophia*) for the modern age."[170] The Russian-born Blavatsky immigrated to the United States in 1873 after a series of world travels, including a trip to Egypt from which she returned to Russia, allegedly with incredible mediumistic skills.[171] After meeting Olcott in 1874, together they formed the Theosophical Society. Stephen Prothero claims that Olcott was the first American of European descent to officially convert to Buddhism and describes him as a powerful figure in the dissemination of information on Buddhism to Western audiences, as we saw in his *Buddhist Catechism*.[172] In the *White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott*, Prothero succeeds in establishing Olcott as a figure who added to the religious diversity of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, but who also reformed Buddhism in the shape of American Protestantism through his work in India and Sri Lanka. While Olcott served as president of the Theosophical Society until his death in 1907, Blavatsky and her texts became the cornerstone.[173]

The Theosophical Society, which developed from Spiritualism, promoted three main beliefs described below.[174] While Theosophy grew out of Spiritualism, it shifted away from it after Blavatsky's return from India in 1879, when she introduced the concept of reincarnation.[175] As promulgated by their creed, the three objectives of the Theosophical Society are: first, "to form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of

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[170] Ibid., xv.
[171] Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*, 1.
[172] Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), ix.
[173] Claude Bragdon, *A Primer of Higher Space: The Fourth Dimension, Man the Square, A Higher Space Parable* (Rochester, New York: The Manas Press, 1912), n.p.
[174] Clément Chéroux, "Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment and Belief," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 46. Chéroux, who traces the history of French spirit photography, notes that Spiritism developed in Europe in the 1850s.
[175] Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, 96.

Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color;" second, "to encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy, and Science;" and third "to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man."[176]

Blavatsky published three main texts that each reveal her promulgation of basic Theosophical beliefs and her concern for immaterial reality: *Isis Unveiled* (1877), *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and *The Voice of Silence* (1889). Each text offers a complicated web of ideas with an unclear path of sources used. For the purpose of this thesis, I pay particular attention to Blavatsky's interest in the immaterial, especially as it pertains to contemporary ether physics and her borrowing of Buddhist ideology. Blavatsky's first major Theosophical work, the two-volume *Isis Unveiled*, focused on science and religion combining Eastern and Western philosophies. *The Secret Doctrine* resulted from Blavatsky's research in India and reflects her knowledge of Asian religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism.[177] In her final book, *The Voice of Silence*, Blavatsky focused on personal spiritual development in the transition from ignorance to wisdom and offered a more instructive guide to transcending the world and emancipating the soul.[178]

As previously discussed in relation to Kupka and then Édouard Shuré, Blavatsky posited that all religions came from one source and would eventually return to that source. She states, "We can assert, with entire plausibility, that there is not one of all these sects — Kabalism, Judaism, and our present Christianity included — but sprung from the two main branches of that one mother-trunk, the once universal religion, which antedated the Vedaic ages — we speak of that prehistoric Buddhism which merged later

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[176] Bragdon, *A Primer of Higher Space*, n.p.
[177] In discussing *The Secret Doctrine*, Joscelyn Godwin notes that Blavatsky "filled it with the ideals of a Mahayana Buddhist." Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 331
[178] Ibid., 331.

into Brahmanism."[179] Blavatsky thus identified early Buddhism as the foundation of all religions. In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky made numerous references to "Buddhistic" philosophy and cosmogony as well as the historical Buddha and Buddhist practices. Furthermore, she also believed "that all sectarian religions would disappear; Buddhism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism would all vanish, to be replaced by the 'grand religion of the past.'"[180]

Blavatsky incorporated the Buddhist conceptions of flux, reincarnation, and karma into her writings. In explaining one of the three Theosophical principles, Blavatsky wrote, "The Eternity of the Universe is *in toto* as a boundless plane . . . . the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow."[181] Her ideas of flux and reflux are reminiscent of the Buddhist notions of impermanence and continual change as basic to a true sense of reality, as I discussed earlier. However, contrary to the Buddhist negation of the soul and selfhood, Blavatsky affirmed the notion of the soul as well as the existence of a "Universal Over-Soul" which maintains a connection to the "fundamental identity of all Souls."[182] She also referred to the Buddhist, and Hindu, idea of karma and reincarnation describing "the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul—a spark of the former—through the cycle of Incarnation . . . in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term."[183] Here again she used the terminology of the soul to describe the process of death and rebirth.

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[179] Balvatsky, *Isis Unveiled,* II: 123.
[180] Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, 98; includes quotations from Blavatsky. Davis claims Blavatsky put forth an emanationist worldview.
[181] Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 3 vols. (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Limited, 1888), I: 16-17. The first principle is that "there is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being . . . . It is 'Be-ness' rather than Being . . . ." Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I: 14.
[182] Ibid., I: 17.
[183] Ibid.

Blavatsky also preached a connection between ignorance and illusion similar to the idea put forth by Buddhism. In *The Voice of Silence*, she declared, "Shun ignorance, and likewise shun illusion."[184] According to Blavatsky, individuals should "soar beyond illusions, search the eternal and the changeless" in their ultimate goals.[185] As Ann Davis has described Blavatsky's thought, "Life limited to a perception of this world is ignorance, and the soul limited to this view is in the web of delusion. However, in each person there is something eternal and divine, the 'inner God' or 'higher self.' Union with this divine self brings wisdom."[186] Blavatsky thus used Buddhist ideology to serve her long-held anti-positivist beliefs and to argue for a truer sense of reality. From Buddhism, Blavatsky appropriated the ideas of ignorance as illusion and suffering and of wisdom as the escape; however, she continued to use the non-Buddhist concepts of the soul, the self, and the eternal.

Blavatsky incorporated many Buddhist principles into her theory, including reincarnation and karma, but, most importantly, she appropriated the idea of the world as illusion. In *The Voice of Silence*, Blavatsky counseled her readers, "Avert thy face from world deceptions; mistrust thy senses, they are false. But within thy body—the shrine of thy sensations—seek the Impersonal for the 'eternal man;' and having sought him out, look inward: thou art Buddha."[187] If one can escape the visual world of illusions, one can achieve Buddhahood. Although Buddhism itself would assert that nothing is changeless or constant, Blavatsky nonetheless drew on its underlying theme that the world constantly deceives people about the true nature of reality. Buddhism's warning against trusting the

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[184] Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence: Being Chosen Fragments from the "Book of the Golden Precepts*" (Peking: The Chinese Buddhist Research Society, 1927), 26.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, 99; includes quotations from Blavatsky in *The Voice of Silence.*
[187] Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence*, 26.

visible world affirmed Blavatsky's already held anti-positivist ideas.[188] To advocate the need to transcend the material world, Blavatsky used the Buddhist concept of the world as illusion or Maya.

The world as Maya is a theme running through Blavatsky's writings. In *The Voice of Silence*, she wrote "Seek not those points in *Maya's* realm."[189] Then in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky compared the state of human existence to the prisoners in Plato's cave:

> Life is thus a dream, rather than a reality. Like the captives in the subterranean cave, described in *The Republic*, the back is turned to the light, we perceive only the shadows of objects, and think them the actual realities. Is not this the idea of *Maya*, or the illusion of the senses in physical life, which is so marked a feature in Buddhistical philosophy?[190]

Blavatsky continued by advocating for the need to remember lessons learned in past lives in order to perfect oneself. Later, she quoted the Buddha on achieving enlightenment: "To achieve this object, he must destroy within himself the trinity of *Maya*."[191] In the second volume of *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky declared, "The profoundest and most transcendental speculations of the ancient metaphysicians of India and other countries, are all based on that great Buddhistic and Brahamanical principle underlying the whole of their religious metaphysics — *illusion* of the senses."[192] She continued, "Everything that is finite is illusion, all that which is eternal and infinite is reality." Interestingly, Blavatsky succeeded in combining components of Buddhist philosophy, particularly here that the external world exists as an illusion, with Western conceptions of the eternal.[193]

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[188] For Blavatsky's opinions on positivism, see *Isis Unveiled*, I: 75-83; II: 3-4.
[189] Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence*, 26.
[190] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I: xiv.
[191] Ibid., I: 290.
[192] Ibid., II: 157.
[193] This is only one instance of Blavatsky's creative melding of different religious philosophies.

The Maya of Buddhism provided Blavatsky with justification for her distrust of the exterior world and proof of another reality: that of the invisible and the immaterial.

As we shall see, the luminiferous ether, central to contemporary Victorian physics, played a pivotal role in new conceptions of matter and space in the late nineteenth century. Blavatsky, too, noted the ether in relation to contemporary scientific discoveries that helped to discredit positivist science with proof of the fallibility of the human eye.[194] However, she made a distinction between the ancient and modern concepts of the ether and focused on the ancient form:

> Ether, with all its mysterious and occult properties, containing itself the germs of universal creation; Ether, the celestial virgin, the spiritual mother of every existing form and being, from whose bosom as soon as "incubated" by the Divine Spirit, are called to existence Matter and Life, Force and Action. Electricity, magnetism, heat, light, and chemical action are so little understood even now that fresh facts are constantly widening the range of our knowledge. Who knows where ends the power of this protean giant — Ether; or whence its mysterious origins? — Who, we mean, that denies the spirit that works in it and evolves out of all visible form?[195]

The ancient form of the ether, or aether, is found in both Hindu and Greek mythology.[196] Preceding the passage above, Blavatsky asked, "What is the primordial Chaos but Aether?"[197] The ether thus functioned as a physical substance and even more so, as the source of all creation. Blavatsky used the ether to validate the existence of an unseen reality and to show that both science and occultism have the power to reveal nature's concealed mysteries. The Theosophical stance on the contemporary ether shifted when

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[194] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I: 130.

[195] Ibid., I: 134. "The *modern* Ether; not such as is recognized by our scientists, but such as it *was* known to the ancient philosophers, long before the time of Moses . . . ."

[196] Bruce J. Hunt, "Lines of Force, Swirls of Ether," in *From Energy to Information*, eds. Clarke and Henderson, 99; Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 79; J. W. Mellor, *A Comprehensive Treatise on Inorganic and Theoretical Chemistry* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), I: 22, 33.

[197] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I: 134

leadership transferred to Annie Besant following Olcott's death in 1907. Besant's co-author, C. W. Leadbeater, in particular, embraced the contemporary ether.

Besant and Leadbeater became prominent figures in the Theosophical Society and used the Society's publications to set forth their particular views, including vibratory thought-transfer through the ether. Besant was a women's rights and political activist prior to becoming president of the Theosophical Society in 1907.[198] The Theosophical Society under Besant stressed Indian Hindu teachings more than Buddhism, which had been central to the teachings of Blavatsky and Olcott. Leadbeater wrote prolifically on Theosophical concerns, many of which engaged invisible, immaterial realities, including clairvoyance and life after death. Leadbeater's writings, in particular, address issues of interest to Kupka, including clairvoyance.

