

Animal Magnetism. Notes for an Ecocritical Political Philosophy in the Anthropocene¹

Magnetismo animale. Note per una filosofia politica ecocritica nell'Antropocene

DIEGO ROSSELLO

Adolfo Ibáñez University, Chile

diego.rossello@uai.cl; ORCID 0000-0001-9244-2778

Abstract. The paper explores animal magnetism as a framework for rethinking ecocritical political philosophy in the Anthropocene. The movement of ideas known as animal magnetism emerged in the years leading up to the French Revolution, when Mesmerism – the theory of vital fluids proposed by Franz Anton Mesmer – gained significant popularity among revolutionaries. Its influence also extended to the intellectual climate that contributed to the Haitian Revolution. Both then and now, the philosophico-political interest in animal magnetism lies in its affinity with radical democracy. However, animal magnetism is also characterized by its egalitarianism – even across species – as well as by an enchanted conception of the world attuned to flows of sympathy, the interconnection between living beings, and the possibility of a harmonious relationship with nature.

Keywords: magnetism, animal, democracy, egalitarianism, nature.

Riassunto. L'articolo esplora il magnetismo animale come quadro di riferimento per ripensare la filosofia politica ecocritica nell'Antropocene. Il movimento di idee noto come magnetismo animale è emerso negli anni precedenti la Rivoluzione francese, quando il mesmerismo – la teoria dei fluidi vitali proposta da Franz Anton Mesmer – ha acquisito una notevole popolarità tra i rivoluzionari. La sua influenza

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si estese anche al clima intellettuale che contribuì alla Rivoluzione haitiana. Sia allora che oggi, l'interesse filosofico-politico per il magnetismo animale risiede nella sua affinità con la democrazia radicale. Tuttavia, il magnetismo animale si caratterizza anche per il suo egualitarismo – anche tra le specie – e per una concezione “incantata” del mondo, in sintonia con i flussi di simpatia, l'interconnessione tra gli esseri viventi e la possibilità di un rapporto armonioso con la natura.

Parole chiave: magnetismo, animale, democrazia, egualitarismo, natura.

I. Introduction

This paper presents research notes on the ecocritical political philosophy of animal magnetism in the context of a crisis of democracy and anthropogenic climate change. Although animal magnetism emerged and expanded in the years prior to the French Revolution – when mesmerism became influential among the leaders of the revolutionary process –. I suggest that its normative impulse should be recuperated today. From my perspective, the relevance of animal magnetism for political philosophy lies in its commitment to a democratic ideology critical of autocratic rule; in its intra- and interspecies egalitarianism, and in an enchanted worldview whose emphasis on the interconnectedness of all forms of life seeks a harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. In times marked by the rise of, on the one hand, techno-authoritarianism² and, on the other, eco-authoritarianism,³ the contribution that animal magnetism can make to political philosophy is even more pressing.

Animal magnetism is a mosaic of ideas that resists classification. It constellates insights from physics, theology, medicine, politics and philosophy, in ways intelligible to enlightened academic standards of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but idiosyncratic for contemporary scholarship. Thus, animal magnetism brings together ideas of Paracelsus, magnetic and electrical theologies, Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation, Luigi Galvani's animal electricity, Helvetius' materialism, and a “scientific” interest in the paranormal, all based on the ideas of the Swabian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815).⁴ However, within this kaleidoscope of ideas, what made animal magnetism popular was

² LaFrance, “The Rise of Techno-Authoritarianism.”

³ Coeckelberg, *Green Leviathan*.

⁴ Pera and Mandelbaum, *The Ambiguous Frog*; Benz, *The Theology of Electricity*; Belhoste, “Frantz Anton Mesmer;” Armando and Belhoste, “Mesmerism Between the End of the Old Regime and the Revolution.”

its therapeutic practice. Mesmer sought to restore the patient's health by manipulating magnetic fluids that, according to the theory, circulated both inside the human body and among all terrestrial bodies. Animal magnetism began using certain "magnetized" objects in the healing process, such as baquets,⁵ pieces of glass or glasses of water, but later relied simply on hand passes by the magnetizer in order to achieve the desired healing effect.⁶ As will be seen below, even this seemingly innocuous therapeutic practice expresses underlying political concerns, as it questions the king's monopoly of the laying on of hands to cure certain diseases – or the royal touch.⁷

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section discusses animal magnetism from a historical perspective. It reconstructs the main features of animal magnetism in the context of the French Revolution; in the so-called "electric theologians" and in the philosophy of German Idealism. The second section links animal magnetism to recent developments in the political theory of new materialisms, in particular in the work by Jane Bennett, Samantha Frost, and the animal studies scholar Kari Weil. The final section concludes by outlining the normative impulse of animal magnetism for an ecocritical political philosophy in the Anthropocene.

