

In the Time of Bergson: The Influence of the Philosophical Thoughts of Henri Bergson  
on the Writings and Music of Dane Rudhyar

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## Abstract

VANESSA SYLVIE AMÉLIE PELLETIER: In the Time of Bergson: The Influence of  
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(Under the direction of Severine Neff)

This thesis examines the influence of Bergsonian philosophy in the music and musical aesthetics of Dane Rudhyar. While most studies dealing with the music of Rudhyar acknowledge his early interest in the philosophies of Bergson (1859-1941), the extent of their influence on his musical writings and musical style have been largely underrated. Although Rudhyar became highly involved with esoteric thought shortly after his arrival in America in 1916, Bergsonian concepts continued to permeate Rudhyar's aesthetic writings on the mystical power of the arts throughout his life. Concepts discussed in Bergson's book *Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*; 1907), can be seen at work in Rudhyar's music. When analyzed using the Bergsonian concepts of duration, *élan vital*, Becoming, and Creative Evolution, Rudhyar's music begins to yield interesting and fascinating results, and particular aspects of his musical style come to the forefront. In addition, a certain metaphysical meaning begins to emerge.

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## Introduction

Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985) is a fascinating figure for the history of American modern culture. Nonetheless, the extent of his influence on the musical scene and as I shall argue, particularly on composer Aaron Copland (1900-1990), remains insufficiently explored.<sup>1</sup> Like many other artists of the twentieth century, Rudhyar was interested in exploring the interrelations between different branches of the arts, philosophy, and esoteric, occult traditions such as Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, alchemy, astrology, Baha'i, and Buddhism, as well as the philosophies of modern writers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Nietzsche and, most notably Henri Bergson. However, his eclecticism and integration of different approaches, although they were in the service of a particular totality of vision, made his musical works very hard to understand for both the general public and many composers and performers. In addition, this has made his contributions difficult to assess through more traditional modes of research. As Deniz Ertan has stated, "Although his creative works can hint at certain artistic movements or aesthetic styles, they neither represent nor are adequately explained by them."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Current studies on the musical relationship between Rudhyar and Copland include Carol Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Carol Oja, "Dane Rudhyar's Vision of American Dissonance," *American Music*, 17 (1999), pp. 129-145.

<sup>2</sup> Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought, and Art* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), p. xii.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many artists felt the need to explore the interrelations between the various branches of art and philosophy, as a means of achieving aesthetic unity and artistic utopianism,<sup>3</sup> and we can use Rudhyar as a prime example of such a composer. In particular, he frequently acknowledged the influence of the ideas of the French philosopher Henri Bergson on his works. In this thesis I examine the influence of Bergsonian philosophy in the music and musical aesthetics of Dane Rudhyar. While most studies dealing with the music of Rudhyar acknowledge his early interest in the philosophies of Bergson (1859-1941), the extent of their influence on his musical writings and musical style have been largely underrated. The writings of Bergson comprise some of the earliest exposure to modern philosophical thought for the composer: Rudhyar began philosophy classes in Paris at the Sorbonne in 1910, where he was introduced to the ideas and writings of Bergson, and subsequently expressed great enthusiasm for them. The connection between Rudhyar and Bergson is significant, since it can be considered the starting point for the composer's later exploration of mysticism, since Bergson was credited with bringing modern philosophy out of the highly scientific and positivistic domain of August Comte and back into the realm of metaphysics. This facet of Bergson's influence was recognized by many, including the Pragmatist Harvard philosopher William James, who described Bergson as a "Magician."

Although Rudhyar became highly involved with esoteric thought shortly after his arrival in America in 1916, Bergsonian concepts continued to permeate Rudhyar's aesthetic writings on the mystical power of the arts throughout his life. This is not surprising, since Rudhyar placed much emphasis on the spiritual unification of all humankind, stating "But it is all one philosophy. It is one way of thinking of life. My

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<sup>3</sup> Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought, and Art*, p. 1.

thinking process—and I must say, even my feeling process—are very different from those of almost anybody I know. I mean, in that sense, my life has been absolutely lonely...”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Bergson’s influence on the aesthetics of the composer, both during the early and later parts of his life, should not be underestimated.