Two particular Leadbeater texts are relevant to Kupka's search for the immaterial: *Clairvoyance* (1899) and *Thought Forms* (1901), co-written with Besant. In *Clairvoyance*, Leadbeater defined clairvoyance as "the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight."[199] According to Leadbeater, it is an ability latent in everyone, which can develop under the direction of an experienced teacher.[200] In the course of the text, Leadbeater addressed in detail the different levels and types of clairvoyance available, including clairvoyance in time and clairvoyance in space. With clairvoyant vision, inanimate objects would become transparent: "The most striking change in the appearance of inanimate objects by the acquisition of this faculty is that most of them become almost transparent, owing to the difference in wave-length of some of the

[198] For a discussion of Besant's public and private history, see Carol MacKay's edition of Annie Besant, *Autobiographical Sketches* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2009).
[199] Charles W. Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 2nd ed. (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1903), 5.
[200] Ibid., 7, 20.

vibrations to which the man has now become susceptible."[201] When the individual develops clairvoyant abilities, his or her vision completely changes and opens up new possibilities for observing a world previously unseen. As we shall see, Leadbeater would also connect this transparency to the scientific discovery of the X-ray.

Writing for a knowledgeable, Theosophical audience, Leadbeater also discussed clairvoyant ability in terms of vibrations traveling through the ether: "We are living all the while surrounded by a vast sea of mingled air and ether, the latter interpenetrating the former, as it does all physical matter; and it is chiefly by means of vibrations in that vast sea of matter that impressions reach us from the outside."[202] For Leadbeater, the ether carried the vibrations necessary for clairvoyant vision to function. He also discussed several "planes" possessed by each individual, including the mental, astral, and buddhic planes. Of most importance to the present conversation is the notion of the astral.

Central to Leadbeater's theories of ether vibrations and clairvoyance is the belief in the existence of astral bodies. According to Leadbeater, "every object has necessarily its astral counterpart," and such an astral body lacks "specialized sense-organs."[203] He also connected the astral body to astral hearing and astral sight, which is closer to "true perception" than normal vision.[204] He defined astral sight as "the faculty of responding to such vibrations as convey to the man's consciousness….the man functioning in that vehicle sees equally well objects behind him, beneath him, above him, without needing to turn his head."[205] Leadbeater also made a distinction between the astral body and the "etheric double" in man. He claimed the etheric double is "in exceedingly close relation

[201] Ibid., 30-32.
[202] Ibid., 8.
[203] Ibid., 14.
[204] Ibid., 41.
[205] Ibid., 16-17.

to his nervous system," and is connected with etheric sight.[206] Unlike astral sight, which enables one to see from a more omniscient point of view, etheric sight is similar to looking through mist or water.[207] In *Clairvoyance,* Leadbeater established a hierarchy of vision: physical sight, etheric sight, and astral sight.[208] With astral sight as the most powerful vision, he also connected to it astral travel as the most spiritually advanced form of clairvoyant vision with no more breaks in consciousness even during sleep.[209]

Leadbeater also touched upon the presence of auras in *Clairvoyance*, which he later dealt with extensively in his 1902 publication, *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance*. In a section titled "Aura expresses character," Leadbeater listed feelings associated with colors that would be visible to a person with astral sight. For the individual with astral vision, "As he looks at a person he will see him surrounded by the luminous mist of the astral aura, flashing with all sorts of brilliant colours, and constantly changing in hue and brilliancy with every variation of the person's thoughts and feelings."[210] Thus, an invisible aura constantly surrounds each individual, which only becomes visible to the person with developed clairvoyant abilities. Leadbeater also made a connection between aura quality and spiritual development, claiming that as an individual spiritually progresses, his or her aura increases "in size as well as in luminosity and purity of colour."[211] While each person is constantly surrounded by an aura, the individual also projects thoughts and feelings, known as thought-forms, only perceptible through clairvoyant vision.

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[206] Ibid., 21-22.
[207] Ibid., 32-34.
[208] Ibid., 36.
[209] Ibid., 36, 46.
[210] Ibid., 42.
[211] Ibid., 101.

Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms* provided an in-depth discussion of thought-forms with corresponding illustrations. The basic principle of *Thought-Forms* is that every thought produces both a "radiating vibration and a floating form."[212] Three principles determine the product of a thought-form: the quality of thought creates color, the nature of thought creates the form, and the firmness of the thought creates the clarity of outline.[213] Besant and Leadbeater go on to describe the three types of thought-forms providing illustrations for specific thoughts.[214] They also provided a decoding of thought-form colors, presenting their text as somewhat of a how-to guide for those interested in developing their clairvoyant abilities.

Again, Leadbeater and Besant used the language of vibrations to describe the communication process of thought-forms.[215] Ann Davis has noted Besant and Leadbeater's extension of Blavatsky's idea that "consciousness consists of the ability to recognize and respond to the vibrations of the universe."[216] As she explains, in *Thought-Forms* they "fused the concept of vibrations with Western scientific investigations and argued that higher matter — the results of thoughts and feelings, thought-forms — is structured by the vibration in a person's higher body just as physical matter is shaped by vibration."[217] According to Besant and Leadbeater, "it should be understood that this radiating vibration conveys the character of the thought, but not its subject."[218] Each thought is accompanied by a "definite form," which "becomes for the time a kind of

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[212] Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House Ltd., 1901), 21.
[213] Ibid., 31.
[214] Ibid., 36-37.
[215] Ibid., 21-25.
[216] Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, 121.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 23.

living creature . . . ."[219] Furthermore, there is an endless capacity for the kinds of thought-forms created: "There may be infinite variety in the colour and shape of such elementals or thought-forms, for each thought draws round it the matter which is appropriate for its expression, and sets that matter into vibration in harmony with its own; so that the character of the thought decides its colour . . . ."[220] Thus, the appearance of thought-forms and their communication is dependent upon the workings of vibrations. Furthermore, the existence of thought-forms, floating invisibly around individuals and only perceptible to the trained clairvoyant, additionally expanded the Theosophical discussion on the existence of an immaterial, invisible reality.

In addition to Theosophy and Buddhism, Kupka explored his interest in another reality beneath surface appearances by studying the science of his time. Not only did Paris provide access to visual and textual material on Buddhism and Theosophy, but it offered opportunities for one to learn about the newest scientific discoveries. Two particular developments are of importance to this thesis: the X-ray and wireless telegraphy. Indeed, popularizations of science were readily accessible to any reader in the early twentieth century.

PART C: SCIENCE

Contrary to Einstein's Relativity Theory and quantum physics, which seemed to take science out of the realm of the lay person for much of the twentieth century after the 1920s, early twentieth-century science was highly accessible to the average reader. With articles such as Sir Oliver Lodge's 1905 "The Electric Theory of Matter," published in *Harper's Monthly*, and Gustave Le Bon's 1906 "The Decay of Matter," published in *The Independent*, the lay person had ready access to the latest scientific discoveries and

[219] Ibid., 25.
[220] Ibid.

theories.[221] As a city, Paris teemed with excitement for the newest science, and on the global scene, the French competed with scientists from other nations to make the latest breakthrough. Perhaps the best-known example of early twentieth-century French scientific prowess was the 1898 discovery of radioactive radium and polonium by the Curies.[222] Radioactivity altered contemporary notions of energy and matter, establishing that radioactive material changed its chemical composition. The various scientific discoveries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century radically transformed the way people envisioned the nature of reality.[223] In particular, the X-ray caused people to question the accuracy of human vision and proved the existence of a reality beyond vision; and wireless telegraphy via ether vibrations offered a model to which many individuals connected thought transfer and extra-sensory human abilities.

X-rays permeated popular culture around the turn-of-the-century. In 1895, German scientist Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen had discovered what he termed the "X-ray" in the course of his experiments with cathode rays.[224] Scholars including Joseph J. Corn, Linda D. Henderson, and Clément Chéroux have discussed the vast quantity of popular literature on the X-ray through the first decade of the twentieth century.[225] Clément Chéroux, writing in his essay "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays,"

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[221] Linda D. Henderson, "Editor's Introduction: I. Writing Modern Art and Science — An Overview; II. Cubism, Futurism, and Ether Physics in the Early Twentieth Century," *Science in Context* 17, no. 4 (2004): 445. Sir Oliver Lodge's "The Electric Theory of Matter" was published in *Harper's Monthly* in August 1904 and Gustave Le Bon's "The Decay of Matter" was featured in the July 26, 1906 issue of *The Independent*.

[222] David C. Cassidy, Gerald James Holton, and James F. Rutherford, *Understanding Physics* (New York: Springer, 2002), 728-734.

[223] Henderson, "Editor's Introduction," 447. "Over the two decades before the public in France first heard of Einstein and Relativity Theory, the decade of the 1890s witnessed a series of scientific discoveries that successively challenged conventional notions of matter and space."

[224] Cassidy, Holton, and Rutherford, *Understanding Physics*, 608-613.

[225] See the anthology, Joseph J. Corn, ed., *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986) and Linda D. Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," *Art Journal* 47 (Winter 1988): 323-340.

has described the presence of X-rays in Parisian life with boulevards featuring X-ray displays alternating with showings of the cinematograph of the Lumière brothers.[226] People went to have their bodies X-rayed believing the rays to have healing powers, and in the parlors of members of high-society, people hosted séances that involved X-rays.[227] Emmanuel Napoleon Santini de Riols, a columnist from the time, accurately captured the public's excitement for the X-ray:

> Pasteur's eradication of the rabies virus and Dr. Roux's eradication of the diphtheria virus did not make such a splash in the papers as Professor Röntgen's discovery of X-rays. Why not? Because the most obvious thing about this discovery was not its surgical applications or its humanitarian benefits; on the contrary it was the curious, amusing, phantasmagorical, extraordinary aspect of the invention: the bone structure of a living hand reproduced on a photographic plate by invisible radiation.[228]

What de Riols revealed is the public's fascination with the magical quality of the X-ray. With the X-ray's prominence in the public sphere, it is no wonder artists picked up on the philosophical and visual implications of the discovery.

X-rays called into question the boundaries of observed reality. Articles on Röntgen's findings were often accompanied by diagrams illustrating the spectra of visible and invisible light as well as other wave vibrations.[229] Such illustrations highlighted the inaccuracy of human vision in its perceptional abilities. Henderson has noted the recognition of the relativity of perception as a prominent theme in X-ray literature, citing

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[226] Clément Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," in *The Perfect Medium*, 115.
[227] Cassidy, Holton, and Rutherford, *Understanding Physics*, 613. Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," 115.
[228] Emmanuel Mapoleon Santini de Riols, *La Photographie à travers les corps opaques par les rayons électriques, cathodiques et de Rontgen avec une étude sur les images photofulgurales* (Paris: Charles Mendel, 1896), 1-2; as quoted in Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," 115.
[229] Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," 325.

