Beyond Radical Enchantment: Mesmerizing Laborers in the Americas

Emily Ogden

Is enchantment radical? Scholars have often thought so. Ever since Ann Braude argued in *Radical Spirits* (1989) that séance Spiritualism fostered feminist politics, the nineteenth century’s enchanted states have carried a whiff of secret rebellion. As the story goes, Protestant revivals and séance experiments met with repression from secular, mainstream cultures. But these enchanted practices flourished anyway. In the shade of their tents there sheltered not only spiritual alternatives but political ones, too. Witchcraft and Great Awakenings, for example, hosted “the untheorized experiential beginnings of political life for persons without a public voice...”

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within the culture.” These political alternatives can be a resource for us now, as they were a resource for “radicals” then. In a variant form, the repression has taken place in our own time. The occult’s forward-looking possibilities were in fact integrated into modernity, but historians have forgotten this; remembering may give us political resources by “bring[ing] into focus the historical specificities of the marginal and local forms by which dominant practices were resisted, deflected, or shown to be imperfectly constituted.”

Exterior to patriarchy, liberalism, secularity, and Whig history, radical enchantment has stood for our hopes. It has been satisfying to talk about, too. Tracy Fessenden recently observed that “the question of the sacred seems still to bewilder and hush, as though it were a daring, even destabilizing inquiry for literary scholarship to pursue.” That hush is the “speaker’s benefit” a repressive hypothesis confers, according to Michel Foucault; merely to broach the forbidden topic is to be on the side of the angels.

But the consolations of the repressive hypothesis depend on there having been a repression of enchantment, and that position is all but impossible to maintain now. Historians of the occult have themselves abundantly demonstrated that enchantment is entangled with modern technologies, sensibilities, and institutions. Meanwhile, among scholars of secularity, there has been a “wholesale shift in how secularization is understood,”

3. Ruttenburg, Democratic Personality, p. 4.

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as John Modern puts it.8 Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ann Pellegrini, Janet Jakobsen, Modern, and others no longer treat secularity as an “empirical description” of a period in which enchantment has receded or become more difficult to access (“C,” p. 195).9 Instead, secularity is a “prescriptive discourse” that enforces a range of imperatives: demonstrate self-possession (“C,” p. 195; see SA, p. 16);10 exercise agency conceived as resistance;11 calculate social life; be, in short, free from enchantment (see SA, p. 126). Enchantment is what the secular agent must avoid; it is the enraptured state of an individual under a magic spell, the delusion that spells are real, and the exclusion from action in history that the rapture and delusion inevitably entail. As Modern insists, “the distinction between enchantment and disenchantment” is “integral to the modern secular imaginary” (SA, p. xvi n. 1). Enchantment is not repressed, it is contraindicated—and also incited, classified, managed.

This shift to a discursive view of secularity spells new opportunities for historians of the nineteenth-century occult. True, the occult can no longer be treated as a safe house where radical enchantment flourishes, sheltered from secular repression. But there are other harvests to be reaped from its prolific statements about magic, superstition, credulity, prophecy, enthusiasm, inspiration, false priests, and all of enchantment’s other accoutrements. The occult may be one of the key places where a secular age defines enchantment and thus defines itself. Ann Taves, Leigh Eric Schmidt, and David Walker have all viewed occult practices in this light.12 So the occult can tell us more than what this or that subculture thought about enchant-

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10. See Taylor, A Secular Age, pp. 300–301.

11. See Asad, Formations of the Secular, p. 71.

ment. It can tell us how a dominant culture—a secular culture—wanted to manage enchantment. With that line of inquiry in mind, the goal is no longer to determine “whether one says yes or no to [enchantment],” with yes having a radical political import and no having a reactionary one. (I am adapting a quotation from Foucault.) The goal is instead “to account for the fact that [enchantment] is spoken about,” whether for or against.13

How did the occult put enchantment into discourse?

Here I offer one answer. The occult put enchantment into discourse as a technique by which properly secular moderns could extract labor from those who were not modern yet. Such was the promise of mesmerism or animal magnetism. Mesmerism ignited the US occult tradition when the Guadeloupean sugar planter Charles Poyen introduced it to New England textile factory cities in 1836.14 The practice influenced Spiritualism and Christian Science; thus its history may bear on our understanding of the nineteenth-century occult more generally.15 Mesmerism made spell-casting safe for instrumental rationality. Practitioners performed a series of choreographed gestures called magnetic passes that communicated an invisible (but natural) fluid into subjects’ bodies. In this way they induced a state called somnambulism, in which subjects developed clairvoyant powers and entered into thrall to their mesmerists. According to practitioners, somnambulism had long been mistaken for a spell; somnambulists “have been successively designated by the names of Oneiropoles, inspired, fairies, sorcerers, exatics, [and] convulsioners,” explained Poyen.16 More primitive people were more prone to somnambulism, as they were more prone to enchantment. But the mesmeric passes were a technique like any other; they could readily be deployed toward new ends. Mesmerists enchanted their subjects in order to manage them, using mesmeric thrall and clairvoyance in labor discipline. With the help of his demonstration partner, the factory worker Cynthia Gleason, Poyen showed the owners of America’s cotton mills how enchantment could impose order—a magic trick he

13.  Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 11. I have substituted “enchantment” for “sex.”
had seen performed both in French hospitals and on Guadeloupean sugar plantations. As we trace the itinerary mesmerism followed to reach the US, hold this working definition of modern enchantment in mind. It was not a refuge. It was not the signature of a kinder, gentler secularism. It was a management technique.

The Factory Bell

When Poyen met Gleason in the autumn of 1836, he was in a “very precarious situation,” as he put it in his account of mesmerism’s American beginnings, *The Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England* (1837). His lectures on mesmerism had thus far been poorly received, and he was “reduced to the utmost degree of poverty” (*P*, p. 50). So he sent home for money. Home was Guadeloupe; with his mother and siblings, Poyen owned Le Piton, a “large sugar plantation, with many slaves” located in the far northwest corner of the island (*P*, p. 50). In 1827, a notary appraised the plantation’s slaves at just under 90,000 francs, a third of Le Piton’s worth and the single most valuable part of the operation. The same notary’s more detailed appraisals in another case, where he valued individual slaves at an average of a thousand francs each, suggest that Poyen and his family owned about ninety people. The money Poyen received from Le Piton in 1836 allowed him to continue his American tour; had it not been for the “very timely” receipt of “some funds from my country,” Poyen declared, “I should have been compelled either to return home, or to engage in some other employment” (*P*, p. 49). Had it not been for the proceeds of slave labor, American mesmerism might never have gotten off the ground.