The study of Bergsonian influence with regard to Rudhyar acquires even greater significance when dealing with aspects of musical style. In particular, concepts discussed in Bergson’s book *Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*, 1907), can be seen at work in Rudhyar’s music. When analyzed using the Bergsonian concepts of intellect, intuition, duration, *élan vital*, Becoming (or creative evolution), Rudhyar’s music begins to yield interesting and fascinating results, and particular aspects of his musical style come to the forefront. In addition, a certain metaphysical meaning begins to emerge. This, I think, is imperative to understanding Rudhyar as an artist, philosopher and mystic and evaluating his role in American culture.

In Chapter 1 I provide an overview of the Parisian intellectual and cultural climate in which both Bergson and Rudhyar were immersed. I deal with the highly important idea of magic, both practical and metaphorical, and I discuss the reasons why Bergson would have been so influential in France, and contextualizes Bergson’s popularity in America. In Chapter 2 I discuss Bergson’s philosophical concepts and compares them to those presented in Rudhyar’s writings. In Chapter 3 I analyze Rudhyar’s works, by applying Bergsonian philosophical concepts of duration, *élan vital*, and creative evolution. In particular, I demonstrates how Rudhyar’s use of motivic alterations, his fluid rhythmic and metric style, and his use of registral space contribute to creating a piece which simultaneously represents differing metaphysical levels and still consists of a unified

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<sup>4</sup> See Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought, and Art*, p. 1.

whole. In addition, I discuss the musical correspondences between Copland's *Piano Variations* and Rudhyar's *Granites* and *Three Paeans*, and I analyze these two pieces with respect to the differing aesthetics of the two composers.



## Chapter 1: Dane Rudhyar and Henri Bergson in the Context of Magic

What is Magic? The word has become the synonym of fraud and charlatanism; and this is most unfortunate, because it was an excellent word which expressed perfectly well etymologically and otherwise an idea which the world needs intensely today.

—Dane Rudhyar,  
*Art as the Release of Power*<sup>5</sup>

For those who have looked into the biography of Dane Rudhyar, it will come as no surprise to learn about his fascination and involvement with the concept of magic and the occult, as well as world religions and philosophies. Dane Rudhyar was born in Paris in 1895 as Daniel Chennevière during a time when the city could be characterized as the locus of modernity,<sup>6</sup> and although modernists and mystics might “make an incongruous combination,”<sup>7</sup> a closer look at some of the figures associated with modernism reveals fascinating connections with magic and mysticism. In fact, those associated with modernist thought attempted to join ancient forms of faith and mysticism to modern thought—they not only looked forward in terms of critical history and philosophy, but they also looked back into the history of mystical traditions.

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<sup>5</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *Art as a Release of Power* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> The young Daniel Chennevière changed his name in 1918 to Rudhyar, which was taken from the Sanskrit word *rudha*, which was symbolic of a rebirth. This is particularly important with reference to his metaphor of the decay and the seed. See Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought, and Art*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> William L. Portier and C.J.T. Talar, “The Mystical Element of the Modernist Crisis,” in *Modernists & Mystics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), p. 1.

In his book *Art as Release of Power*, Rudhyar defines “Magic” as “*the release of power through an efficient form by an act of will*. It is in fact life itself; but life in terms of human characteristics, destiny and will-power....Magic, thus understood, differs from age to age according to the focalization of the Race’s will and desire.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, for Rudhyar, magic is the resultant force produced, and this force is produced because the human will sees a need to create it. Consequently, “Paris in 1900 was not at the end of a century. It was at the beginning of one,”<sup>9</sup> and this led many to believe that a modern society such as Paris was ripe for change. One way to achieve this was through the exploration of non-Western cultures and mysticism. Consequently, although Rudhyar grew up and was educated in a city that had provided a stage for the invention of modern poetry and literature and visual and performing arts, as well as cutting-edge scientific advancements, he also belonged to a culture which was interested and valued non-Western cultures. This interest in Orientalism and exoticism was fostered by the enduring belief that the “primitive” non-Western cultures could play a part in the revitalization of the overly modern Western world.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for a young artist such as Rudhyar, Paris provided the perfect place to experience the rise of a modern, multi-cultural world, as well as develop a deep appreciation for what the religious beliefs and philosophies of non-Western cultures could teach him.