II. Animal magnetism: from democratic revolutions to German idealism

The most systematic assessment of the relevance of animal magnetism to political philosophy can be found in the work of intellectual historian Robert Darnton. In his book *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*,⁸ Darnton argues that animal magnetism was not only a "radical political theory"⁹ in pre-revolutionary France, but also a kind of "camouflaged political theory very much like Rousseau's."¹⁰ Darnton discusses the movement of ideas around the figure of Mesmer, whose approach to the flow of invisible magnetic forces connecting living and non-living beings – also called "animal gravitation" – became very popular not only in France

⁵ A "baquet" was an apparatus used in the healing sessions of animal magnetism, typically a wooden tub filled with magnetized water and conductive materials (like iron filings or glass shards), equipped with metal rods that patients touched to supposedly absorb "magnetic fluid." It was central to Mesmer's group treatments, creating a dramatic, ritualized environment believed to encourage the flow and redistribution of vital energy in the body.

⁶ Luly, "Mesmerizing Encounters," 28.

⁷ Bloch, *The Royal Touch*.

⁸ Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

and its colonies, but also in England and the U.S.¹¹ Darnton focuses on a radical strand of mesmerism centered on the revolutionaries Nicolas Bergasse, Pierre Brissot, and Jean-Louis Carra. All of them were part, together with Mesmer, of the Society of Universal Harmony, an association whose purpose was to spread animal magnetism in France and England, in close connection with republican egalitarian ideas and with the aim of returning to a harmonious natural order.

Darnton's pioneering work on mesmerism inspired a new generation of cultural historians interested in the figure and doctrine of Mesmer. Bruno Belhoste, for example, criticizes Darnton for focusing exclusively on the radical side of Mesmerism – centered on Bergasse and his group – and proposes to focus on Mesmer's own ideas and political allegiances. Belhoste analyzes the type and degree of Mesmer's involvement with Jacobin groups in Vienna; in particular with his friends Andreas Riedel, Franz Hebenstreit and Kajetan Gilowsky von Urazova. This group, Belhoste claims, was charged with high treason and subsequently imprisoned for participating in the so-called "Jacobin plot" of 1793 against the Austrian Emperor Franz II, with the intention of establishing a provisional government based on republican ideas. After being found guilty, Hebenstreit was hanged; Gilowsky took his own life in prison and Riedel was not released until 1809. Mesmer himself was arrested for a few weeks in late 1793 and later released for lack of evidence.¹²

Belhoste also sheds light on a shift in Mesmer's intellectual project from his initial focus on healing practices to his later goal of offering a moral philosophy of universal harmony. While Mesmer submitted a doctoral dissertation to the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna in 1766, and his work met the academic standards of the time, it was not characterized by a desire to clarify his ideas to a skeptical audience. Belhoste reconstructs and analyzes the lectures delivered in 1784 for the Society of Universal Harmony in Paris, presumably written and read in Mesmer's presence by his disciple Bergasse. According to Belhoste, Mesmer's turn to moral speculation shows affinities with the tradition widely understood as "sensualist materialism," as seen in the works of authors such as Shaftesbury, Hutchinson, Helvétius, Baron d'Holbach, and Rousseau.¹³ In Mesmer's moral philosophy, the question of harmony becomes central not only in terms of individual health but also in "the organization of society [...] between men [sic], and the natural order, or universal harmony."¹⁴ Bel-

¹¹ Dawson, "A Sort of Natural Magic;" Belhoste, "Frantz Anton Mesmer;" Gaidnot, "Tubs in the Tropics."

¹² Belhoste, "Frantz Anton Mesmer;" 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 50 and 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

hoste suggests that the mesmerist understanding of happiness consists in bringing both the individual and society into harmony with nature.¹⁵

The historian of religion Ernst Benz also discusses Mesmer's conceptualization of harmony with nature, but from a theological perspective. Benz reconstructs the way in which, in the eighteenth century, the invisible forces of electricity were represented as emanations of an invisible God who organized the universe and animated his creatures by means of flows of energy. He reminds us that, at that time, the light of the first day of Creation was conceived as an "electric fire" that cultivated and nourished life.¹⁶ Benz also argues that Mesmer became acquainted with the "theology of magnetism" during his student years at the Jesuit seminary in Dillingen, through the work of the philosopher and theologian Athanasius Kircher. For Benz, there are important affinities between Kircher's investigations of a depersonalized God – who becomes a magnetic force – and Mesmer's vision of animal magnetism.