Camille Flammarion's 1900 *L'Inconnu*.[230] Flammarion argued that "Our senses mislead us as to the reality of objects around us. Sensation and reality are two different things."[231] He wanted to use the X-ray for inquiries into unknown mysteries:

> The late discovery of the Röntgen rays, so inconceivable and so strange in its origins, ought to convince us how very small is the field of our usual observations. To see through opaque substances! To look inside a closed box! To see the bones of an arm, a leg, a body, through flesh and clothing! Such a discovery is, to say the least, quite contrary to everything we have been used to consider certainty. This is indeed a most eloquent example in favor of the axiom: it is unscientific to assert that realities are stopped by the limit of our knowledge and observation.[232]

X-rays transformed the entire cultural dialogue on the nature of reality. From the scientific realm, the language and use of X-rays extended into the spiritual.

For Spiritualists, the X-ray proved the fallibility of human vision and validated the existence of invisible reality. The exhibition catalog *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, noted earlier, presents an in-depth study of spirit photography, including photographs of spirits, fluids, and mediums, which all attained scientific legitimacy with the discoveries of radiation, X-rays, and radioactivity.[233] In his catalogue essay noted above, Clément Chéroux argues that occultists appropriated the X-ray as scientific proof of their long-held claims about clairvoyance and spirit mediums: "Occultists were quick to use the scientific credibility of X-rays to legitimate old beliefs. The gift of clairvoyance, in other words the possibility of seeing through opaque bodies, was afforded an entirely rational explanation by Professor Röntgen's discovery."[234] Chéroux offers several examples of late nineteenth-century authors using the X-ray, and

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[230] Henderson, "Editor's Introduction," 447-448.
[231] Camille Flammarion, *L'Inconnu* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1902), 11.
[232] Ibid., 14.
[233] Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, "Photography and the Occult," in *The Perfect Medium*, 16.
[234] Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," 116.

related discoveries, to validate their claims. He cites an 1897 article, titled "Les Rayons cathodiques et la lumière astrale," published in the *Revue spirit*, in which the author claims that clairvoyants "possess a kind of highly developed Crookes' tube"[235] The Crookes tube is a reference to the technology used by Röntgen in his discovery of X-ray photography. By comparing a clairvoyant to a Crookes tube, the author not only gave scientific legitimacy to the phenomenon but also offered a physical means to envision clairvoyant power. In addition, the X-ray was also seen by certain occultists as proving Baron von Reichenbach's theory of the "fluid of magentizers . . . with the name of od" as well as other "ancient phenomena that have long been known in the form of subjective conceptions because they had not yet received an objective demonstration of their reality."[236] Thus, for occultists the X-ray offered scientific support for occult theories as well as a new language with which to speak about subjective experience and extra-sensory abilities.

Like the Spiritualists, Theosophists used the X-ray to validate their arguments. In his 1899 book *Clairvoyance*, Leadbeater conceived of clairvoyance in terms of the X-ray:

> The experiments with the Röntgen's rays give us an example of the startling results which are produced when even a very few of these additional vibrations are brought within human ken, and the transparency to these rays of many substance hitherto considered opaque at once show us one way at least in which we may explain such elementary clairvoyance as is involved in reading a letter inside a closed box, or describing those present in an adjoining apartment.[237]

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[235] P. Bloche "Les Rayons cathodiques ey la lumière astrale," *Revue spirit* (1897), 669; as quoted in Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," 116. As Chéroux quotes the full sentence, clairvoyants "possess a kind of highly developed Crookes' tube, connected to their sense of sight, so that objects hidden to ordinary eyes are exposed by astral light to the cathodic rays generated by those mediums; the images are photographed on their brains."

[236] L. Aubert, "Radiothérapie," (1898), 161; as quoted in Chéroux, "Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays," 116.

[237] Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 11-12.

As he continued on the kind of clairvoyant seeing, "To learn to see by means of the Röntgen rays in addition to those ordinarily employed would be quite sufficient to enable anyone to perform a feat of magic of this order."[238] X-ray vision combined with normal human sight would be an incredible power, about which he later discussed the benefits and dangers.[239] The new scientific language of X-rays and vibrations thus provided a language with which to envision occult practices of clairvoyant abilities.

Another example of occultists using X-ray-related science is the work of Dr. Hippolyte Baraduc in Paris. According to Besant and Leadbeater, Baraduc "is well on the way towards photographing astral-mental images."[240] Baraduc, along with Louis Darget and Jules-Bernard Luys, attempted to photograph their own energy by placing their bodies, mostly their fingers or foreheads, on sensitized, photographic plates.[241] Baraduc believed he was capturing vibrations traveling through the ether in a photographic image similar to the results of X-ray photography. For the Theosophists, Baraduc's photographs served as actual, physical results and as a way to envision the presence of vibrations. Not only is Baraduc cited by Besant and Leadbeater in *Thought-Forms* but also by Olcott in *The Buddhist Catechism*, discussed earlier.[242] Here, Olcott asserted that scientists had proved the existence of the aura and cited both von Reichenbach experiments, published in his *Researches* in 1844-45, and Dr. Baraduc's photographs of "aura light." Olcott claimed that all "humans . . . animals, trees, plants and even stones have it," and that for a buddha or arhat, the aura becomes "brighter and more extended" as evidence of superior

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[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 170-175.
[240] Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 12. Besant and Leadbeater describe Baraduc's experimentations and relate the importance of his findings to the study and practice of clairvoyance.
[241] Apraxine and Schmit, "Photography and the Occult," 16.
[242] Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism*, 114.

development.[243] From the example of Olcott borrowing Baraduc's experiments, themselves paralleling X-ray photography, one can see the possibilities for exchange between the spiritual, the occult, and the scientific all connected by an interest in immaterial reality.

The X-ray provided a new way for artists to envision reality. With the post-impressionists and their reaction against the positivism of Monet and the impressionists, artists beginning in the 1880s held a greater interest in the subjective world of the individual and refocused attention from the visible world to the invisible, subjective reality of the artist's thoughts and feelings. Henderson has discussed the importance of the X-ray for modern artists, including Pablo Picasso, the Puteaux Cubists, and the Futurist Umberto Boccioni. For the Cubists, the X-ray provided a new model of vision with the use of penetrating light and transparency.[244] Boccioni, as the first to publish on the relationship between the X-ray and painting, questioned, "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies . . . ? Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to the X-rays?"[245] The X-ray served as a new model for visual artists seeking to convey the reality of the invisible, and as we shall see, Kupka used the X-ray to philosophically and visually explore the existence of a reality beneath surface appearances.

Beyond X-ray science, wireless telegraphy was the other transforming development of the late nineteenth century that was grounded in electromagnetic waves of the ether. Loosely defined as space-filling medium, the ether was thought necessary to transmit vibrating waves, including X-rays, visible light, and Hertzian waves, which

[243] Ibid., 114-116.
[244] Henderson, "Editor's Introduction," 448.
[245] Umberto Boccioni in his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" (1910), as quoted in Henderson, "Editor's Introduction," 448.

Heinrich Hertz had discovered in the 1880s and that made wireless telegraphy possible.[246] According to Donald R. Benson, the ether "provided a means for resolving apparent discontinuities in the spatial-material order, and even for resolving the fundamental discontinuity between material and nonmaterial orders."[247] Sir Oliver Lodge, the British physicist and proponent of the ether, wrote in 1908 of the ether, "Every such answer involves some view of the universal, and possibly infinite, uniform omnipresent connecting medium, the ether of space."[248] Thus, the ether maintained the ability to connect all life and to solve problems from the physical to the metaphysical.

The ether offered solutions to many individuals, including artists looking to envision a new form of reality and to Spiritualists hoping to find scientific proof for communication to other-worldly realms. Individuals interested in Spiritualism or Theosophy hoped that validating the ether might indeed prove the existence of an unseen reality.[249] Scientists even used the ether to link science and religion. In *The Unseen Universe* from 1875, scientists Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait "postulated a parallel universe, spiritual in nature, and responsible for the birth of the present universe."[250] They described the ether as a "bridge into the invisible universe" and asked "May we not at once say that when energy is carried from matter into ether it is carried

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[246] Hunt, "Lines of Force, Swirls of Ether," 99-100; Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space," 128-129.

[247] Donald R. Benson, "Facts and Fictions in Scientific Discourse: The Case of the Ether," *The Georgia Review* 38 (Winter 1984): 830.

[248] Sir Oliver Lodge, "The Ether of Space: Supplementary Remarks Concerning Density of Ether," *The North American Review (1821-1940)* 187, 630 (May 1908): 724.

[249] Peter J. Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early-Twentieth Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 90. "Virtually all felt that proving the reality of these phenomena would help turn the tide of materialism and usher in a new age of belief, whether or not the new theology would be seen as continuation of the old."

[250] Peter C. Kjaergaard, "'Within the Bounds of Science': Redirecting Controversies to Nature," *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. Louise Henson, Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Richard Noakes, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathan R. Topham (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 214.

from the visible into the invisible; and that when it is carried from ether to matter it is carried from the invisible into the visible?"[251]

Theosophical writers used the model of telegraphy and ether vibrations to explain human extra-sensory abilities. Theosophists, including Blavatsky, Besant, and Leadbeater, all followed the latest scientific developments that supported their long held anti-positivist beliefs. As mentioned earlier, Blavatsky conceptualized the ether in terms of the ancient "aether." Besant and Leadbeater, however, turned to a more contemporary idea of the ether stating in their 1901 *Thought-Forms*, "Ether is now comfortably settled in the scientific kingdom, becoming almost more than a hypothesis."[252] As noted earlier, in *Thought-Forms*, Besant and Leadbeater cited Baraduc's images as scientific equivalents to their work.[253] A thought-form, which is the physical manifestation of a thought, can only be perceived by an individual with extra-sensory, clairvoyant abilities. According to Besant and Leadbeater, "Every thought gives rise to a set of correlated vibrations in the matter of this body, accompanied with a marvelous play of colour."[254] Both "thought-forms" and the auras discussed by Leadbeater, noted earlier, were understood as vibrations in the ether.