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<sup>8</sup> Rudhyar, *Art as the Release of Power*, p. 5. Italics are in the original. Here, Rudhyar uses the term “Race” in the sense that Helena Blavatsky had used it in *The Secret Doctrine*. It was not really a classification of human beings as it referred to levels of human evolution.

<sup>9</sup> William R. Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> For studies which deal in whole or in part with issues of Orientalism and exoticism, see Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), pp. 139-215, and Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Within the booming multi-cultural Parisian scene were numerous groups which associated themselves with forms of mysticism. These usually included a wide array of artists such as poets, musicians and painters. A well-known example would be the French composer, organist, and teacher, Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992). Although he belonged to a slightly later decade than turn of the century artists, he nonetheless transferred his fervent Catholic mysticism to his music.<sup>11</sup> He was also one of several composers to value non-European cultures, especially Indian and Japanese, and he tended to direct his theological focus towards themes of glory, mystery, and miracles—much like the significant themes of some of the ancient religions and philosophies which had attracted the attention of so many. Seen in this broader context, it is evident that Messiaen's work belonged to a much wider circle of mystical aesthetics.

Several other artists in addition to Messiaen and Rudhyar concerned themselves with forms of mysticism. Mysticism, in this context, refers to the constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation.<sup>12</sup> Many of these mystics expressed an interest in occult phenomena, which we can define as hidden knowledge or wisdom.<sup>13</sup> For example, a large number of these artists gathered themselves at the popular avant-garde and occult

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<sup>11</sup> Although several artists looked towards other forms of mysticism than Catholicism, modern historiography on the subject of Catholicism in France suggests a very narrow notion of what this religion may have meant to French artists. For example, in his entry on Messiaen, Paul Griffiths states that the composer was “alone in his joyously held Catholic faith, which again was unswerving.” As a matter of course, many artists such as Poulenc, Satie (in his unique way), the *Schola cantorum* composers, and the visual artist Matisse maintained some kind of tie with Catholicism. Such generalized assessments go against the kind of historiography for which I am arguing here. See Paul Griffiths, “Messiaen, Olivier,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed 13 June 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Jerome Gellman, “Mysticism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, accessed July 19 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Sven Ove Hansson, “Science and Pseudo-Science,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, accessed 19 July 2010.

bookshop and publishing house, *L'Art indépendant*, which Edmond Bailly opened in 1885 in downtown Paris. Bailly, himself an amateur composer, had become a Theosophist when Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) brought her *Secret Doctrine* to France in the 1880s.<sup>14</sup> According to Balvatsky, the “West had fallen into a state of decline and ignorance. She argued that the East preserved all of its ancient wisdom, and thus, it was for humans, who possessed both an historical and scientific knowledge, to give it a new impulse.”<sup>15</sup> The introduction of Theosophy into France at this time was quite significant in that it relied essentially on Eastern philosophy for its doctrine, and it eventually became one of the most important esoteric movements in Europe and America, influencing artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), Henry Cowell (1897-1965), and Dane Rudhyar, among others. Consequently, *L'Art indépendant* “attracted occultists, esthetes, symbolists, decadents, esotericists and avant-garde artistic thought.”<sup>16</sup>

Although we currently know very little about Bailly’s bookshop, it is definitely an organization which should be explored further in order to study the influence of occultism on twentieth-century French culture, since we can make connections between *L'Art indépendant* and several very important twentieth-century figures. For example, some might be surprised to discover that Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Erik Satie (1866-1925) were daily visitors to the bookshop, and that on an illustrated cover of one of Bailly’s compositions entitled *La Tristesse d’Ulad* is a watercolor signed by “M.

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<sup>14</sup> Jocelyn Godin, *Music and the Occult: French Musical Philosophies, 1750-1950* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> Godin, *Music and the Occult: French Musical Philosophies, 1750-1950*, p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> Godin, *Music and the Occult: French Musical Philosophies, 1750-1950*, p. 152.