However, Benz notes an important contrast between Kircher and Mesmer with respect to the centrality that nature acquires for the latter. For Benz, Mesmer's animal magnetism dispenses with the dogmatic teachings of Christianity and relies almost exclusively on the "sacrament" or "gospel" of nature. In Benz's words:

Mesmer discards the entire terminology used in the dogmatic teachings of the Church and in biblical theology and retains only the concept of magnetism as the secret, innermost life force of nature, his "gospel of nature" [evangelium naturae]. [...] For him there existed no sacrament other than the "sacrament of nature."¹⁷

Thus, Mesmer's interest in the "sacrament" of nature also appears to explain his concern with the natural dimension of human and non-human life. This is suggested by Dennis Stillings in his preface to Benz's book, where he emphasizes the relevance of the connection between human and non-human life for electrical theology. Stillings suggests that:

For the electrical theologians, there is not only a "conscious and rational" life, but a "sensory, growth-like, sensitive" life. This "sensuous soul" (the unconscious) is electric, and is nourished by the "electrical fire" [...]. Man [sic] is a being "involved in all levels of life-the material, vegetable, animal." His soul "has deep roots in pre-human realms." Man's [sic] spiritual life is rooted "in the organic structures and physico-chemical processes of his bodily exist-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Benz, *Theology of Electricity*, 39.

¹⁷ Benz, *The Theology of Electricity*, 13.

ence.” Not only is the “animalistic” soul the “nourishment of the rational soul,” but the rational soul “needs this substratum in order to function.”¹⁸

This holistic and encompassing perspective on sentient life and its interconnection is key to understanding the normative impulse of animal magnetism. But let us return for a moment to the healing practices of mesmerism, since critical theorists such as Eric Santner find a political valence in them.¹⁹

Indeed, for Santner, the therapeutic dimension of animal magnetism implied a questioning of the monarchical regime, since the laying on of hands to cure certain diseases such as scrofula was considered a royal prerogative.²⁰ Santner suggests that when radical mesmerists began to perform “magnetic passes” to cure certain illnesses, they were redistributing and democratizing a prerogative of the king and, consequently, could not help but challenge the monarch’s authority. In connection with this, and as is well known, the monarchy organized scientific commissions to determine the seriousness of the new theory. These commissions took place at the Royal Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society of Medicine in 1784, and were attended by important figures in the sciences of the time, such as the chemistry specialist Antoine Lavoisier and Benjamin Franklin, an expert in electricity, famous inventor of the lightning rod and one of the founding fathers of the United States.

It is possible, however, that these commissions had the opposite of the intended effect, as they contributed to making animal magnetism attractive to revolutionaries who opposed both the scientific establishment and the political establishment that supported it. In this context, animal magnetism became a kind of plebeian political philosophy opposed to the epistemic standards established by a de-legitimized monarchy ruling by divine right. In Santner’s own bio-theologico-political terms, mesmerism appears to anticipate the democratic circulation of the mystical, excarnated body of the king, under the guise of magnetic effluvia “ready-to-hand” to the therapeutic magnetizer.²¹

Animal magnetism also attracted the attention of the Prussian intellectual milieu, including central authors in the canon of philosophy. Since the Prussian government was less skeptical than the French on the status of the theory, soon mesmerism became academically respectable in ways that Mesmer, who died in 1815, was not presentable to appreciate. G.W.

¹⁸ Stillings, “Editor’s Preface,” xii.

¹⁹ Santner, *The Royal Remains*, 96-100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98 and 99.

²¹ Santner, *The Royal Remains*, 96-100.

F. Hegel's interest in animal magnetism can be traced back to his time in Tübingen, possibly through the lectures of Johann Friedrich Flatt.²² Hegel's engagement with animal magnetism became more pronounced during his years in Jena, where Hegel and F. W. J. Schelling frequently exchanged letters. In 1807 Schelling recommended to Hegel works on animal magnetism written by his brother Karl Eberhard Schelling. In those articles, K. E. Schelling explores a theory of animal magnetism grounded on the principle of compassion or universal sympathy.²³ By 1810, Hegel's letters to Peter Gabriel van Ghert, a former student of his years at Jena, indicate that he had a good grasp of the concept.²⁴ Hegel writes:

I was very interested to hear that you are occupying yourself with animal magnetism. To me this dark region of the organic conditions seems to merit great attention because, among other reasons, ordinary physiological opinions here vanish. It is precisely the simplicity of animal magnetism which I hold to be most noteworthy [...] Its operation seems to consist in the sympathy into which one animal individuality is capable of entering with a second, insofar as the sympathy of the first with itself, its fluidity in itself, is interrupted and hindered. That [sympathetic] union [of two organisms] leads life back again into its pervasive universal stream. The general idea I have of the matter is that the magnetic state belongs to the simple universal life, a life which thus behaves and generally manifests itself as a simple soul, as the scent of life in general undifferentiated into particular systems, organs, and their specialized activities.²⁵

Hegel finds the notion of animal magnetism suggestive, as he was attracted by its tendency to transgress the limits set by philosophies based on the understanding. In "The Philosophy of Spirit" Hegel writes:

§379 [...] In experience too the phenomena of animal magnetism in particular have given, in recent times, a visible illustration of the substantial unity of the soul, and of the power of its ideality. Before these phenomena, the rigid distinctions of the intellect are thrown into disarray; and the necessity of a speculative examination for the dissolution of the contradictions is displayed more directly.²⁶

In this context, Hegel's reception of animal magnetism is nuanced: on the one hand, he appreciates animal magnetism's goal of grasping the unity of life, finding hidden and often inscrutable sympathetic connec-

²² Origoza Peña, "Magnetic Somnambulism in Context."

²³ Roustang, *Hegel: Le magnétisme animal*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 and 9.

²⁵ Hegel in Magee, "The Dark Side of Subjective Spirit," 59.

²⁶ Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind*, 6.

tions between living beings; on the other hand, animal magnetism's goal of unity is ultimately unsatisfactory to Hegel, as it lacks the reflexive stages undergone by Spirit, and remains closer to what he calls magic, namely, the feeling of the soul in its immediacy that annuls the distinctions between space and time, and can therefore only be grasped by speculative philosophy.

III. Animal magnetism and new materialism

Despite its idiosyncratic character, or perhaps because of it, animal magnetism crossed the Atlantic to the Americas. Although for reasons of space we cannot exhaust the American reception of animal magnetism, it is worth mentioning that Mesmer's ideas influenced the work of authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, among others. Interestingly, the latter two exert a particular influence on the work of the American political theorist, and leading representative of the new materialism, Jane Bennett. In her latest book, Bennett focuses on a particular form of non-mechanistic causality which she calls "influence" and which resembles mesmerism's interest in the invisible flows that would connect all beings on Earth.²⁷ Bennett uses animal magnetism to emphasize that human and non-human beings are not isolated, but are part of a larger set of energies and forces that influence them and are in turn influenced by them. In Bennett's re-enchanted account of what she calls "influxes" and "effluxes" in Whitman and Thoreau, mesmeric fluids circulate among all forms of life, ensuring both interconnection and communication.²⁸

In revealing passages, Bennett draws on animal magnetism to conceptualize flows of sympathy that blur the division between humans and animals.²⁹ This marks a new development of her approach to vital materialism, in which the world is re-enchanted and agency pluralized to include both human and nonhuman actants.³⁰ Bennett states the following:

Thoreau wades deep into the great river of natural influence –into what he also calls the "circulation of vitality beyond our bodies." We will follow him as he is impressed by, digests, and decants that vitality.³¹

²⁷ Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁹ Rosello, "Animal Magnetism."

³⁰ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

³¹ Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, 91.

Thoreau's attunement to natural influences echoes Mesmer's magnetic flows as well as his quest for a harmonious relationship with nature. Bennett develops this orientation toward nature from Whitman's conception of sympathy and Thoreau's reflections on "mesmeric influence" in his own experience of nature. Bennett notices the potential for mesmerism to account for the contagious dimension of sympathy and regards the latter as an "atmospheric rather than a human force."³² For Bennett, following Whitman here, this atmospheric or gravitational sympathy grants no privilege to the human species. Bennett writes:

The current of sympathy connecting "Nature" to human beings does not discriminate [...] Whitman flirts with the idea of a sympathy *so* impartial that, akin to gravity, it exhibits not even an anthropocentric preference.³³