Newly flush, Poyen headed for the textile city of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, where slavery’s products were pouring in at a rate of hundreds of

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thousands of pounds of raw cotton per year.\(^{22}\) Poyen’s lectures there cost seventy-five cents a ticket, between one and two days’ wages for an adult cotton factory worker, so it is likely that only owners and managers came to hear him.\(^{25}\) Owners were in the midst of consolidating their power over workers’ time with the help of a new technology, the power loom.\(^{24}\) Rhode Island’s early cotton mills, the first of which Samuel Slater opened in 1790, had employed children to spin thread and yarn by machine, while adult outworkers wove cloth by hand.\(^{35}\) Though child workers were subject to strict time discipline,\(^{26}\) outworker weavers largely controlled their own production rhythms.\(^{27}\) But conditions for adult workers changed with increasing automation. Between 1813 and 1823, the Boston Associates introduced the power loom in new mills in Waltham and Lowell, Massachusetts.\(^{28}\) Rhode Island firms adopted the technology throughout the twenties, with the process of adoption complete by 1830.\(^{29}\) Power looms gave owners a new level of control over work schedules.\(^{30}\) The water-powered machines brought weavers into the factory building and subjected them to the pace of the mill wheel. Since children could not operate the new machines and master weavers largely refused to do so, factories began employing unmarried women, a class that managers found more tractable.\(^{31}\)

\(^{22}\) See US House of Representatives [Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane], *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States* [McLane Report], 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1833), 1:170–77. The McLane Report’s “Schedule of Manufactures” for Pawtucket estimates the number of pounds of domestic cotton used by each factory in Pawtucket per annum circa 1829, based on self-reporting by factory owners and managers. The sum of the Pawtucket estimates is more than 660,000 pounds.

\(^{23}\) See advertisement, *Pawtucket Chronicle*, 11 Nov. 1836. Wages ranged from thirty-eight cents to just over a dollar per day; see US House of Representatives, *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States*, 1:171, 175, 177.


now reported to the factory at sunrise to work a twelve- to fourteen-hour
day, six days a week. The factory bell, which tolled for start and stop times
that managers alone controlled, was both the symbol and the instrument
of the discipline the weavers faced.  

Among these weavers was Cynthia Gleason, the first American mes-
meric clairvoyant. Gleason did not see Poyen’s lectures until she became
an exhibit in them. But Niles Manchester, her physician and the part
owner of a cotton mill, had attended and had been favorably impressed.
Poyen had presented animal magnetism as a means of both curing ill-
ness (by rebalancing the body’s nervous fluids) and inducing clairvoy-
ant states. Manchester asked Poyen to consult on Gleason’s case. Gleason
had worked in Pawtucket’s factories for the past decade. For almost as
long, she had been “laboring under a complicated nervous and functional
disease, which baffled all the skill of physicians,” as Poyen reported in neigh-
boring Providence’s \textit{Daily Journal}. According to Poyen, “the sleep of the
patient has become difficult, short, [and] very much troubled by pains.”
Gleason felt “a dulness of the mind, and heaviness of the system, for sev-
eral hours after awaking”—the predictable result of working six fourteen-
hour days per week.  

Gleason’s body failed to comply with the factory bell’s rhythms, so Poyen used animal magnetism to bring her back into
line. The two met at Gleason’s lodgings almost daily in that first week,
often with a small coterie of mill personnel observing. On an evening
when the cotton manufacturer Ruel Richards was present, Poyen placed
Gleason under his control by mesmerizing her using the gestures called
the magnetic passes. Then he “\textit{mentally}” requested the somnambulist
to go to bed . . . and told her, ‘\textit{mentally},’ to sleep until eight o’clock ex-
actly.” The next morning, efforts to wake Gleason before eight proved “all
in vain.” But “as the clock was striking \textit{eight} she stretched her hand out of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{34}{See Stephen W. Williams, \textit{American Medical Biography} (Greenfield, Mass., 1845), p. 382, and Robert Grieve, \textit{An Illustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Vicinity} (Pawtucket, R.I., 1897), pp. 111, 139.}
\footnotetext{36}{See \textit{ibid.} See also Poyen, “Experiments in Animal Magnetism,” \textit{Providence Daily Journal}, 23 Nov. 1836.}
\footnotetext{37}{See Poyen, “Experiments in Animal Magnetism.” On Richards, see Grieve, \textit{An Illustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Vicinity}, p. 162.}
\end{footnotes}
the clothes, rubbed her eyes, and got up.”

Poyen had used mesmerism to implant his will in Gleason. “The magnetic agent,” he explained, “is a fluid existing in every individual, but which is secreted and emanated only by the will of him who wishes to impregnate with it another individual” (R, p. lx). By “impregnating” Gleason with the magnetic fluid, he could make her actions conform to his desires. Implantation of the managerial will in laborers was the point of the mills’ own strict schedules, as Barbara Tucker observes; schedules were meant to inculcate “the so-called habits of industry: regularity, obedience, sobriety, steady intensity, and punctuality.” Animal magnetism did that work here. Suffused with Poyen’s will, Gleason was preternaturally punctual; she awoke from the magnetic sleep feeling “as bright as a dollar” and ready to begin making more bright dollars for her employers.

According to Poyen, the power that had allowed him to possess Gleason with the spirit of the factory timetable was primitive religion, updated for modern use. Animal magnetism, Poyen wrote, had “struck with amazement and admiration the greatest men of antiquity”; but these great men, “being not able to account for it, the natural causes being yet unknown, attributed them to the beneficial interposition of the gods, Isis, Osiris, Serapis, Apollo, Vulcan, Jupiter, Esculapius, &c” (R, p. liii). False priests had always worked their miracles by manipulating the animal-magnetic fluid; they simply had not realized they were doing it. Now animal magnetism had refurbished their enchantments as disciplinary techniques. Poyen had learned about this technical means of wielding primitive religious powers when he was a medical student in France. In Guadeloupe, he had seen his fellow planters use the same methods on their slaves. When he met Gleason in Providence, thus inaugurating not just American mesmerism but a whole strand of the American occult tradition, he carried this education with him.