Bergson-McGregor [*sic*]” (this refers to Mina, or Moïna, Bergson-MacGregor (1865-1928)), who was the sister of Henri Bergson. In the case of Debussy and Satie, scholars have dealt extensively with their importance in the history of music as leaders of the impressionistic and the avant-garde musical movement, respectively. We can perceive the influence of occultism in some of the titles of the works of these two composers, for example Satie’s *Gnossiennes*, and more specifically, the *Première pensée rose + croix* and the *Sonneries de la rose + croix*, both of which are named after the symbol of the esoteric movement of Rosicrucianism—the theology of a secret society of mystics, said to have been founded in late medieval Germany by Christian Rosenkreuz. In fact, during the years 1881 and 1882, Satie was the official composer for the French poet Joséphin Péladan’s (1858-1918) spurious *Ordre de la Rose-Croix Catholique du Temple et du Graal*, and because of this, he was permitted to experiment musically at Péladan’s Rosicrucian salons at the fashionable *Galerie Durand-Ruel*.<sup>17</sup> Mina Bergson-MacGregor, on the other hand, is less known. As mentioned above, she was the sister of Henri Bergson, but she was also the wife of the occult novelist and founder of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918). She was also a reputed clairvoyant, which no doubt would have made her a popular guest at Bailly’s shop. There is no documentation to confirm that Henri Bergson ever set foot inside *L’Art indépendant*, and although there is no evidence to suggest that he was engaged in the occult activities of his sister and her husband, there is a connection between his own professional interests and those of this sister. For example, Bergson was a member of the British Society for Psychical Research, of which he eventually accepted the Presidency in 1913 and delivered an impressive address entitled

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Orledge, “Satie, Erik,” in *Grove Music Online*, accessed 13 June 2010.

“Fantômes des vivants et recherche psychique” (“Phantoms of Life and Psychic Research”). His sister Mina was also a member of the Society. In addition, his philosophical works, which not only attempted to restore the metaphysical aspect of philosophy that the discipline had progressively lost since the eighteenth century as a result of Comtian positivism, but also dealt extensively with issues of religion, morality, and mysticism, at least point to him as a participant in the broader cultural interest in spirituality.

The participants at *L'Art indépendant* which I discussed above have one further claim to interest for the subject of my work, in that they were all major figures in Rudhyar's development as an artist, philosopher and astrologer. As in the case of Henri Bergson, there is no documentation to place Rudhyar inside Bailly's bookshop. However, given Rudhyar's admiration for the two composers and his predilection for the occult, as well as his interest in Bergsonian philosophies, it is possible that he himself may have been a visitor to the store. Nonetheless, he was no doubt informed about the ideas and practices which emanated from *L'Art indépendant*, and they influenced much of his own thoughts on the connection between music and spirituality.

What may be concluded from the above discussion of magic and the occult is that magic (and all matters involving some type of spiritual meaning) was a very important element of twentieth-century modernist culture.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the concept of magic went beyond the popular ritualistic occult phenomena that had become the trend among some mystical, avant-garde circles. Rudhyar, in this chapter's initial quotation,

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<sup>18</sup> Several studies have been devoted to the subject of magic in modern culture. For example, see Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Corinna Treitel, “What the Occult Reveals,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 6 (2009), pp. 611-625; and C.J.T. Talar, ed., *Modernists & Mystics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), among others.

distinguished between a fraudulent conception of magic and one which referred to something on a higher mystical level and of which human society was in great need. Rudhyar's first distinction was probably synonymous with the popular and trendy séances that were happening all over Europe at the time and that more often than anything else, provided entertainment for their spectators. His second distinction had broader cultural implications, since Rudhyar believed that the decaying occidental society in which he found himself could be replenished and reborn through magic. Both Rudhyar and Bergson had a connection to this broader definition of magic as a means of replenishing society of its devoid morality, and this point of view was also theoreticized by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920).