Bennett's reading of Whitman's encompassing notion of sympathy resonates with the Newtonian dimension of Mesmerism understood as "animal gravitation." In his 1776 dissertation, Mesmer had already suggested that his doctrine was an extension of Newton's discovery of the effects of gravitational force on the Earth. According to Mesmer, since both the atmosphere and human beings contain water, the gravitational force should influence them just as it does the tide of the oceans.³⁴ This affinity between Bennett's new materialism and Mesmerism becomes even more evident in Bennett's reading of Thoreau. Thoreau himself employs the vocabulary of animal magnetism to describe his interactions with nonhuman beings in the forest. Bennett refers to an entry in Thoreau's diary for April 1852:

As I turned round the corner of Hubbard's Grove, saw a woodchuck [...] in the middle of the field. [...] When I was only a rod and a half off, he stopped, and I did the same [...] We sat looking at one another about half an hour, till we began to feel mesmeric influences [...] I walked round him, he turned as fast and fronted me still. I sat down by his side within a foot. I talked to him quasi forest lingo.³⁵

This singular interaction with a woodchuck reveals a feeling of sympathy that crosses the boundary between humans and animals, manifesting itself as a subtle undercurrent of connection and communication. From Bennett's ideas, this interaction can be understood as a reciprocal influence

³² *Ibid.*, 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁴ McLoughlin, "When What Does Not Exist May be Useful," 100.

³⁵ Thoreau in Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, 106.

in the forest environment. This non-logocentric undercurrent of communication, shaped by the spatial dynamics of the forest, invites a productive dialogue with recent work on interspecies communication and the role it can play in a reconfigured democracy beyond the human species.³⁶

The work of American political theorist Samantha Frost is close to Bennett's new materialism.³⁷ In her latest book *Biocultural Creatures* Frost contributes to the biological turn in feminist theory by distancing herself from the emphasis on constructivism and performativity in gender theory – based on the work by Judith Butler – to explore the intrinsic generativity of the biological substrate of the body, which becomes a source of creativity rather than a ground for a reductive notion of “sex.” Alongside this exploration of biology, Frost moves away from the Newtonian assumptions of animal magnetism to embrace Albert Einstein's view of the interchangeability of matter and energy. For Frost, energy is not simply an external force acting on matter, but energy is matter in a different state and vice versa. Interestingly, Frost turns to magnetism to show how energy can act as matter and matter as energy, as in her example of two magnets that repel each other, creating the “material” impossibility of being able to bring them together.³⁸ Frost's ideas also seem to have implications for ecocriticism, for in recognizing the agency of matter the author argues for a more hospitable and respectful approach to the non-human world. In this way, the concept of biocultural creatures highlights complex causal histories in which the biological substrate of humans is intertwined with matter-energy, cultivating and fostering a more-than-human ethic.

Kari Weil, in turn, focuses explicitly on the contribution that animal magnetism has to make to ecocriticism in the Anthropocene. Weil stresses how the “[a]cceptance of our shared animality was nevertheless integral to the radical or democratic strain in mesmerism, for it was evidence also of our shared ‘nature’ and so our natural equality.” Weil suggests that shared animality was “used to mock” and criticize Mesmerism with popular caricatures that “depicted Mesmer as an ass or magnetized patients as swooning dogs.”³⁹ Moreover, echoing Karl Schelling's idea of the “flows of sympathy” and Bennett's idea of “influence,” Weil seeks to cultivate flows of sympathy conducive to the universal harmony sought by animal magnetism.

The aspiration to align human bodies with nature and the cosmos is a central feature of mesmerism that Weil considers particularly relevant in the context of climate change and the looming threat of a sixth

³⁶ Meijer, *When Animals Speak*.

³⁷ Frost, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker*; Frost and Coole, *New Materialisms*; Frost, *Biocultural Creatures*.

³⁸ Frost, *Biocultural Creatures*, 34-36.

³⁹ Weil, “Animal Magnetism as Ecocriticism,” 131.

mass extinction. Her reflections engage with the urgent need to reimagine humanity's place within the natural world and the cosmos in ways that prevent ecological imbalance and the potential collapse of the Earth. Given the scale of the crisis posed by the Anthropocene, turning to unconventional or overlooked conceptual frameworks such as animal magnetism may prove more insightful than expected. In a recent paper, Weil connects animal magnetism with animal studies and contemporary theoretical approaches in ecocriticism. She writes:

It is in his understanding of a body's embeddedness in the forces and flows that surround it and of the body's ability to affect and to be affected by them – both negatively and positively – that Mesmer can be seen as a precursor to current ecocritical thinking and to acknowledging the alternative meanings or logos to which our fundamental animality may be attuned.⁴⁰

IV. Final Reflections

In the pages above, I sought to explore and develop the potential contribution that animal magnetism can make to political philosophy and ecocriticism today. Such potential resides in its commitment to the expansion of the democratic imaginary; in its critique – in France and elsewhere – of autocratic rule; in its emphasis on intra and inter species egalitarianism; its attention to flows of sympathy connecting all forms of life; its emphasis on communication and interconnection with non-human species, as well as in its quest for a more harmonious relationship with the natural world.