Isis Magnétisant Son Fils Horus

Poyen sailed from his native Guadeloupe to France in 1829. He spent the next four years studying medicine in Paris (see P, pp. 41–42). Mesmerism had begun in that city in the late eighteenth century when Franz

39. Like many in the French tradition, Poyen posited such a fluid but did not think the question was settled.
42. See Journal Politique et Commercial de la Pointe-à-Pitre, 26 Mar. 1829, supplément.
Anton Mesmer set up a controversial treatment salon there, after years as an amateur practice, it was receiving modest attention among the medical faculty (see R). The consensus view among magnetists by the 1820s was that animal magnetism had rationalized false religion, making magic into a modern technique that could be used to cure and to control.

"Priests of false gods, hiding their proceedings under the veil of sacred mystery, manipulated such nervous patients [crisiaques] as prophetesses [pythonisses], sibyls, oracles, etc. in their temples," wrote the magnetizer E. F. d’Hénin de Cuvillers. The priests credited their gods, but “all these priests were in effect magnetizers.” As they had waved their hands mysteriously, they had accidentally performed the magnetic passes. Hénin de Cuvillers’s Archives du Magnétisme Animal (1820–1823) carried frontispieces of world religions reinterpreted as animal magnetism, including one image of “Isis magnetizing her son Horus” (fig. 1). The Bibliothèque du Magnétisme Animal (1817–1819) discovered mesmerism at work in the miracles of a “pretended devil . . . Horey” worshipped by “the blacks living on the banks of the Gambia” and in the trances Laplanders induced through drum rituals. Joseph Deleuze, a librarian at the Jardin des Plantes and “animal magnetism’s principal spokesman,” wrote that “animal magnetism . . . [has] been known throughout history,” but past attempts to describe it “have been founded on false physical theories or on superstition.”

46. See Gauld, A History of Hypnotism, p. 120.
a “subtraction story”; mesmerism, they claimed, was the truth that had been buried under spell-casting all along.\textsuperscript{52}

To subject to a magical spell—to delight, to delude, and to enthrall—is the original meaning of \textit{enchant}.\textsuperscript{53} With the translation of Max Weber’s \textit{Entzauberung} as “disenchantment,” the word acquired a periodization; enchantment can also refer to the state of the world before modernity.\textsuperscript{54} For Weber, “the world is disenchanted,” or demagified, when one can employ “technical means and calculations” to manipulate nature; in an “enchanted” world, by contrast, “the savage” has “ recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits.”\textsuperscript{55} Scholars have proposed various extensions of enchantment; Jane Bennett and others have figuratively extended it to include aesthetically and affectively enrapturing, but not magical, experiences, while Modern has used the term to describe a widespread antebellum sense of being subject to the “infinite socialities” of a disciplinary society (quoted in SA, p. xxii).\textsuperscript{56} But in the case of mesmerism, magic as a primitive capacity is the relevant definitional field. Mesmerists took the spell-casting that “savages” such as “blacks living on the banks of the Gambia” might have used to propitiate “Horey,” subjected it to calculation, and redeployed it as a technique. Thus mesmerism enchanted its subjects in the original sense of the word; it placed them under a spell, deluding and enthralling them. But mesmerism was also a Weberian disenchantment, in that it claimed to rationalize the means by which an ensorcelled state was produced. Mesmerism thus had the distinction of being at once an enchantment to its subjects and a disenchantment to its practitioners.

In his \textit{Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal} (1825), “without question the most popular” magnetizing manual ever published,\textsuperscript{57} Deleuze explains in great technical detail how to enchant or, rather, mesmerize: “take [the subject’s] thumbs between your two fingers, so that the inside of your thumbs may touch the inside of his”; “withdraw your hands, . . . wavin

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  \item \textsuperscript{52} See Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, pp. 26–28.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} See \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}, s.v. “enchant.”
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Adam Crabtree, \textit{From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing} (New Haven, Conn., 1993), p. 128. See also Deleuze, \textit{Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal} (Paris, 1825).\end{itemize}
them so that the interior surface be turned outwards, and raise them to his head”; and “descend slowly along the body as far as the knees” (fig. 2). These gestures allowed the operator to direct “the vital principle” from his own body into that of the subject (PI, p. 11). Magnetic somnambulism, the condition this process induced, was a pleasurable state of delusion, thrill, and inspiration; the subject’s will and senses passed into the magnetist’s control, but at the same time many subjects developed clairvoyant powers (see PI, pp. 83–84, 101). Somnambulism was, in short, an enchantment. It followed that the techniques would work best on those with proclivities for false religion: primitives, nervous patients, and Christian enthusiasts (see SA, 18 n. 45). Mesmeric texts glided easily between these various categories; ancient magicians “were themselves mostly crisiaques [nervous patients],” said Hénin de Cuvillers, and Deleuze pointed out that nervous patients displayed the most “singular phenomena” as somnambulists (PI, p. 17). Poyen, among others, lumped together recent Jansenist cults and ancient Egyptian ones (see R, p. lii). A somnambulist’s state was essentially identical to that of a votary entranced by false priests, but the role of the operator had changed. The magician had become a technician.

As the medical faculty took magnetism up throughout the 1820s, its modern enchantments found rational uses in the management of nervous patients in the Paris hospitals (see R, p. 76). Enthallment became discipline, or the enforcement of patient compliance. Deleuze suggested, “the magnetizer will say to the somnambulist, ‘You will return home at such an hour: you will not go this evening to the theatre: . . . you will take your medicines without being obstinate: . . . you will drink no coffee: you will occupy yourself no longer in such a thing’” (PI, p. 83). And prophecy became prescription. Paul Villagrand, a magnetic somnambulist and a patient at

59. In French as “le principe qui nous anime et nous fait vivre” (Deleuze, Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal, p. 9).
60. See Deleuze, Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal, pp. 137, 164.
62. See Deleuze, Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal, p. 19.
64. See Husson, Rapport sur les expériences magnétiques faites par la commission de l’Académie royale de médecine (1831), in J. D. Dupotet de Sennevoy, Cours de magnétisme en sept leçons (Paris, 1840), p. 442.
65. See Deleuze, Instruction pratique du magnétisme animal, p. 137.
the Hôpital de la Charité, predicted he would be cured by New Year’s day if doctors followed the bloodletting regimen that had come to him in a magnetism-inspired vision; they did, and he was (see R, pp. 129–33). Another somnambulist patient, when asked when his next epileptic fit would be, replied, “I shall have one on Monday, the 27th, at twenty minutes past three” (R, p. 142). So it proved.