The scientific discoveries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provided philosophical and visual models for many individuals, which often paralleled ideas to be found in Buddhism and that served usefully for contemporary occultists, who incorporated them into their doctrines. Theosophy, in particular, played a vital role as a popular and prolific conduit for information, which began with Blavatsky and Olcott. Theosophical authors borrowed from both Buddhism and science to provide historical

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[251] Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait, *The Unseen Universe* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875), 159.
[252] Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, 11.
[253] Ibid., 12-15.
[254] Ibid., 18.

and contemporary justification for their beliefs. These three fields, of which Kupka was well aware, played a crucial role in the development of his painting style, bringing him to the verge of his move to totally abstract painting in 1912. Kupka's 1909 painting *The Dream* serves as an effective counterpart to his early Buddhist-oriented illustrations to demonstrate his transformation into a painter of the immaterial (Fig. 34).

Section III: Immaterial, Invisible Reality in *The Dream*

Kupka's concern for immaterial, invisible reality eventually would lead to his decision to create totally abstract works of art, such as *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors* and *Amorpha, Warm Chromatics* (Figs. 2, 3). Prior to the development of his mature abstract style, however, Kupka painted several works in which he gave form to his preoccupation with immaterial reality. One particular painting epitomizes this concern: *The Dream* (1909) (Fig. 34). The painting, which is seemingly personal in its intent, is small in size. Kupka used oil on a square cardboard measuring roughly one foot on each side. By examining *The Dream* in relation to Kupka's interest in Buddhism, Theosophy, and science, I hope to shed light on his aesthetic and philosophical interest in the immaterial. Furthermore, I want to argue that *The Dream* represents a critical stage in Kupka's artistic evolution.

The Dream conveys a sense of reality beneath the surface through its formal language and subject matter. The painting features two nude figures, one male and one female, lying on the ground in what appears to be a dream-like state. A projection of two forms, also male and female, looms large on the left side of the image. The projected forms overlap one another in a sensual, semi-transparent embrace; their forms are translucent and shift in Fauvist-inspired color between blue, purple and green. On either side of the floating figures variations in blues and purples, painted in mostly diagonal lines, give a sense of upward movement and frame the gaseous yellow surrounding the figures. On the lower left corner of the painting, Kupka wrote: "My dear Ninie, Here I sketch the dream that I had of the two of us—Yours, Franc."[255] The inscription, dedicated

[255] "Ma Chère Ninie, Voici ébauche le reve que J'ai eu-nous deux—Ton Franc." Kupka met Eugénie Straub in 1904. They began living together in 1906 and eventually married in 1910. Mladek and Rowell, "Chronology," 308-310.

to his lover and future wife, emphasizes the intimate, sensuous character of the work. In *The Dream*, Kupka gave form to his personal dream of an intimate moment with his lover, using transparent washes of Fauve-like color to fuse the two figures.

Kupka wrote of dreaming in his notebook from 1910-1911: "When we try to remember a dream . . . often we only retain a skeleton of the dream images . . . a vague grid through which fragmented forms emerge and disappear as quickly as they came."[256] In *The Dream*, Kupka visualized the fragmentary and fleeting experience of dreaming where one encounters a different sense of reality. Mladek suggests that Kupka continued participating in Spiritist circles and séances in Paris while adapting to the overwhelming "external reality" of Parisian life.[257] She cites a letter from Kupka to his friend, Arthur Roessler, in 1897:

> Unfortunately—or may it even be good luck—I came again in contact with the Spiritists . . . . Yesterday I experienced a split consciousness where it seemed I was observing the earth from outside. I was in great empty space and saw the planets rolling quietly. After that it was difficult to come back to the trivia of every day life and so in my thoughts I seek refuge in you.[258]

Kupka's experience of observing the earth from an external, omniscient point of view runs parallel to his representation of dreaming. In *The Dream*, one simultaneously sees the physical bodies of two earthly figures with a mental projection of their translucent bodies floating above them. Kupka's experience with occult practices, which began in Bohemia and carried over from Prague and Vienna to Paris, thus enabled him to conceive of invisible, but no less real, alternate states of existence.

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[256] Kupka, unpublished notebook, 5; as quoted in Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 61. Ellipsis is in original.
[257] Mladek, "Central European Influences," 28.
[258] Kupka, Letter of February 7, 1897; as quoted in Mladek, "Central European Influences," 28-29. Ellipsis is in original.

Kupka considered himself endowed with extra-sensory abilities. As discussed earlier, Mladek, in her essay "Central European influences," has argued for the importance of Kupka's childhood and young adult experiences in Bohemia, Prague, and Vienna that educated him in Spiritism and encouraged a lifelong participation in the occult and "metapsychology."[259] According to Mladek, "His ability to function as a medium made him believe that he was capable of insight into reality inaccessible to most. He believed himself endowed with exceptional intuition and perception and ability for self-observation and self-analysis, which he considered vital for the discovery of the 'essence of reality.'"[260] Or as Margit Rowell has developed Mladek's argument in reference to his interest in Theosophy and Eastern Religions, "These disciplines made him receptive to visionary experiences and taught him that a world beyond the perceptual realm exists, a world ruled by dynamic causality and change, colored by imaginary not perceived hues, infinite in its dimensions. Nothing is still, everything moves in a vital flux. Man can only intuit its rhythms."[261] These are exactly the types of concerns that Buddhism, Theosophy, and science would have supported as Kupka developed his aesthetic theories.

Like Buddhists and Theosophists, Kupka considered the world of appearances to be illusion. He translated his interest in immaterial reality into artistic practice via his rejection of realism in painting. For Kupka, naturalistic painting was itself an illusion: "The low-brow or earthly painters, for the most part skillful imitators, hold the trompe-l'oeil as an ultimate tour de force."[262] By contrast, Kupka believed it was critical to move

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[259] Mladek, "Central European Influences," 28.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 48.
[262] Kupka, *La Création*, 183. "Les peintres terre à terre, pour la plupart imitateurs habiles, tiennent le trompe-l'oeil pour un tour de force ne plus ultra." Kupka professed a similar statement in his 1913

beyond surface appearances.[263] Speaking of the most effective works of art, he argued, "it soon becomes clear that most of the painted and sculpted artworks develop themes borrowed from a 'beyond' of reality."[264] For Kupka, naturalism denigrated art and the artist and prohibited any movement forward, much like the illusions of the world prevent one from escaping ignorance and death. In *The Dream*, Kupka refrained from using illusionistic lighting and chiaroscuro modeling to render the scene; instead, he employed a kind of transparent light to emphasize the floating figures. They are suffused with light rather than reflecting it and being made to seem solid and three-dimensional by shadows. By moving away from trompe l'oeil effects, Kupka escaped the illusory techniques of the painters he criticized.

Kupka envisioned the artist as a visionary gifted with a heightened sense of perception. Akin to Leadbeater's concept of the clairvoyant with extra-sensory abilities, Kupka imagined the artist as detecting aspects of higher realities, which he then makes visible through the medium of paint. He classified artists as "visionaries" and described their motivation:

> Great art makes the invisible and intangible, purely and simply felt, a visible and tangible reality — a reality that is not a simple pictorial replica of the ideal mechanism common to everyone, but that has, as a created work, a soul and a life of its own, which imposes itself supremely on the viewer's senses.[265]

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unpublished "credo," "Il est absolument absurd de continuer la tradition barbare du trompe l'oeil." "It is absolutely absurd to continue the barbaric tradition of trompe l'oeil." Kupka, unpublished "credo," 1.

[263] Kupka, *La Création*, 92.

[264] Ibid., 51. "Il devient aussitôt évident que la plupart des oeuvres peintres et sculptées élaborent des thèmes empruntés à un 'au-delà' de la réalité."

[265] Ibid., 103, 236. "Le grand art, c'est de faire de l'invisible et de l'intangible, purement et simplement ressenti, une réalité visible et tangible — une réalité qui ne soit pas une simple réplique imagée du mécanisme idéel commun à chacun, mais quiait, en tant qu'oeuvre créée, un âme et une vie propres, qui s'impose souverainement aux sens du spectateur."

Thus, an artist explores and makes visible an alternate reality, and it is the role of the painter to communicate to the viewer the existence of this reality. In fact, Kupka took his clairvoyant visions seriously and used them in the formation of his imagery.[266]

He thought the extra-sensory abilities of artists to be, in part, atavistically determined. According to Kupka, "The artist, in what sets him apart from other men, is not only predetermined by heredity and connected to a pre-existing environment. As a sensitive, open to all impressions, he feels the movements and events of the whole universe. His visions, the representations that fill his mind are not exclusively the work of the organs of intellect."[267] He thus envisioned the artist to both be born with special perceptional abilities and encouraged by his environment. It was Kupka's belief in immaterial reality and the artist's special ability to perceive such a reality that would eventually lead him to paint total abstraction, starting in 1912. In the meantime, his interest in sources that encouraged an understanding of invisible realities enabled him to give form to the immaterial in works such as *The Dream*.

The Dream reflects the Buddhist emphasis on the illusory quality of visible reality. As discussed in Section II, Buddhism teaches the importance of recognizing the visible world as an illusion and warns against false conceptions of the self. For an individual in the early twentieth century seeking an alternative to traditional Western philosophies, Buddhism offered a more fluid idea of consciousness and a different conception of the nature of existence. As noted earlier, Blavatsky, Theosophy's co-founder, also spoke of the world as Maya, or illusion, and advocated trust in the invisible

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[266] Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 77.

[267] Kupka, *La Création*, 207. "L'artiste, dans ce qui le met à part des autres hommes, n'est pas seulement un être prédéterminé par l'atavisme et mis en rapport avec un milieu préexistant. En tant que sensitif, ouvert à toutes les impressions, il ressent au fond de lui-même les mouvements et les événements de tout l'univers. Ses visions, les representations qui peuplent son esprit ne sont pas exclusivement l'oeuvre des organes de l'intellect."

world over perception of the visible, and Kupka himself referred to the concept in his notebook.[268] In *The Dream*, Kupka presented a vision of invisible reality. Here the imaginary floating forms dominate the scene; they dwarf the forms of visible reality, as represented by the fleshy forms lying in sleep. Through the variation in scale between the dream figures and their earthly forms, Kupka clearly made the painting about an experience of invisible reality with the immaterial dominating the material.

Certain forms of Buddhism teach what is called "transference of consciousness," which one might consider a state similar to clairvoyant astral travel.[269] The tenth-century Indian tantric Buddhist Nāropa taught "transference of consciousness," where one individual can transfer his or her consciousness, often at the moment of death, into that of another being, either human or animal in form.[270] The consciousness transfer thus allows an individual's consciousness to continue on in a new bodily form. Despite its Buddhist association with death, it is a similar notion to what Kupka recalled in his letter to Roessler from February 1897, when he experienced a "split consciousness where it seemed I was observing the earth from outside."[271] While Kupka did not speak specifically of transferring his consciousness to another being, he encountered his consciousness traveling to a location other than that of his physical body. As in *The Dream*, Kupka's consciousness projected its own reality of intimately embracing his

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[268] Kupka, unpublished notebook, 45. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I: xiv, 290; II: 157.