Max Weber characterized modern Western society as a "disenchanted" world. Most disciplines during the early twentieth century were still under the influence of the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the philosophical system in which the sciences take on a centralized focus, with an emphasis on scientific research procedures and methodologies. But several thinkers saw the limitations of this system, including Max Weber, Henri Bergson and William James, among others. In particular, Weber was the first to associate the rise of positivism and modernity with what he called the "disenchantment of the world." Consequently, he also posited that humanity could return to a more spiritual state of being by means of "re-enchantment of the world." Weber's ideas on the subject give a broader context in which to place Rudhyar's own observations of the decaying Western society in which he found himself. Weber was an economic sociologist—however, he was also a sociologist of religion, and throughout

his academic works, he tried to determine the link between these two areas.<sup>19</sup> He studied in Heidelberg and Berlin, and also held a teaching position at the University of Berlin.

What was highly important about Weber's sociological works is that he derived his theories from his observations of the distinctive characteristics and rituals of various cultures and their religions. Among his books were *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, and *Ancient Judaism*. His work on other religions was interrupted by his sudden death in 1920, which also prevented him from following *Ancient Judaism* with studies of Psalms, the Book of Jacob, Talmudic Jewry, early Christianity and Islam.

According to Weber, disenchantment is literally a process of “de-magification.” Fundamental to this process was modern science, which was “singularly responsible for this late development, [and] was initially welcomed as a surrogate system of orderly value creation....Modern science has relentlessly deconstructed other value-creating activities, in the course of which its own meaning has also been demolished beyond repair.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, modern humanity “no longer submits itself to the spell of superstition and the sacred rituals of power, but has demystified its existence through the calculations of science and the bureaucratic apparatus of state. What was supernatural has been

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<sup>19</sup> To a certain extent, Bergson also linked the so-called ‘disenchantment of the world’ and war to socio-economic factors: he identified the two principal causes as overpopulation and overconsumption. This provides an interesting connection to the work of Weber, particularly since Bergson made these conclusions in 1932, twelve years after the death of Weber, and it is entirely possible that he was well-acquainted with the latter's publications.

<sup>20</sup> Sung Ho Kim, “Max Weber,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, accessed 6 April 2010.



rationalized as merely natural, the authority of religion has been replaced by the politics of state. The modernization of society is therefore its secularization.”<sup>21</sup>

Although Weber discussed his ideas of disenchantment and re-enchantment of the world in the context of economics, arguing that de-magification was linked with modernity and the rise of capitalism, we can easily see similar traits in areas outside of economics. Indeed, it seems that the broader culture of the time perceived this trend towards disenchantment and a need for a new beginning. Rudhyar himself often compared Western society at large to a seed in a decaying fruit, stating that “the cultural and moral decay in which he found himself prompted him toward some kind of emancipation from the norms, clichés, and even the morality of European culture, which were weighing heavily upon his shoulders.”<sup>22</sup> The metaphors of decay and of the seed were symbolic, embodying notions of sacrifice, death, rebirth, potentiality, direction, and expectation, among other things, that were brought about by unstable and unsatisfactory social factors in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, he saw the disenchantment of the world not as an end, but rather as an opportunity for humanity to revitalize itself, just as a seed from a decaying fruit still has the potential to grow into a wholesome fruit. Furthermore, Rudhyar believed that the time for the “re-enchantment of the world” had come, declaring that “the disintegration of the old European culture and music is still going on, both in Vienna and in Paris. But seeds have escaped from the decaying fruit.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel K.L. Chua, “Vincenzo Galilei, Modernity and the Division of Nature,” in *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. by Susannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Deniz Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought and Art*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought and Art*, p. 13.

Rudhyar's preoccupation with matters of spiritual and moral rebirth and replenishment of humanity is obvious from his book titles, which include *The Rediscovery of Music*, *The Rebirth of Hindu Music*, *Liberation through Sound*, *Art as Release of Power*, and *The Magic of Tone*, among others. Also evident in some of his book titles is the importance of magic, and the connection between magic and the arts, especially music. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, for Rudhyar, magic is the resultant force produced, and this force is produced because the will sees a need to create it. Rudhyar's definition of magic was largely influenced by Bergson's philosophical ideas about evolution, which he crystallized in his book *L'Évolution créatrice* of 1907. Notably, Bergson believed that change, and consequently creation, was a continual process spurred by an *élan vital*, or a vital force. The confluence of Bergson's concept of creative evolution and the *élan vital* and Rudhyar's definition of magic not only not only results in an interesting connection of ideas between the two figures, but it also reinforces the notion that magic had broader cultural implications than simply occult connotations, and that Bergson was highly respected within this paradigm. This is perhaps best illustrated by a section of a congratulatory letter that the American pragmatist philosopher William James sent to Bergson upon the publication of the latter's book, *Évolution créatrice*:

Oh, my Bergson, you are a magician and your book is a marvel, a real wonder....But, unlike the works of genius of the Transcendentalist movement (which are so obscurely and abominably and inaccessibly written), a pure classic point of form....such a flavor of persistent euphony, as of a rich river that never foamed or ran thin, but steadily and firmly proceeded with its bands full to the brim. The aptness of your illustrations, that never scratch or stand out at right angles, but invariably simplify the thought and help to pour it along. Oh, indeed you are a magician! And if

your next book proves to be as great an advance on this one as this is on its predecessors, your name will surely go down as one of the great creative names in philosophy.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, James’s use of the metaphor of the magician in his letter is significant in the broader context of magic as discussed above, since through this metaphor James implies that the discipline of philosophy was in great need of a change, and that Bergson was able to provide this through his writings. In fact, James’s statement that Bergson’s “name will surely go down as one of the great creative names in philosophy” is important since it links creativity, for Bergson, Rudhyar and many others, with magic. In short, James credited Bergson with having re-introduced the metaphysical back into the discipline of philosophy. And although James does not articulate this, we can interpret this passage as meaning that Bergson took a step towards the re-enchantment of society.

The aim of Bergson’s philosophical work is situated directly within the context of Weber’s theories about the disenchantment and re-enchantment of the world, and this is further confirmed by Bergson’s own background as a scholar. Many of Weber’s ideas rested on his observations about Western society and its tendency to rationalize all aspects of life and use science as the sole approach for investigation. In the words of Bergson, “the human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids, where our action finds its fulcrum and our industry its tools; that our concepts have been formed on the model of solids; that our logic is, pre-eminently, the

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<sup>24</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1920), pp. ix-x.

logic of solids; that, consequently, our intellect triumphs in geometry, wherein is revealed the kinship of logical thought with unorganized matter.”<sup>25</sup>

Bergson himself began as a mathematician and was highly influenced, both from an academic as well as a personal standpoint, by the theories of Charles Darwin on evolution, especially his best-known work, *On the Origin of the Species*, which appeared in 1859.<sup>26</sup> Bergson then read the evolutionary theories of the English sociologist Herbert Spencer as a student at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris. Spencer became highly influential for him, but Bergson soon came to realize the limitations of Spencer’s theories of social evolution since they were too largely based on scientific methodologies and did not account for continually changing living organisms. Spencer’s theories, therefore, were only appropriate for static, inert matter. Therefore, one of Bergson’s philosophical goals, which is best shown in his book *L’Évolution créatrice*, was to develop a theory in which he would simultaneously employ scientific methodologies, accommodate living beings, and confront the metaphysical aspect of evolution.

Eventually, Bergson rejected the use of scientific methodologies in philosophy. In his address at the Fourth International Congress of Philosophy in Bologna, Italy in 1911, he insisted that:

[T]he future of philosophy lay in pursuing a method quite different from that of science. Traditionally, the philosopher had followed the route of scientific analysis and had constructed systematic intellectual

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<sup>25</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. xix.