Poyen was aware of the magnetic ferment among the medical faculty (see P, p. 40, and R, pp. lxvi–lxx), but his interest was tepid until he fell ill in 1832 “with a very complicated nervous disease” (P, p. 39). His Martiniquan friend Alfred Fillastier, who was writing a medical thesis on magnetism, introduced him to a clairvoyant we know only as Madame Villetard (see P, p. 39). Villetard became a clinical prophet when placed in the state of magnetic somnambulism. She had begun her career by diagnosing her own illness and could now diagnose the illnesses of others. Once she had been magnetized by the physician Pierre-Jean Chapelain, Villetard gave

66. See also Husson, Rapport sur les expériences magnétiques, pp. 474–76.  
67. See ibid., p. 481.  
69. See ibid., p. 29.
Poyen “a correct and minute description of the symptoms of [his] disease” and prescribed a curative regimen (P, p. 40). According to Fillassier, Villetard’s “dark and piercing eyes [and] her face that was thin and aged, but full of fire . . . gave her the air of a sorceress [quelque chose de l’air qu’on prête aux sorcières].” The sorceress found employment in a clinic, her powers enclosed within Chapelain’s mesmeric technique.

Mesmerism took a domain that seemed to have reference to spirits and gods—namely, the casting of spells—and redescribed that domain in rational terms. It was in that sense a disenchantment. But if disenchantment was supposed to liberate humanity from superstition’s spell, mesmerism did not aspire to set everyone free. Its efficacy depended on keeping certain people enchanted: primitives, nervous patients, and, in short, somnambulists. Mesmerism offered the means by which those who had modernized already could manipulate those who had not modernized “yet.” In mesmerism, enchantment appears neither as a universally desirable state nor as a useless vestige. It appears as a control lever. Like lab techs extending gloved hands into an isolation box, mesmers could appropriate the enchanted powers that worked so well on premodern subjects without contaminating themselves. In the encounter with someone who was still primitive, the mesmeric impulse was not to liberate that person from superstition—an impulse that would have been problematic in itself. The impulse was to take hold of that person’s enchantment and to steer it toward the mesmerist’s ends.

Plus Souvent chez les Nègres que chez lesBlancs
Sometime in the late 1820s, Deleuze sent his *Instruction pratique* to a cousin in Guadeloupe, where it circulated among the planters. By the time Poyen returned home in the winter of 1832–1833, his fellow colonists were magnetizing their slaves. Poyen “found a great many rich and intelligent planters devoted . . . to the practice of Animal Magnetism” (P, p. 41). If mesmerism was a means of grasping primitive people by the handle of their own enchantment, no wonder it captured colonists’ atten-

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70. Ibid., p. 28.
tion. To the editors of Paris magnetism periodicals, the African worshippers of the “pretended devil . . . Horey” may have been theoretical figures. But to planters, the same fetishists appeared instead as an enslaved labor force that outnumbered them three to one and engrossed the better part of their capital.74 Planters took an interest in Deleuze’s manual, perhaps because they had an interest, in the other sense, in doing what mesmerists claimed to do: annexing the powers of an enchanted people for use in that people’s own discipline.

Guadeloupe’s plantations were complex “agricultural, industrial, and commercial operations”75 whose owners were concerned with technological improvements, market conditions overseas, price competition from French beet sugar, and the use of water-powered mills.76 But enchantment still loomed large. Even as planters contemptuously pleaded the impossibility of emancipating “pagans” and “savages” with no better guide to moral behavior than their “African fetishism,” they took that “fetishism” seriously as a danger to themselves.77 As Doris Garraway writes in her work on the pre-Revolutionary colony, “colonial authorities both feared and revered African slaves for their knowledge of the spirit world.”78 Records of planters accusing their slaves of malicious magic down to abolition in 1848 suggest that the pattern continued. Starting in 1827, an ordinance permitted planters to petition the colony’s primary governing body, the Conseil privé, for the deportation of dangerous slaves. The category of esclaves dangereux included fomenters of rebellion, arsonists, and runaways (esclaves marrons). But almost equally prominent were slaves accused of witchcraft and poisoning.79 Planters making these accusations did not necessarily believe them. They sometimes used the Conseil privé process to get permission to sell their slaves out of the colony, something that


77. M. A. Granier de Cassagnac, Gazette des Deux Mondes, 23 July 1841.


79. See “Mesures de correction ou de précaution prises à l’égard d’esclaves dangereux ou mauvaises sujets, 1827–1848,” Série géographique, Guadeloupe, SG GUA 111.770, ANOM. See also Série géographique, Martinique, SG MAR 42.346-49, ANOM.
was otherwise prohibited—to Puerto Rico, for example, where they would fetch a higher price. But whether these petitions represented economic interest, fear of sorcery, or both, they make clear that Deleuze’s *Instruction pratique* intervened in a society where slave magic played a prominent discursive role. Not unlike the deliberations of the Conseil privé itself, magnetism would allow planters to use Africans’ supposed enchanted tendencies against Africans themselves; only in this case, it was not a matter of bringing accusations but of appropriating and directing slaves’ powers.