[269] For a falsified account of consciousness transfer related to Tibetan Buddhism, see Donald Lopez, "The Eye," in *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 86-113. While Tibetan Buddhism is certainly not the focus of this thesis, it is important to note the rapid increase of interest in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism during the late nineteenth century. Donald Lopez and Janice Leoshko have both argued for recognizing the role Theosophists played in increasing popularity in Tibetan Buddhism.

[270] Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 105. Lopez outlines the most famous case of consciousness transfer, which is found in the biography of Marpa, who taught the famous Tibetan yogin Milarepa. Milarepa's biography, as mentioned in Section I, was one of Brancusi's favorite books.

[271] Kupka, Letter of February 7, 1897; as quoted in Mladek, "Central European Influences," 28-29.

lover, which remained separate from the action of his physical body, lying near to but not touching his wife's earthly form (Figs. 35, 36).

The Dream also embodies the Theosophical notion of clairvoyance, which we may consider here first in terms of astral travel and auras before turning to basic clairvoyance. As discussed in Section II, Leadbeater's book *Clairvoyance* defined clairvoyance as "the power to see what is hidden from ordinary physical sight," which he further explained in *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance*.[272] In *Clairvoyance*, Leadbeater presented five methods by which a student should learn to "see at a distance" via astral travel.[273] Of importance to the present discussion are the fourth and fifth methods: traveling in the astral body and traveling in the mental body, the fifth being characterized by Leadbeater as a glorified version of the fourth.[274] In these last two methods, he described a process in which "consciousness of the seer no longer remains in or closely connected with his physical body, but is definitely transferred to the scene which he is examining."[275] In this method, the person must be asleep or in a trance.[276] In *The Dream*, Kupka presented a localized version of this kind of clairvoyant, astral travel. Here consciousness manifests itself in another setting: a moment of intimate embrace. Certainly Kupka believed himself endowed with special abilities and sought to discover the nature of invisible reality hidden to the average viewer but available to the individual possessed of extra-sensory powers.

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[272] Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 5.
[273] For all five methods, see Leadbeater, *Clairvoyance*, 61-78.
[274] Ibid., 78.
[275] Ibid., 69-70.
[276] Ibid., 70.

Leadbeater's *Man Visible and Invisible* offers a strong visual correlation to *The Dream*.[277] Here Leadbeater addressed both the "bodies of man connected with the higher planes," and also "physical matter which is seen by clairvoyant sight to be part of the aura of man."[278] Accordingly, there remained a separation between clairvoyant vision on a higher level, such as the astral travel previously mentioned, and clairvoyant vision of auras connected to the physical realm. Leadbeater also insisted on the association of auras with specific colors.[279] In illustrations for *Man Visible and Invisible*, one finds a variety of figures surrounded by colored auras, such as the "Mental Body of the Average Man" (Fig. 37).[280] The combination of color fields over the hollow structure of the human body is reminiscent of *The Dream*, where the floating figures are surrounded by an array of yellows and greens, which even suggests auras.[281] In *Man Visible and Invisible*, Leadbeater also cited the aura of the Buddha, claiming that illustrations of the Buddha's aura, although represented incorrectly, can be found on temple walls in Ceylon. Despite the drawings being "grotesquely inaccurate," they are still "a rough and material representation of the actual higher vehicle of the Adept of that particular type to which this Great One belongs," according to Leadbeater.[282] The Buddha is distinguished from

[277] Margit Rowell draws a parallel between Kupka's mental organization of imagery to Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms.* She connects the process of visualization put forth in *Thought-Forms* to that of Kupka's. For the full discussion of Kupka's visualization process in relation to Besant and Leadbeater, see Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 77.

[278] Charles W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance* (New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1903), 128.

[279] Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms* featured a chart that easily decodes their colors associations.

[280] The "Mental Body of the Average Man" is Illustration IX in *Man Visible and Invisible*. The corresponding explanatory text can be found on pages 94-95.

[281] If one follows the color association decoding chart found in *Thought-Forms*, then yellow is associated with the highest intellect and green with sympathy. Blues are associated with devotion and spirituality while purple is tied to sensuality.

[282] Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible*, 136. Leadbeater also cited the aura of the Buddha in *Clairvoyance*, 93-94: "We read in quite exoteric Oriental scriptures of the immense extension of the aura of the Buddha; I think that three miles is mentioned on one occasion as its limit, but whatever the exact measurement may be, it is obvious that we have here another record of this fact of the extremely rapid growth of the casual body as man passes on his upward way."

the average person by the quality of his aura—associated with great sensitivity—which Kupka also claimed for the artist.

For *The Dream*, it is also the basic Theosophical notion of clairvoyance that provides evidence of Kupka's concern for the immaterial translated onto the surface of the canvas. Just as Theosophists conveyed information on Buddhism to their readers, they also employed the latest science, and as discussed in Section II, they used the newest scientific discoveries to justify their long-held beliefs.[283] In particular, the X-ray served as the perfect analogy to discuss clairvoyant abilities, with Leadbeater and Besant directly comparing X-ray photography to clairvoyant vision. Theosophist Claude Bragdon included an illustration using X-ray imagery to describe clairvoyance in *A Primer of Higher Space*. Bragdon's Plate 19, titled "Man as seen by clairvoyant (4 dimensional vision) and by ordinary human sight," illustrates the contrast of average human sight versus that of a clairvoyant (Fig. 38). The clairvoyant vision image uses the format of an X-ray to show an underlying skeletal structure surrounded by an aura or "higher dimensional body."

In *The Dream*, Kupka used a similar format contrasting the two types of figures. The individual with normal vision would see the two dense and opaque figures lying on the ground, while the individual with clairvoyant vision would see the floating forms, since as Bragdon explained, "The same solids would in turn appear transparent and be perceived to be but boundaries or cross-sections."[284] The two floating figures in *The Dream* demonstrate the visual language of transparency found in X-ray photography (Fig. 39). In *The Dream*, the figures from the dream-state consist of translucent forms that

[283] It is interesting to note Kupka's own engagement in science. While in Paris, he attended lectures at the Sorbonne in physics, physiology, and biology. Vachtová, *Frank Kupka: Pioneer of Abstract Art*, 28.
[284] Bragdon, *A Primer of Higher Space*, Plate 19.

allow one to see both male and female simultaneously. In fact, the difference between the dematerialized, transparent forms and those of the fleshy, voluminous bodies on the ground is clear. The X-ray light enabled artists to focus on the essence of an object, which was of great interest to Kupka since, as noted earlier, he had written of his concern with the "essence" rather than surfaces, making a clear distinction between external and internal.[285] Henderson has noted other examples of Kupka's use of contrasting modes of representation using visible and invisible light—even in the same figure (e.g., *Planes by Colors, Large Nude*, 1909-1910, Fig. 40). Here, however, Kupka uses that contrast to signify two different states of existence: that of the dreamers and a vision.

Kupka used the language of X-ray transparency and motion in several other paintings from 1909 to 1912, including *Planes by Colors* (1910-1911) and *Woman Picking Flowers* (1909-1910) (Figs. 41, 42). Henderson has compared the former painting to an X-ray plate with the typical absent nose because of the cartilage's lack of density and the dematerialization of the female figure, while Rowell has noted the parallel in the latter work to the motion of early chronophotography.[286] Kupka used the term "film psychique" as an analogy to the artist's mind with its visionary abilities.[287] Highlighting clairvoyance and the extra-sensory abilities of the artist, he emphasized the transparency of the figures in *Planes by Colors* and *Woman Picking Flowers* by the yellow background, that, somewhat like *The Dream*, suffuses the figures with light.

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[285] Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," 329.

[286] For more information on Kupka's experimentation with and interest in chronophotography, see Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 49-67. Rowell analyzes Kupka's interest in chronophotography in relation to several of his paintings from around the same time, including *Planes by Colors* and *Woman Picking Flowers*. In her essay, she notes not only the proliferation of photography in general, including the chronophotography of Marey and Muybridge, but also the popularity of X-ray photography. For *Planes by Colors*, see Henderson, "Kupka, les rayons X, et le monde des ondes électromagnétiques," 52.

[287] Kupka, unpublished notebook, 21; as cited in Henderson, "Kupka, les rayons X, et le monde des ondes électromagnétiques," 52.

Kupka also highlighted the sense of motion in *Planes by Colors* and *Woman Picking Flowers* through vertical planes that span the length of the canvases. His initial interest in motion was rooted in the chronophotography of E. J. Marey and Eadweard Muybridge (Fig. 43).[288] In *The Dream*, Kupka also invoked motion, but here it is an entirely different kind of movement. Rather than suggesting physical rotation or forward movement, as in *Planes by Colors* and or *Woman Picking Flowers*, Kupka produced a transparent registration of the figures floating and fusing together.

The "psychic film" of the visionary artist comes to light in *The Dream*. For Kupka at this time, the X-ray served as the perfect analogy to the mind of the artist. Within the painting, Kupka depicted the subject matter of his personal dream through the X-ray language of transparent forms. Not only is the mind of the artist like an X-ray, but the artist can use the visual format of the X-ray to communicate to the viewer. The artist with his extra-sensory abilities portrayed the presence of an invisible reality just as an X-ray photograph accurately captured what the average human eye fails to do. As he later wrote in his treatise of the artist's interior vision, "A painted or carved work is a reality for itself, destined to make visible to others the events that unfold on the entirely interior projection screen that is the vision of the artist."[289] He imagined the artist's role to be the communication of the artist's mind. For Kupka, notions of the immaterial permeated his art and writings and set him on a path to turn the "interior projection screen" of the artist's vision into physical reality.

The Dream epitomizes Kupka's concern for immaterial, invisible reality. Each of the sources he studied, including Buddhism, Theosophy, and science, confirmed his long-

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[288] Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 49-67.

[289] Kupka, *La Création*, 146. "Une oeuvre peinte ou sculptée est une réalité pour soi, destinée à rendre visibles à autrui les événements qui se déroulent sur l'écran de projection tout intérieur qu'est la vision de l'artiste."

held belief in the existence of an alternative reality. *The Dream* highlights particular ideas from those sources of interest to Kupka. These ranged from the world as Maya and clairvoyant vision to the scientific model of the X-ray. His philosophical interests liberated him from the constricting forms of naturalism and realism and the necessity of subject matter in painting. His concern for the invisible and immaterial led him to rethink the purpose of art and the artist, and by 1912, Kupka turned his focus to the materiality of the canvas and to paint totally abstract works, intended, themselves, to "exteriorize" the artist's inner vision.[290] However, paintings like *The Dream* have played a key role in his careful consideration of what painting itself could be.