However, a thorough assessment of the normative potential of animal magnetism for ecocriticism should also be able to identify and highlight its possible limitations. Mesmer's turn to moral philosophy shows that his idea of social happiness, although based on popular sovereignty, freedom of speech and assembly, is nevertheless problematic in terms of gender equality, as women are excluded from citizenship in his work.⁴¹ Perhaps this explains why feminist theorist Mary Wollstonecraft was critical of the "hocus pocus tricks" of those who practiced animal magnetism, whom she characterized as "the priests of quackery."⁴² Thus, in any assessment of the normative potential of animal magnetism one must proceed with caution so as not to reproduce the gender biases present in Mesmer's work. In relation to this, one could argue that elective affinities between animal

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴¹ Belhoste, "Frantz Anton Mesmer," 54.

⁴² Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 727 and 728.

magnetism and feminist ecocriticism are quite evident in terms of respect for nature; inter- and intraspecies egalitarianism; emphasis on the sympathy and interconnectedness of all forms of life; as well as in the critique of Cartesian approaches that regard the nonhuman as mere *res extensa*.⁴³

Likewise, we must pay attention to the reach of animal magnetism beyond what is usually called the Global North, mainly Europe and North America. If we follow the diffusion of animal magnetism towards the European colonies in the Caribbean, we can observe unexpected hybridizations and displacements. For example, one of Mesmer's disciples, Count Antoine Hyacinthe Anne Chastenet de Puységur, traveled to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, present-day Haiti, on a cartographic mission. Puységur, a practitioner of medical hypnosis, was responsible for introducing animal magnetism to the culture of the colony. The fact that there was a branch of the Society of Universal Harmony operating in Saint-Domingue testifies to the diffusion of the doctrine to the so-called "*territoires d'outre-mer*." To what extent animal magnetism succeeded in transgressing racial lines remains a matter of debate, as well as whether it is appropriate to speak of a "Creole mesmerism" as the product of hybridization between vudou practices and animal magnetism.⁴⁴ It should be noted, however, that at least part of the specialized literature highlights how influential animal magnetism as a movement of ideas was for the development of the first successful independence revolution in Latin America.⁴⁵

To conclude, I argue that the normative impulse of animal magnetism is urgently needed today as democracy is under threat due to the perils of, on the one hand, techno-authoritarianism and eco-authoritarianism on the other. In this context, recuperating animal magnetism for political philosophy and ecocriticism becomes pressing and implies investing in expanding the democratic imaginary in agonistic ways.⁴⁶ Unlike techno- and eco-authoritarian positions, animal magnetism is intrinsically linked to a critique of autocratic rule in the name of radical democracy and species egalitarianism. This is because it foregrounds not only the body's relational capacity for healing and mutual influence, but also a vision of politics grounded in affective resonance rather than hierarchical command – whether based on an AI technocracy or a Green Leviathan. Its insistence on non-coercive influence and embodied attunement opens the possibility of a more-than-human commons, where vitality circulates through cooperation and constellation rather than domination. In addition, animal

⁴³ Gaard, *Ecofeminism*; Gebara, "Cosmic Theology;" Ress, "Remembering Who We Are."

⁴⁴ Regourd, "Mesmerism in Saint Domingue;" Gaidnot, "Tubs in the Tropics."

⁴⁵ Murphy, "The Occult Atlantic."

⁴⁶ Honig, "An Agonist's Reply;" Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*.

magnetism's interest in restoring a harmonious relation with nature can be productively linked to the concern that Eco-Marxism has on the metabolic rift between humans and nature provoked by capitalism.⁴⁷ Moreover, animal magnetism extends the debate beyond the political economy of late-capitalist societies and opens a dialogue with ecofeminist and intersectional approaches that affirm interspecies egalitarianism. Finally, the enchanted worldview proposed by animal magnetism provincializes the Western canon of political philosophy, opening the possibility of a fruitful exchange with afro-Caribbean worldviews, Amerindian cosmologies and ecocritical political theologies in Latin America and beyond.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Rift*; Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*.

⁴⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectives*; Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native*; Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*; Orrego and Rosello, "Imagining Ecopolis."

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