When Poyen returned, he “had the opportunity of witnessing several cases of somnambulism, produced by my friends on some of their colored servants” (*P*, p. 41). His friends were orthodox Deleuzians: “the effects I have observed in France coincided perfectly with those I witnessed in the West Indies.” Poyen would have been well prepared to see the utility of appropriating magic. His family had owned sugar plantations in Guadeloupe since the seventeenth century; since the eighteenth century they had owned the marquisat and plantation of Sainte-Marie. Several Poyens took an interest in industrial improvement; the family plantation of Bois Debout had a newer water mill for fabricating sugar, and Jean Baptiste Poyen de Sainte-Marie, Charles’s great-uncle, wrote the lesser Antilles’ best-known plantation management guide, *De l’exploitation des sucreries* (1792). The extended Poyen family also made two sorcery complaints to the Conseil privé. As a result of one, Catichette, enslaved on the Bois-Debout plantation, was expelled from the colony in 1829 on “suspicion of witchcraft”; when she returned in 1840, “death again began to decimate the plantation’s slaves [atelier].” The Conseil privé agreed, as they almost invariably did, to expel Catichette a second time—perhaps meaning she was sold at a premium in Puerto Rico. This was the family tradition into

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80. Manuscript transcription from *Le Siècle*, 12 Dec. 1842, in “Mesures de correction ou de précaution prises à l’égard d’esclaves dangereux ou mauvaises sujets,” ANOM.
84. See Jean Baptiste Poyen de Sainte-Marie, *De l’exploitation des sucreries ou, Conseils d’un vieux planteur aux jeunes agriculteurs des colonies* (Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, 1792), and Rossignol, *Généalogie*, p. 43.
85. “Mesures de correction ou de précaution prises à l’égard d’esclaves dangereux ou mauvaises sujets,” ANOM.
which Charles was born in 1806 at Le Piton, his father’s plantation at the time and, after 1827, his own.  

Poyen never mentions magnetizing his slaves. Private records survive from only a tiny number of plantations in nineteenth-century Guadeloupe, and Le Piton is not one of them. But we do know that the Marquis François-Xavier Eimar de Jabrun, an acquaintance of Poyen’s and one of the island’s most prominent citizens, performed magnetic experiments. Jabrun owned two plantations and frequently served in colonial government.  

Like the Poyens, he mixed industry and sorcery; he prominently supported technical innovations in sugar production; and in 1830 he accused his slave Germain of sorcery before the Conseil privé, based on the evidence that Germain “associated only with the most infamous poisoners in the neighborhood [ne fréquentais que les Gens les plus mal famés du quartier et réputés Empoisonneurs].” Poyen names Jabrun as a fellow magnetizer (see P, p. 41). It seems almost certain that Jabrun was also the Guadeloupean who reported cases to Deleuze, even though Deleuze’s published correspondence (the only version extant) has the name as Jaboun.  

In a letter to a third party, Deleuze describes what he has been learning from “the owner of a plantation in Guadeloupe, who has made numerous magnetic experiments on that island, and who has just spent six months in Paris” (RP, 1:145). It is impossible to say how typical Jabrun’s cases were or how extensively mesmerism was practiced in Guadeloupe because sources about mesmerism on the island are so limited—as are archival materials related to the island in general in this period. It may be that the lack of materials indicates that mesmerism was not extensively practiced; or it may be that the way in which it was practiced—privately, by medical amateurs on their own slaves, according to the few sources we have—did not leave much of a trace. In addition to having encountered Deleuze’s manual, planters may also have remembered that between 1782 and 1785, Saint-Domingue colonists practiced an earlier form of animal

86. See Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths (état civil), 1806, Sainte Rose, Guadeloupe, ANOM; Poirié, “Inventaire après le mort de Mathieu Augustin Poyen Montrop,” ANOM; and Rossignol, Généalogie, p. 94.
89. “Mesures de correction ou de précaution prises à l’égard d’esclaves dangereux ou mauvaises sujets,” ANOM.
90. I find no mention of a Jaboun on the island, Deleuze’s comments about Paris travel are consistent with Jabrun’s habits, and Poyen mentions Jabrun by name as a magnetizer; see P, p. 41.
magnetism. Slaves were accused of practicing magnetism at that time, too, in conjunction with vodou rituals. But two political revolutions divided the lesser Antillean planters of 1832 from their counterparts in ancien ré-gime Saint-Domingue; the theory and practice of animal magnetism had also changed substantially since then. Thus Deleuze’s report on Guadeloupean magnetism from the thirties gives us the best itinerary to follow speculatively, as a means of understanding what mesmerism meant to the planter who introduced it in America.

One might have expected planters to use magnetic thrall to redouble the control they had over their slaves, but none of the limited evidence proves (or, for that matter, disproves) such an expectation. In Jabrun’s cases, it is clairvoyance, not thrall, that comes to the fore. He used magnetic enchantment as a surveillance technique. Having read Deleuze’s Instruction pratique, Jabrun had “tried to magnetize many of his slaves” and had “found some very lucid somnambulists among them” (RP, 2:23). He understood that susceptibility to mesmeric enchantment should be greater the more primitive the subject, and he told Deleuze “that somnambulism is more frequent among negroes [nègres] than among whites” (RP, 1:145). One of the somnambulists Jabrun had discovered among his slaves “informed him of everything that happened on his plantation” (RP, 2:23). Somnambulists sometimes traveled in spirit to see events taking place beyond their ordinary range of vision, and Jabrun’s slave availed himself of these powers to surveil the plantation. The somnambulist had “rendered him some great services,” according to Deleuze, a guarded phrase that suggests the detection of rebellion (RP, 2:23).

Poyen de Sainte-Marie’s De l’exploitation describes the surveillance practices that Jabrun might have reproduced mesmerically. A planter “must look after the work on his plantation with the greatest application” but not by “look[ing] constantly over the shoulders of [rester constamment derrière] his slaves,” Charles Poyen’s great-uncle explained. Stealth was more effective; a planter should appear “always at different hours and from different directions; before showing himself, he should observe what is happening.” In this way, his enslaved and free managers, “not suspecting his presence . . . will show him their energy or their negligence.” The planter was to become a phantom, liable to sudden and unwelcome apparition. “The most energetic surveillance possible” figured in Conseil privé


records, too, as the means by which planters managed to detect sorcerers among their slaves. A somnambulist who could travel invisibly would have been a frighteningly efficient aide-de-camp.