[290] Linda D. Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 101.

Conclusion

The Dream epitomizes Kupka's long-standing belief in the existence of an alternative, immaterial reality beneath surface appearances. His engagement with sources in his cultural surroundings, including Theosophy, Buddhism, and science, affirmed the concept of a dynamic, invisible reality beyond human perception. By examining the period preceding Kupka's total abstraction, I hope to have provided a new understanding of his philosophical and aesthetic evolution that led him to his mature style of abstraction. While his interest in invisible, immaterial reality represents a crucial stage in his artistic development, by 1912, Kupka began to re-conceptualize the function of painting and to reconsider the importance of the canvas surface in its two-dimensional form.

While Kupka used the X-ray as a visual model for *The Dream*, his interest in vibrations altered his aesthetic as he began to focus more on the material, physical power of painting.[291] He then came to conceive of the painted surface as a vehicle to transmit vibrations. In his writings, Kupka used the language of "exteriorization," which was also connected to ether vibrations and telepathic communication as discussed in Section II. In his 1910-1911 notebook, Kupka wrote, "A painting is nothing other than a field of exteriorization."[292] Likewise in his treatise, he declared, "Let the operator of the specific state of the central nervous system be found, which creates or establishes telepathic communications and picks up the wave of an idea which is, as they say, 'in the air.'"[293] Most importantly, Kupka envisioned the relationship between artist and viewer as that of

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[291] For an in-depth discussion of Kupka's use of the scientific models of X-rays and telepathic wave vibrations, see Henderson, "Kupka, les rayons X, et le monde des ondes électromagnétiques."

[292] Kupka, unpublished notebook, 31 with other references on 33, 39, and 42; as quoted in Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, 101.

[293] Kupka, *La Création*, 207. "Mettons qu'il se retrouve conducteur de l'état spécifique du système nerveux central qui engendre ou établit les communications télépathiques et qu'il capte l'onde d'une idée qui est, comme on dit, 'dans l'air.'"

sender and receiver, with artists representing "a particular category of living beings in which all reflexes irresistibly tend to externalization."[294] For Kupka, the artist exteriorized his subjective world onto the surface of the canvas in order to reach the viewer through telepathic vibrations.[295]

Despite Kupka's reconceptualization of the function of painting, he continued to explore themes connected to an invisible reality alive with flux and growth. He also returned to the motif of creation, which he had first painted in *The Soul of the Lotus* (1898) and *The Beginning of Life* (1900) (Figs. 4, 5). Rather than using the Buddhist iconography he employed in his earlier works, Kupka applied his new visual language of abstraction in his *Creation* series from 1911. In *Irregular Forms: Creation* (1911) and *Creation* (1911-1920), Kupka represented the theme of creation in a dramatically different form (Figs. 44, 45). Of these works, Kupka wrote, "Chaotic forms circulating like clouds in spaces of a kind never seen before, bizarre and sometimes monstrous worlds, created from scratch by the painter's poetic imagination."[296] Unlike the theme of creation seen in his earlier works, he now associated the motif with the artist's special ability to generate life on the surface of the canvas.

Kupka specialist Margit Rowell has best summarized Kupka's goal in painting:

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[294] Ibid., 239. "Les artistes représentent une catégorie particulière d'êtres vivants dont tous les réflexes tendent irrésistiblement à l'extériorisation."

[295] Wassily Kandinsky also operated with the model of ether vibrations as the key to communicating with the viewer. In his 1911 treatise, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky posited that vibrations of color cause vibrations in the human soul, to which the artist has the unique ability to communicate. Sixten Ringbom has argued that Kandinsky borrowed the model of vibrations from Theosophical writers and their interest in scientific investigations to determine his theory that "finer emotion consists of vibrations, vibration shapes the work of art, the work vibrates, and the soul of the beholder is set into vibration." Sixten Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press Inc., 1986), 148. Henderson has discussed Kandinsky in the context of the telegraphy and telepathy model akin to Kupka. While Kandinsky's theory of vibrations concerned reaching the soul of the viewer Kupka's theory centered on communicating with the viewer's mind. See Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka, and the Ether of Space," 126-149.

[296] Kupka as quoted in Rowell, "Catalogue of the exhibition," 170-171.

> For Kupka, art was the projection of the highest form of human spirituality through evocative but autonomous forms and colors. The artist does not reproduce nature; but nature is his model for understanding the universal cosmic order. The natural processes of growth, expansion, rotation, dilation, constricting are visible inferences of rhythms which man, as part of the cosmic order, contains within his innermost being. These rhythms provide the structure of the artist's vision.[297]

For Kupka, by the time he developed his mature art theory and style, he had learned to negotiate between the invisible and visible. Ultimately, his belief in an immaterial reality led him to conceive of the artist's responsibility to leave behind any reference to objects—even in their most transparent, translucent form as in *The Dream*—and to communicate to the viewer through the physical surface plane of the canvas. For Kupka, the artist's desire for creation was central to the artist's very being: "The need to see our poetic and philosophical experience transposed into material expression is as powerful and entrenched as the will to live" (Fig. 46).[298] He had learned invaluable lessons about the nature of existence and reality, both material and immaterial, with Buddhism Theosophy, and science; and now his reality was that of the canvas.

[297] Rowell, "František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction," 48.
[298] Kupka, *La Création*, 231. "Le besoin de voir nos expériences poétiques et philosophiques transposées en une expression matérielle est aussi puissant et enraciné que le vouloir-vivre."

Figures

Fig. 1: Installation image of the Paris Salon d'Automne, 1912

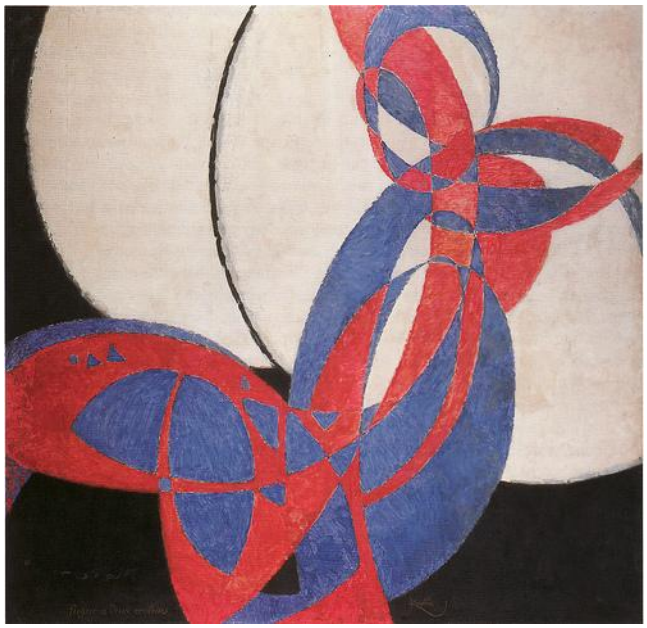

Fig. 2: Kupka, *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors*, 1912, oil on canvas, 211 x 220cm, National Gallery, Prague

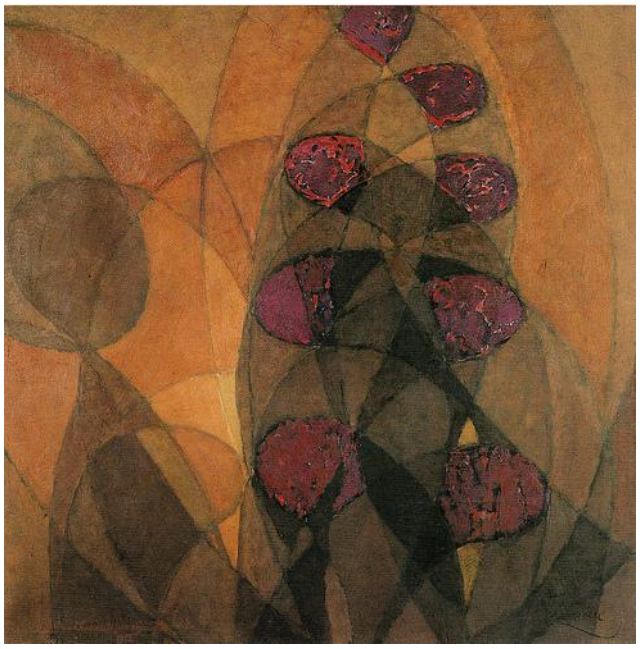

Fig. 3: Kupka, *Amorpha, Warm Chromatics*, 1911-1912, oil on canvas, 108 x 108cm, Private Collection

Fig. 4: Kupka, *The Soul of the Lotus*, 1898, watercolor on paper, 38.5 x 57.7cm, National Gallery, Prague

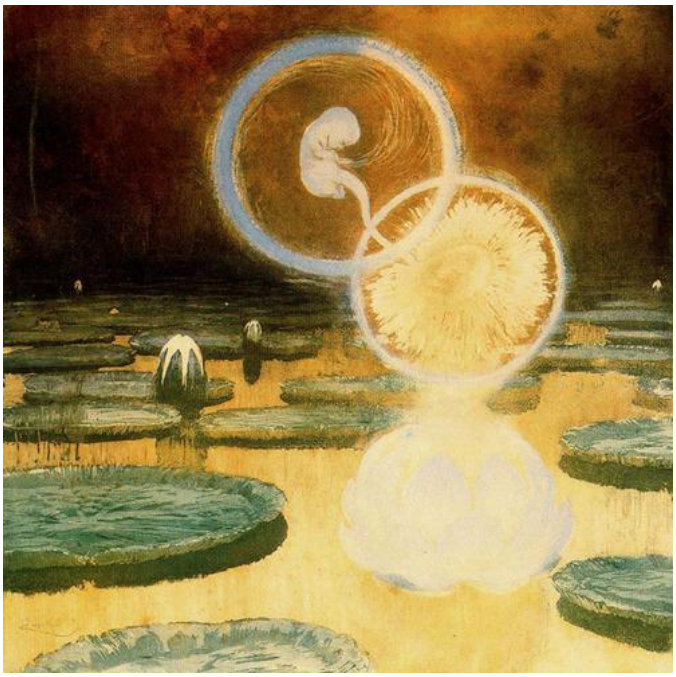

Fig. 5: Kupka, *The Beginning of Life*, 1900, aquatint, 34.5 x 34.5cm, Centre Pompidou Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Fig. 6: Kupka, *Money (L'Argent)*, 1899, oil on canvas, 81 x 81cm, National Gallery, Prague