<sup>26</sup> Bergson had received a Jewish religious education, but in 1868-1878, he lost his faith after reading Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris. According to this theory, humanity shares common ancestry with modern primates and was not necessarily created by a God or gods.

representations of the world. Such rational structures are destined to failure or diminishment, he claimed, because as scientific inquiry penetrates into the same field explored by the philosopher the discrete and verifiable findings of the scientist overthrow or displace philosophical system. The future of the philosopher belongs not to intellectual analysis but to intuitional knowledge, “akin to that of the artist, and differing fundamentally from the kind of activity you get in science.”<sup>27</sup>

Bergson’s emphasis on intuition is even more important if we place it in the early twentieth-century context of the increased significance of magic as the conscious manipulation of various conceptual practices to achieve the desired result. Many scholars and artists, both past and present, have considered magic to represent the point of intersection between religion and science.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it is sometimes difficult to establish the border between magic and science, enough so that at times, the only distinctions rest with who is practicing what: magic tends to belong in the realm of popular culture, while most would consider science as the domain of the ‘intellectuals.’<sup>29</sup> Consequently, several participants of magic used this vague distinction in order to justify their practices as being legitimate scientific research, especially within a still largely positivistic environment. Thus, twentieth-century alchemists also proclaimed themselves chemists, hypnotists proclaimed themselves also psychologists, and so on.

Bergson’s attempt at achieving a philosophy that was both scientific and metaphysical also plays within the paradigm of magic as a mixture of science and

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<sup>27</sup> Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1-2.

religion. We can observe this not only in his three most famous works, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*Time and Free Will*) from 1889, *Matière et mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*) from 1896, and *L'Évolution créatrice*, but most notably in a fourth later very popular work which Bergson wrote in 1932 entitled *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*). The two sources that Bergson identified were social instinct and mystical intuition:

Central to Bergson's thesis was the idea that mystics could transcend their historical and social context and then, based on this transcendent experience, introduce a dynamic element into an otherwise static religion.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, Bergson the philosopher had an explicit interest in mysticism, which is an idea essential to magic, and all of his works led him to the conclusion that the only way to “re-enchant” the world was through it. Of course, this tenet was bound to be attractive to a composer such as Rudhyar, and although he was introduced to Bergson's ideas at a young age in France, their influence on his own work continued throughout his life, including after Rudhyar's move to America in 1916. By that time, Bergson was already a popular philosopher in the United States, mainly with the aid of William James and other artists such as Edgard Varèse who arrived in New York in 1914. Furthermore, Bergson paid a visit in 1913. The details about his visit demonstrate exactly how popular he was:

In 1913, when Bergson traveled to New York to receive an honorary degree from Columbia University and to deliver a series of lectures, automobiles

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey Hill, “Henri Bergson and Alfred Loisy: On Mysticism and the Religious Life,” in *Modernists & Mystics*, p. 106.

bound for the lecture hall crowded along Broadway (surely one of the first traffic jams in America), and inside well-dressed auditors jostled one another aside to find a seat.<sup>31</sup>

Bergson's popularity in America makes the connection between him and Rudhyar even stronger, since when the young composer arrived, he was in an intellectual environment in which his exploration of Bergson's ideas were not only accepted, but favorable. To these, Rudhyar could thus expand his knowledge with ideas from various Eastern religions and philosophies.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I have dealt with the cultural implications of magic. The early twentieth century, both in Europe and in America, was one of excitement, but also of contradictions. Although scientific advancements continued, there was a reaction against positivism and an acknowledged need for a more metaphysical and mystical world view. This was provided by several artists and intellectuals who looked to magic, and in particular to mysticism, as a means of achieving this ideal world. However, magic had greater connotations than simply the occult: magic was a way of bringing humanity back to the moral sense that spiritualism can *pro ide*; and Bergson took on that challenge by discussing philosophy in a way that included the metaphysical and was in line with most definitions of magic. Because of this, he was also very influential to Rudhyar, who used his ideas as a basis for his philosophy of the arts, including music, and who employed them also in a more practical way in his musical compositions. The next chapter will explore in detail the connection between Bergson's and Rudhyar's ideas.

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<sup>31</sup> Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens*, pp. 1-3.