Mesmeric surveillance could also subvert rebellion on a global scale. Sometime around 1829, Jabrun escorted a gifted Creole somnambulist, evidently a white woman, to France (see RP, 1:145). There, under the magnetic ministrations of Poyen's acquaintance Pierre-Jean Chapelain, she reported in 1831 that “there had been a slave revolt in Martinique, and that in Guadeloupe they were taking precautions against the same misfortune” (RP, 2:23). Colonial gazettes confirming her prophecy arrived in Paris a month later. Enslaved Martiniquans, marching under a revolutionary tricolor with the inscription “la liberté ou la mort,” had nearly succeeded in burning the city of Saint-Pierre. Several were killed in combat, and twenty-one were condemned to death. The Creole woman confronted this frightful combination of sorcery and Revolutionary modernity with an untimely combination of her own: mesmerism's technical enchantment. Thanks to the spell Chapelain placed on her, the Paris circle had the earliest colonial intelligence. They appropriated the powers that menaced them.

Mr. Delewz Comes to America

In 1834 Charles Poyen sailed from Guadeloupe to the US, listing his occupation as “planter” on his customs form. Within a few years, he would begin lecturing on mesmerism. But, first, he visited family. In 1792, Poyen's Guadeloupean grandfather had seen trouble coming, even without the benefit of somnambulistic powers. The year 1831 was not the first time that the enslaved population of the Lesser Antilles had tried to put the principles of fraternity, liberty, and equality into effect. Immediately following the French Revolution, Guadeloupe’s slaves had mounted a series of small-scale rebellions. Pierre Robert Poyen Saint-Sauveur had only just

93. “Mesures de correction ou de précaution prises à l’égard d’esclaves dangereux ou mauvaises sujets,” ANOM. See also “Police des esclaves, esclaves dangereux, expulsion, décisions du Conseill privé, 1827-1831,” Série géographique, Martinique, SG MAR 42.348, ANOM.
94. Chapelain is called M. le docteur Chap. throughout the text, but he can be identified by the fact that he is mentioned in the context of L’Hermès, a journal with which Chapelain was associated; see RP, 1:9, and L’Hermès 3 (1828): 116, 222–24, 255–64.
96. See ibid., pp. 149–51.
purchased Le Piton, but he hastily resold it and fled with Charles’s father, aunts, and uncles to Newburyport, Massachusetts.99 The family bided its time while the French National Assembly abolished slavery in 1794 and while former slaves fought off British efforts to take the island.100 In 1802 Napoleon recaptured Guadeloupe and reinstated slavery, in spite of stiff resistance.101 Soon after, Charles’s father, Mathieu Augustin Poyen, returned to repurchase Le Piton,102 while one uncle, Joseph Rochemont Poyen, remained in Newburyport (see P, p. 41).103 This was the uncle Charles visited in 1834. Since Joseph’s arrival forty years before, the area had changed radically. The factory city of Lowell had sprung up nearby; between 1830 and 1836, its population went from six thousand to eighteen thousand.104 Charles tutored in French for Lowell’s “very first families,” learning the contours of the managerial class that would make his fortune in Providence a few years later (P, p. 42). Via the Poyens’ interests on two continents, mesmerism had found a new home; from the hospitals of Paris and the plantations of Guadeloupe, it had come to the textile factories of New England.

Deleuze’s technical manual had made this journey as well. First the Instruction pratique had guided experimentation in Paris hospitals. Then the Marquis de Jabrun had tried Deleuze’s instructions on his slaves. Now Poyen opened a new field to the manual’s conquest. In early 1836 he started lecturing on mesmerism in Boston. His career took off when he met Gleason in November; her gifts as a somnambulist burnished his reputation.105 By December 1836, just weeks after Poyen had used animal magnetism to make Gleason’s sleep schedules as regular as clockwork, enthusiasm was such that Providence’s citizens were doing nothing but attending mesmerism lectures, as the New-Bedford Mercury joked.106 To satisfy readers who had heard of “professor Poyen” and “his pupil Miss

101. See ibid., pp. 145–47.
102. See Rossignol, Généalogie, pp. 87, 115.
103. See ibid., p. 85; marriage certificate of Sally Elliot to Joseph Poyen, 5 Mar. 1805, in Vital Records of Haverhill, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849 (Topsfield, Mass., 1911), 2:106; and Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian, p. 185.
104. See Dublin, Women at Work, p. 21.
Charlotte [Cynthia] Gleason” and were “anxious to know the method of magnetising,” the *Mercury* provided the first partial American translation of the “Practical instruction on animal Magnetism” by “a Mr. Delewz”: “take [the subject’s] thumbs between your fingers, in such a manner that his and your thumbs may be applied to each other . . . The hands are then to be placed on the shoulders, and suffered to remain there two or three minutes, and afterwards gently brought down, the arms to the thumbs.”

The eminently transmissible techniques for casting a spell had found a new set of primitive souls on which to work.

As in France and in Guadeloupe, some New Englanders were more prone to enchantment, and thus to somnambulism, than others. Nervous patients had been the paradigmatic somnambulists of France; African slaves had been most susceptible in Guadeloupe. In the US it would be factory girls. David Reese, who called mesmerism the “present reigning humbug in America” in 1838, declared that “‘factory girls’” were “the chief somnambulists in the country.”

The first two famous mesmeric somnambulists, Gleason and her successor Loraina Brackett, were factory workers—though Gleason was hardly a girl when Poyen met her; she was thirty-seven, older than Poyen himself. The industrial city of Providence, Pawtucket’s close neighbor, became the center of the magnetic movement in its first two years. But on Reese’s view the problem went beyond Providence: “Third-rate doctors, merchants and mechanics . . . providing themselves each with a factory girl, who would rather sleep than work, . . . have scattered themselves abroad in the villages, towns, and cities of the land” to give lectures on animal magnetism.

As US mesmerism developed in subsequent years, it became popular among the middle classes as a cure and as a parlor experiment. But in these early days practitioners looked to the lower classes for their subjects.

Factory girls raised the specter of a distinctive kind of enchantment: seduction. Like the false priest, the seducer cast a delightful and delusive mist over his victim, subverting her will. Factory novels such as *Ellen Merton, the*...