Fig. 7: *Eleven-Headed Kannon* or *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, 16th century, Japan, woodblock print, 67 x 26cm, Academy of Arts, Honolulu

Fig. 8: *Tara* (or Lakshmi), Bodhisattva of Compassion, 11th century, Nepal, copper-alloy with gilding, Newark Museum, New Jersey

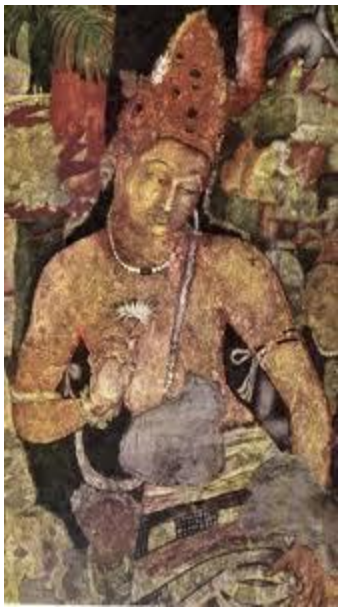

Fig. 9: Bodhisattva from Ajanta, 7th century, cave painting, India

Fig. 10: *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, late 6th-early 7th century, China, limestone, 100.8cm height, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

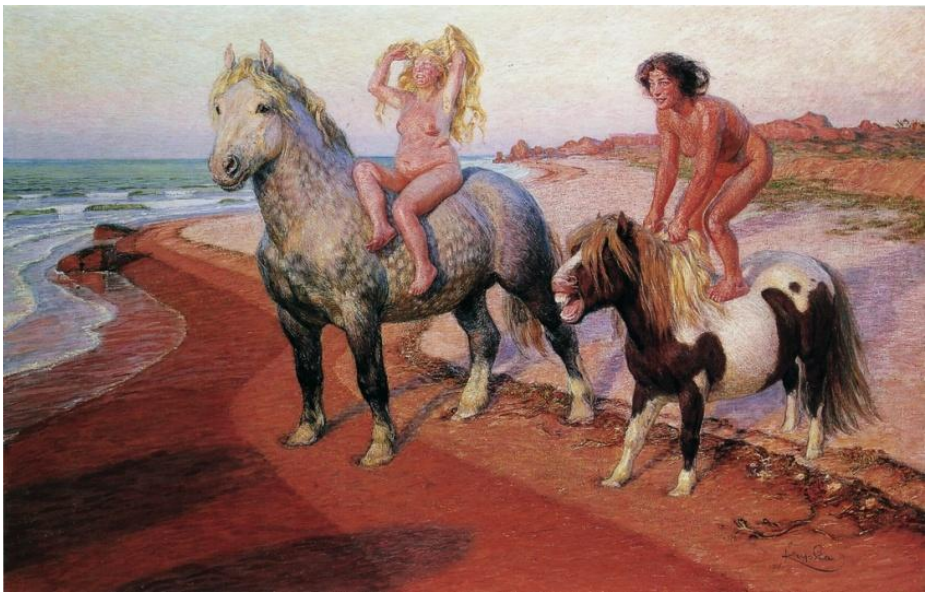

Fig. 11: Kupka, *Ballade/Joies*, 1901-1902, oil on wood, 83.5 x 126.5cm, National Gallery, Prague

Fig. 12: Constantin Brancusi, *Sleeping Muse*, 1910, bronze, 16.1cm height, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Fig. 13: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Khmer salon, photograph, circa 1927

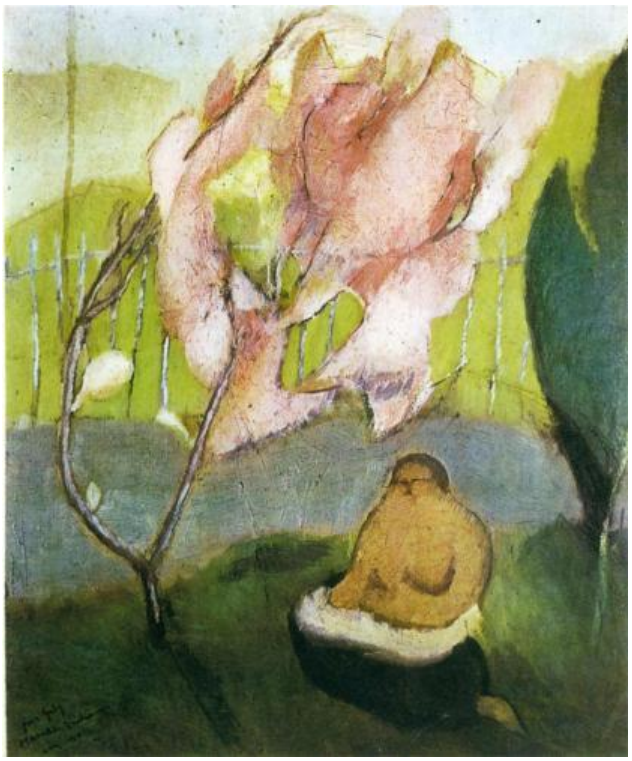

Fig. 14: Marcel Duchamp, *Draft on the Japanese Apple Tree*, 1911, oil on canvas, 9.7 x 7.7cm, Private Collection, Paris

Fig. 15: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Japanese salon, photograph, between 1900-1924

Fig. 16: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Indian salon, photograph, no date

Fig. 17: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Chinese ceramic salon, photograph, before 1931

Fig. 18: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Japanese salon, photograph, before 1931

Fig. 19: Reproduction of an illustration for “Cerémonie lamaïque célèbrée au Musée Guimet le 27 Juin 1898”

Fig. 20: Reproduction of an illustration for “Cerémonie lamaïque célèbrée au Musée Guimet le 27 Juin 1898,” detail

Fig. 21: Reproduction of an illustration for “Cerémonie lamaïque célèbrée au Musée Guimet le 27 Juin 1898,” detail

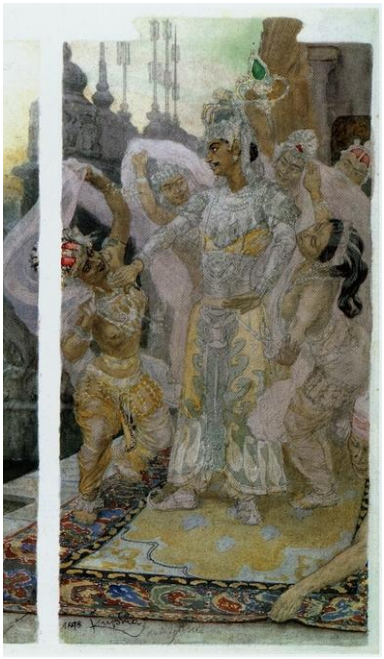

Fig. 22: Kupka, *The Soul of the Lotus*, 1898, detail

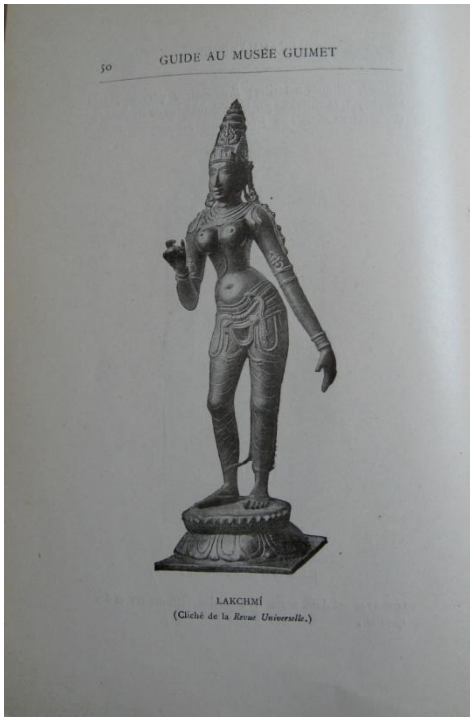

Fig. 23: Lakchmî, bronze, from the 1910 *Petit Guide illustré au Musée Guimet*

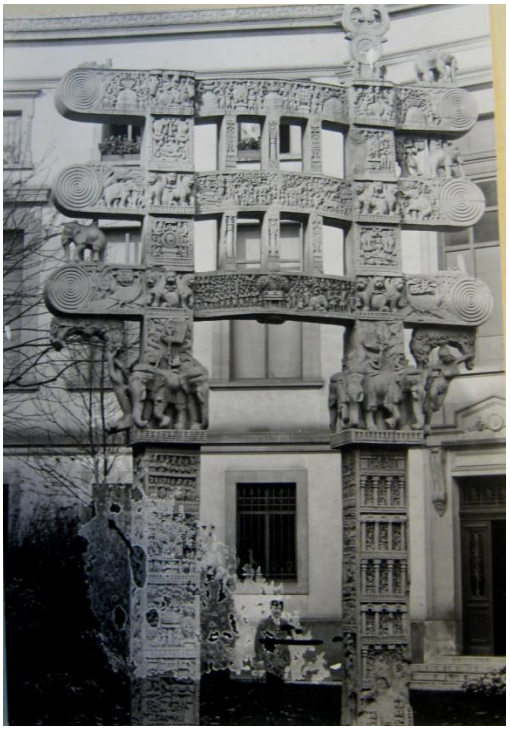

Fig. 24: Molding of the East gate of Sanchi, installation image of Musée Guimet courtyard, photograph, until 1930

Fig. 25: Molding of the East gate of Sanchi, detail

Fig. 26: Installation image of Musée Guimet, Japanese salon, photograph, no date

Fig. 27: Tchanrési, from the 1910 *Petit Guide illustré au Musée Guimet*

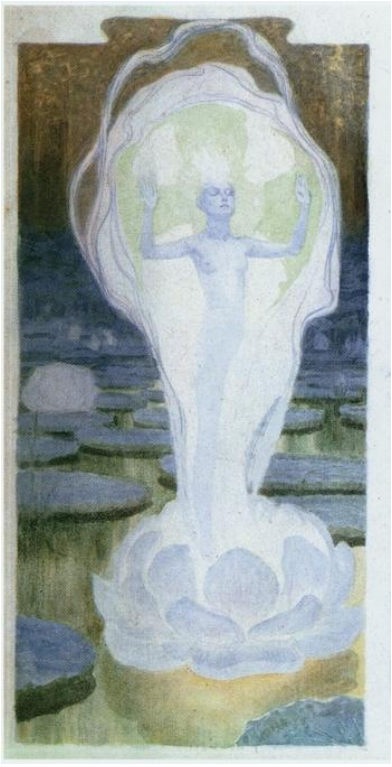

Fig. 28: Kupka, *The Soul of the Lotus*, 1898, detail

Fig. 29: Kanō Hōgai, *Hibo Kannon* or *Merciful Mother Kannon*, 1888, ink, colors, and gold on silk, mounted on panel, 196 x 86.5cm, Tokyo University of the Arts

Fig. 30: Kanō Hōgai, *Kannon*, circa 1883-1884, hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold on silk, 165.7 x 84.8cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

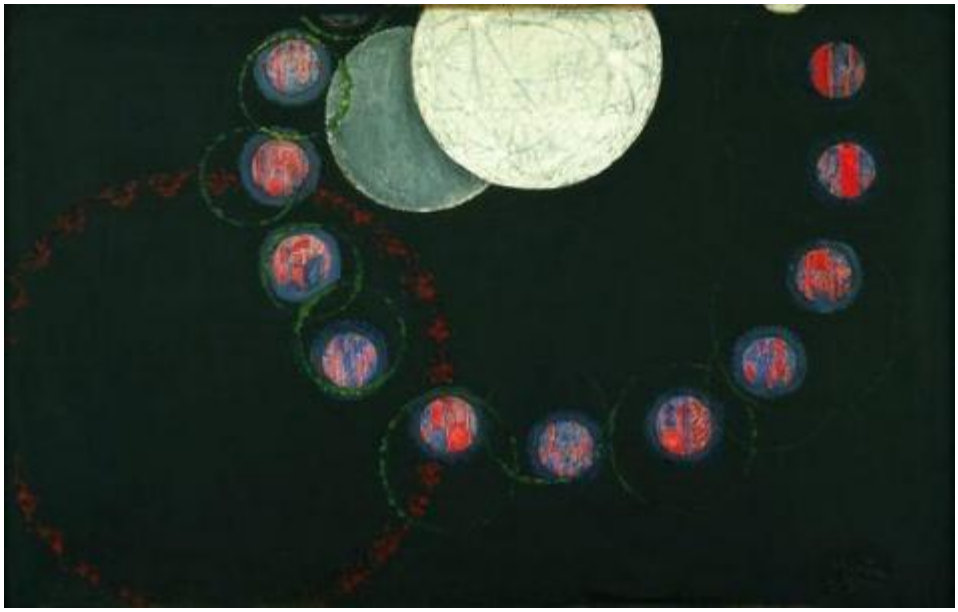

Fig. 31: Kupka, *The First Step*, 1909-1913, oil on canvas, 83.2 x 129.6cm, the Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 32: The wheel of cyclic existence in six sectors

Fig. 33: The wheel of cyclic existence in six sectors, detail

Fig. 34: Kupka, *The Dream*, 1909, oil on cardboard, 30.5 x 31.5cm, Museum Bochum, Germany

Fig. 35: Kupka, *The Dream*, 1909, detail

Fig. 36: Kupka, *The Dream*, 1909, detail

Fig. 37: Count Maurice Prozor, “Mental Body of the Average Man,” 1902

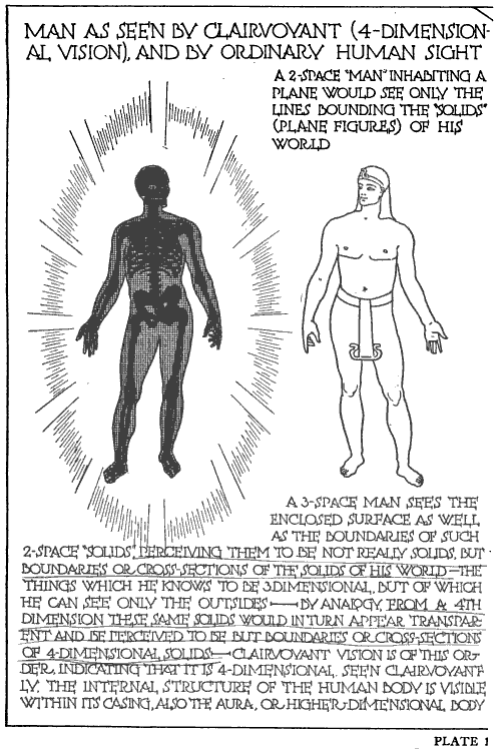

Fig. 38: Claude Bragdon, Plate 19, 1913

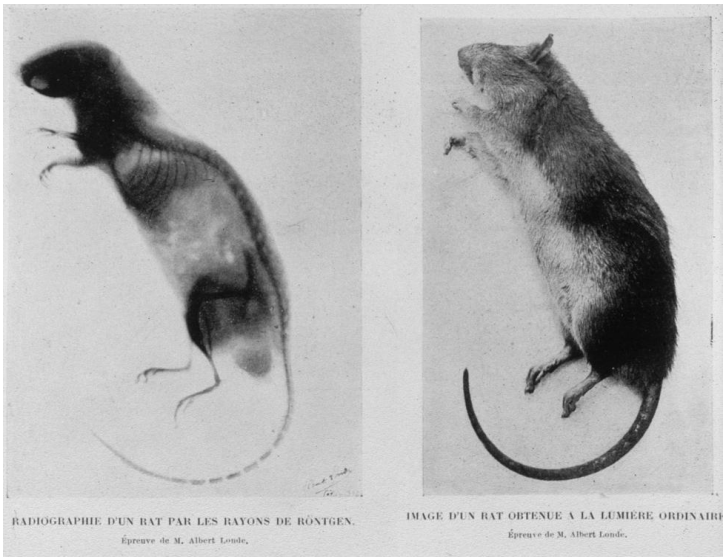

Fig. 39: Albert Londe, *X-Ray of Rat*, 1896

Fig. 40: Kupka, *Planes by Colors, Large Nude*, 1909-1910, oil on canvas, 150.1 x 180.8cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

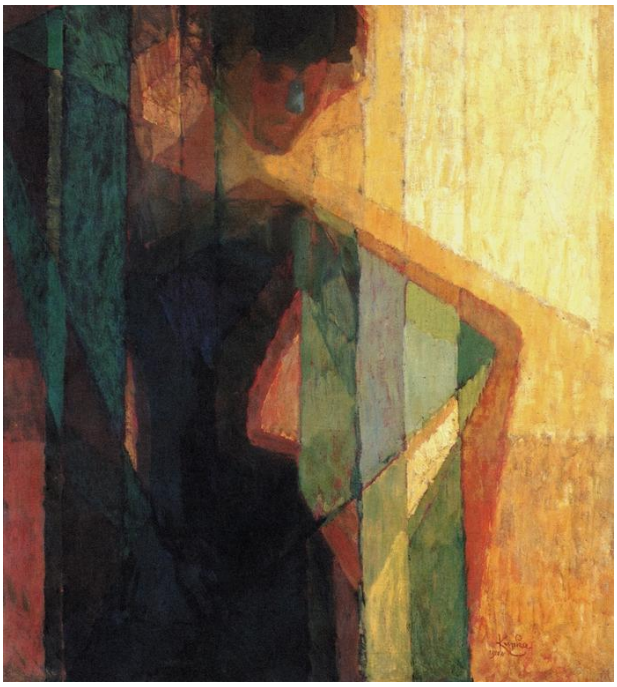

Fig. 41: Kupka, *Planes by Colors*, 1910-1911, oil on canvas, 110 x 100cm, Centre Pompidou Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Fig. 42: Kupka, *Woman Picking Flowers I*, 1909-1910, pastel on paper, 45 x 47cm, Centre Pompidou Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Fig. 43: Jules Etienne Marey with Georges Demeny, *Untitled [Sprinter]*, circa 1890-1900, gelatin silver print, 37 x 15cm

Fig. 44: Kupka, *Irregular Forms, Creation*, 1911, oil on canvas, 108 x 108cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Fig. 45: Kupka, *Creation*, 1911-1920, oil on canvas, 115 x 125cm, National Gallery, Prague

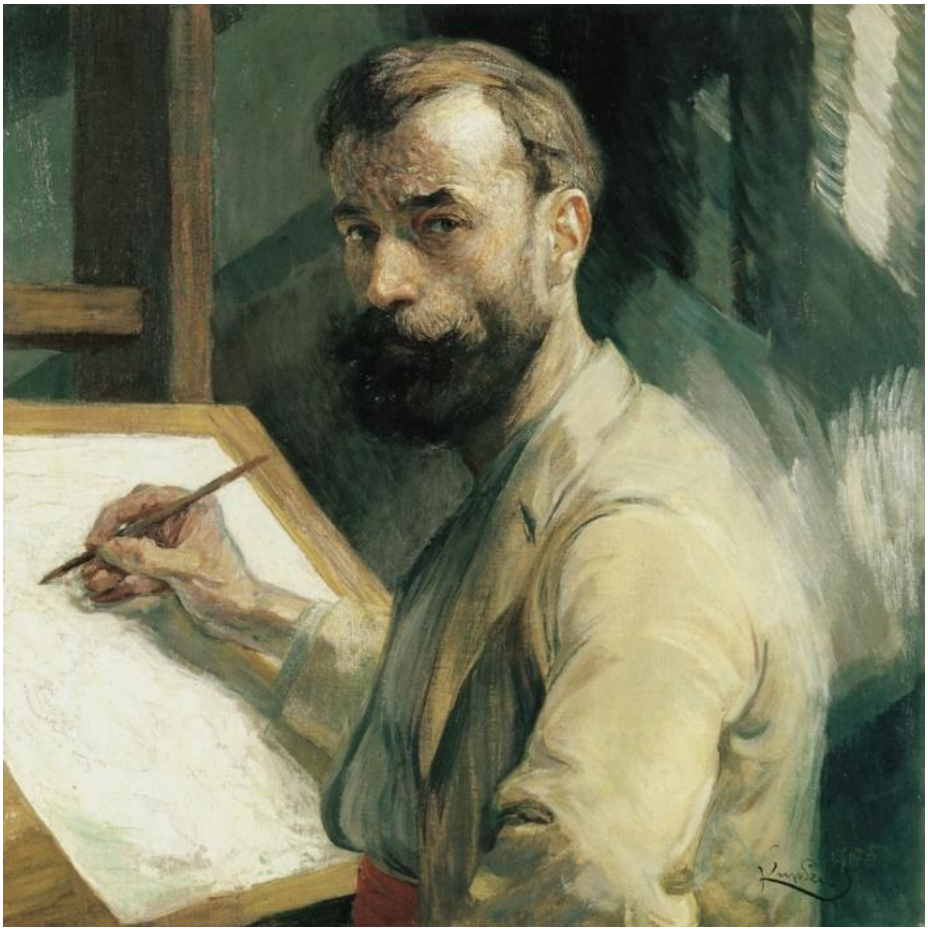

Fig. 46: Kupka, *Self-Portrait*, 1905-1906, oil on canvas, 65 x 65cm, National Gallery, Prague

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