Belle of Lowell (1844) worried about the “inexperienced, artless” women who made up Lowell’s largest population of workers. The novel’s sensational demography suggested that “nine-tenths of those fallen and degraded females . . . in the metropolis of New England, have been operatives in the Mills at Lowell.” Operatives could not be expected to be “proof against the practised and cunning arts of the deliberate, calculating, cold-blooded libertine.” The libertine of the factory city replaced the false priest of primitive religion as the charlatan who would delight, delude, and—impregnate, if not inspire, his hapless mark. Or sometimes the false priest and the libertine combined. In an 1832 scandal, unmarried Rhode Island operative Sarah Maria Cornell was found hanged to death and pregnant; suspected in both crimes was Ephraim Avery, a Methodist camp meeting leader. Mary Clarke’s dramatic adaptation, Sarah Maria Cornell (1833), made Cornell’s seduction an enchantment. In the play, Sarah foresees her doom in a prophetic dream: “were I inclined to superstition, I should fancy I was to be murdered!” Then at a camp meeting where “moonbeams sporting through [the] branches . . . impel each heart to the love of God” and to “the love of his creatures,” “Averio” carries Sarah off while “girls cry; men shout; [and] all is a scene of confusion.”

Pregnancy; death; exit all. The revivalist Lothario combined the ensorcelling powers of sex and the Spirit.

Factory girls of managers’ imaginations lived in a world more primitive than the managers’ own, just as Guadeloupean slaves had done in the eyes of their enslavers. And workers’ susceptibility to seduction was a disciplinary liability for factory owners, just as slaves’ alleged magical abilities were for planters. In Clarke’s play, the first crack in the virgin vessel is Sarah’s disregard of the factory bell; the morning after her prophetic dream, the usually punctual Sarah, a “good, virtuous and industrious” girl, arrives late.

Discipline and sex magic stood on opposite sides in writing surrounding the factories. Management apologists like Henry Miles, author of Lowell, as It Was (1845), countered the charge that Low-
ell was a “hotbed of corruption, tainting and polluting the whole land” by describing Lowell’s stringent “moral police,” including company-run boarding houses and supervised factory floors.118 “The only access [to the factory] is through the counting room, in full view of those whose business it is to see that no improper persons intrude themselves upon the premises,” Miles assured his readers.119

As in Guadeloupe, part of animal magnetism’s appeal was that it could bring enchantment over to the cause of management. Just as Poyen had used animal magnetism to “impregnate” Gleason with his will and thus wake her at 8 am, factory agents could in theory avail themselves of the “magentical agent” (R, p. ix). They could see their employees impregnated not with productivity-destroying children but with the managers’ own wills. “The spring of numberless superstitions” in earlier times, animal-magnetic power now rested in the hands of technicians, who could use it to counter the wiles of camp-meeting demagogues (R, pp. liii–liv). The Daily Intelligencer got the message, conjecturing that magnetism would shed light on “the case of demoniacs, the gift of prophecy, the frenzy of a mob, and the esprit du corps.”120 In a March experiment in Lowell, at the home of Lowell Carpet Manufactory agent Alexander Wright, magnetism even annexed the powers of the New Testament. Poyen handed Gleason a glass of water “in willing that the water should be Rum for her.” The quick-witted Gleason made things more interesting by alluding to the Gospels: “‘Wine!’” she exclaimed; “‘will it make me dizzy?’” (P, pp. 166–67).121 Poyen and Gleason offered manufacturers a religious power that would turn their water wheels rather than attracting their workers to the lurid precincts of camp meetings.

Magnetism never became institutionalized in the factories. But through Poyen’s lectures the dream of a perfect coercion beguiled the leisure hours of industrial towns. He and Gleason spent a few months doing demonstrations in the Pawtucket-Providence area before going on a tour in 1837 that took in the factory cities of Nashua and Lowell. From the first public demonstrations in Pawtucket, Poyen took pains to show that magnetism gave him a degree of control over Gleason that lay beyond the grasp of

119. Miles, Lowell, as It Was, and as It Is, p. 64.
her factory superiors. A few days after they met, Gleason and Poyen performed before an audience of 170 people at the Pawtucket Hotel.\(^{122}\) Having magnetized Gleason, Poyen called Edward Walcott to the platform. Gleason probably worked for a company like Walcott’s, under the supervision of someone like him. Walcott was the part owner and agent, or manager, of the Walcott Manufacturing Company, a firm that produced cotton cloth by power loom.\(^{123}\) “At my request,” Poyen wrote, “Edward Walcott Esq. asked the somnambulist to drink of the water that he presented to her . . . but she took no notice of it.” Poyen then “mentally asked Gleason whether she wished for some water”—that is, he thought it at her—and she instantly responded “that she ‘did not feel thirsty.’” Poyen now mentally urged Gleason to drink some water anyway, and “she opened her lips, grasped at the tumbler, and drank two or three swallows of the liquid.”\(^{124}\) Walcott’s spoken commands had not been heard, let alone heeded; Poyen’s silent ones convinced Gleason to act against her own inclinations. On another occasion, Poyen made the same point with a Brown University professor, Gleason’s physician Manchester, and the Reverend E. B. Hall in succession. Gleason ignored all three when they addressed her; when Poyen spoke, she attended and obeyed.\(^{125}\) Poyen’s magnetism trumped the magnetism of the ruling classes.

From those early days, Gleason manifested clairvoyant gifts that adapted her ever more perfectly to the work of supervising a power loom. Power loom technologies varied somewhat, but a weaver’s primary tasks were to retie broken web yarns and to replace empty shuttle bobbins with full ones; the latter process alone involved seven steps. In 1836, a skilled weaver ordinarily attended two looms at once.\(^{126}\) In the 1844 *Lowell Offering*, a workers’ magazine, “Susan” reported her difficulties in managing even one loom: “I could take care of two if only I had eyes in the back part of my head, but I have not got used to ‘looking two ways of a Sunday’ yet.”\(^{127}\) Gleason could do just this. The director of Providence’s Greene Street School, Hiram Fuller, saw Poyen will “that [Gleason’s] mind would leave


the brain, would come out of the body, and see what should be held over or behind her.” Gleason more or less successfully identified a watch key, a book, a bunch of peacock feathers, and a large pencil. In the state of somnambulism, Gleason did have eyes in the back part of her head. She was a weaving prodigy as well as a mesmeric one, and it was not unusual for her questioners to be as interested in the magic of industry as in the magic of mesmerism. Gleason told Brown University president Francis Wayland that she could handle five looms at a time, though three or four was her usual load. Supervising three or four looms would have been exceptional in the mid-1830s; five was almost preternatural. As the New Hampshire Sentinel put it, “the Pawtucket subject works wonders.” Gleason gave her audience two marvels at once: her somnambulism and her technical skills as a weaver.

In January 1837, Gleason gave up industrial marvels to devote herself full time to magnetic ones. She left her factory post to tour New England with Poyen in exchange for room, board, and a small cash salary (see P, p. 118). They traveled together on and off for two years. After that, Gleason briefly continued work as an independent clairvoyant; she died in 1847. Poyen departed for France in 1839 and died in Bordeaux in 1843, still in possession of his share of Le Piton. Before he left the US, Poyen saw to it that Deleuze’s manual appeared in translation as Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism (1837). It became perhaps the most influential magnetizing manual there, as it had been in France and Guadeloupe. The manual’s translator, Thomas Hartshorn, declared that “somnambulism will probably give the death-blow to superstition” right before launching into a three-hundred-page appendix of experiments by American mesmerizers, most of them inspired by Poyen and Gleason. Each case was an instance of “superstition,” or primitive religion, retooled as animal

129. See ibid.
132. [Fuller], “Remarkable Phenomena of Animal Magnetism,” p. [1].
magnetism.\textsuperscript{136} The manual was more of a lightning strike to superstition than a death blow; it reanimated enchantment in a form useful to modern institutions. Gleason and Poyen had left Deleuze’s techniques of enchantment lastingly established in New England. Mesmerism would thrive well into the 1850s, when it was gradually absorbed into Spiritualism.\textsuperscript{137} Poyen left a token, too, of the mark industry made on this wellspring of the American occult. He dedicated the Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England to the factory manager Wright. He signed the book “Charles Poyen, St. Sauveur,” alluding to the Guadeloupe sugar plantation that gave its name to his branch of the family (see \textit{P}, p. i, iii).\textsuperscript{138} Mesmerism had arrived in the US as the gift of one boss to another.

\textbf{Conclusion: The Infinite and the Unknown}

As Deleuze’s \textit{Instruction pratique} traveled, each new group of readers adapted its enchantment techniques to local needs. In Paris, the powers of magnetism had borrowed from the world’s religions made some patients compliant and helped to diagnose others. In Guadeloupe, mesmerism warded off rebellion. And in the US it made a more tractable weaver out of the first American somnambulist. Poyen claimed that seeing mesmerism in all these places had proved to him that “the human soul was gifted with the same primitive and essential faculties, under every climate, among every nation, and under whatever skin, black, red, or white” (\textit{P}, p. 41). This sense of universal brotherhood neither stopped him from owning slaves in Guadeloupe nor from apparently advocating the transportation of American slaves back to Africa.\textsuperscript{139} But read against the grain, Poyen’s declaration may serve as a good description of what made mesmerism appealing. By framing itself as having capitalized on superstition—on what

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} Hartshorn, “Appendix” to \textit{PI}, p. 70.
\item \textsuperscript{138} See Rossignol, \textit{Généalogie}, pp. 82, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{139} In fall 1837, Poyen claimed that the \textit{Literary and Theological Review} (he called it the “\textit{Theological and Literary Review}”) would soon be publishing an essay of his, entitled “Philosophical and Historical Essay on Slavery, followed by the Exposition of a New System of Measures for the Civilization of Africa, and the Abolition of Slavery in the United States” (\textit{P}, pp. 42–43). But no essay ever appeared in that journal under his name. Russ Castronovo has proposed that the anonymously published “Slavery and Abolitionism,” \textit{Literary and Theological Review} (Mar. 1839) is the missing essay; see Castronovo, “The Antislavery Unconscious,” p. 46 n. 10. But this seems unlikely; “Slavery and Abolitionism” does not concern colonization as Poyen had promised, and its dense allusiveness to the King James Bible is out of keeping with Poyen’s usual range of reference—and probably beyond his capacities. Poyen never demonstrated any knowledge of the Bible elsewhere, whether in French or in English, and his reading in English seems to have been limited. More probably, Poyen’s essay on African colonization was never published.
\end{itemize}
had not yet been calculated—mesmerism could seem to be most useful precisely where the most modernization had yet to be done. If all souls had the same “primitive” faculties, mesmerism taught a readily transferrable technique for manipulating any population. Enchant them to manage them. Take hold of their unvarying primitive souls.

In Providence, as Fuller watched Gleason’s “supernatural going to sleep,” he “questioned more deeply within myself than ever before—what is the human soul?” He felt “that God and Eternity are the only answer to these mysterious phenomena—these apparitions of the Infinite and the Unknown.” But God and eternity were not the only answers, as Poyen knew. What is the human soul? A thing to grasp; a thing toward which to direct the effluvium of one’s will; a thing to manage. What impressed Fuller in Gleason’s performances was a sense that she had departed her body during her sleep; and, if she was absent, she must be somewhere else. That elsewhere authorized in him a sense that he was seeing “apparitions of the Infinite and the Unknown.” But Poyen made very different use of Gleason’s apparent absence. He filled the vacuum of her will with promises of perfect discipline.

Fuller wanted to see the infinite in mesmerism; Poyen wanted to see a factory irradiated with order. But both took Gleason’s enchantment to be an exterior space they could reoccupy for their own purposes. One problem with the story of radical enchantment is that it does not leave us in a very good position to remember how instrumental use and utopian striving can be two sides of the same coin. Stories of radical enchantment partake in what Robyn Wiegman calls the “political imaginary of the alternative.” They ally us with an alleged position of “exclusion, subordination, and exploitation” in the hopes that we gain thereby a vantage point on the workings of power. But as Wiegman points out, the difficulty with this move is that the political imaginary of the alternative “has been central to Western modernity as a whole, where revolutionary rupture defines not only the modern’s origin, but the very framework in which origin and rupture become central features of modernity’s cultural syntax.” Rebels may reach for the outside, as did the enslaved revolutionaries of Martinique who embraced the vanguardism of la liberté ou la mort. But when the unnamed Creole somnambulist used her powers to descry the colonial unrest to which French state power would have to respond, she reached for the outside, too. The occult may look now like the dream of a better life. The melancholy fact is this: it wore the same appearance to nineteenth-century managers of labor.

140. [Fuller], “Remarkable Phenomena of Animal Magnetism,” p. [1].