## Chapter 2: Bergson and Rudhyar: Some Definitions of Concepts

Bergson's ideas about evolution were paramount for Rudhyar's ideas about art and music. Although we can see most of the concepts which Bergson discusses in *Creative Evolution* already hinted at in his three other well-known philosophical works *Time and Free Will*, *Matter and Memory* (where the ideas are developed to a lesser degree) and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (where certain ideas are developed for a different purpose), it is in *Creative Evolution* that these concepts are most clearly laid out and make their most forceful appearance. The main goal of Bergson's *Creative Evolution* was to tackle the problem of evolution from a philosophical point of view. As Leszek Kolakowski has stated, "[I]ts philosophical importance lay in the fact that it was the boldest attempt to assimilate the theory of evolution to a world view which implied a Great Mind at the steering wheel of the universe and the absolute irreducibility of the human soul to its material conditions."<sup>32</sup> In particular, Bergson devoted much effort to countering the theories of Herbert Spencer, who had gone one step further than Darwin to devise a theory of sociological evolution, as may be seen in his *Principles of Biology* of 1864.<sup>33</sup> As a young researcher, Bergson had been quite enamored not only of the conclusions of Spencer, but also of his rigorous scientific methodology to describe the

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<sup>32</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> It was Spencer who coined the famous concept "survival of the fittest." The term strongly suggests natural selection, but since Spencer extended evolution into realms of sociology and ethics, he made use of Lamarckism rather than natural selection.



process of evolution. Bergson devoted the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution* to a critique of prior philosophical systems dealing with the question of Becoming (or evolution)<sup>34</sup> by historical figures such as Aristotle, Plato, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant and Spencer, as well as a critique of the approaches of ancient and modern science. He described the significance of Spencer thus:

That the thought of the nineteenth century called for a philosophy of this kind, rescued from the arbitrary, capable of coming down to the detail of particular facts, is unquestionable. Unquestionably, also, it felt that this philosophy ought to establish itself in what we call concrete duration. The advent of the moral sciences, the progress of psychology, the growing importance of embryology among the biological sciences—all this was bound to suggest the idea of a reality which *endures* inwardly, which is duration itself. So, when a philosopher arose who announced a doctrine of evolution, in which the progress of matter toward perceptibility would be traced together with the advance of the mind toward rationality, in which the complication of correspondences between the external and the internal would be followed step by step, in which change would become the very substance of things—to him all eyes were turned. The powerful attraction that Spencerian evolutionism has exercised on contemporary thought is due to that very cause. However far Spencer may seem to be from Kant, however ignorant, indeed, he may have been of Kantianism, he felt, nevertheless, at his first contact with the biological sciences, the direction in which philosophy could continue to advance without laying itself open to the Kantian criticism.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, Bergson credits Spencer with introducing to philosophy the new discoveries and approaches of the biological sciences, psychology, and the moral sciences, which consisted of the social sciences and humanities such as history, sociology, anthropology, and economics, among others. The French philosopher's research on evolution, which

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<sup>34</sup> Evolution is the change in the inherited traits of a population of organisms through successive generations. The concept of Becoming was originated in ancient Greece by the philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, who in the sixth century BCE said that nothing in this world is constant except change or becoming. Thus, evolution and becoming are synonymous in this context because they both emphasize change.

<sup>35</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 384. Italics are in the original.

culminated in *Creative Evolution*, was initially meant to be a direct extension of Spencer's work.

However, Bergson soon realized that Spencer's conclusions were unsatisfactory. As he stated in his critique of Spencerian evolutionism:

But he had no sooner started to follow the path than he turned off short. He had promised to retrace a genesis, and, lo! he was doing something entirely different. His doctrine bore indeed the name of evolutionism; it claimed to remount and redescend the course of the universal becoming; but, in fact, it dealt neither with becoming nor with evolution.

We need not enter here into a profound examination of this philosophy. Let us say merely that *the usual device of the Spencerian method consists in reconstructing evolution with fragments of the evolved.*<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, although Bergson respected Spencer's theories and methodologies, he acknowledged that the notion of a fragmentary evolution which emerged from them did could never adequately describe the evolutionary process.

Bergson's main criticism of Spencer was that the latter's theories of evolution were better applicable to inert matter than to living organisms. Indeed, one of Bergson's main criticisms of the human mind was that it best comprehended inert matter:

We shall see that the human intellect feels at home among inanimate objects, more especially among solids, where our action finds its fulcrum and our industry its tools; that our concepts have been formed on the model of solids; that our logic is, pre-eminently, the logic of solids; that, consequently, our intellect triumphs in geometry, wherein is revealed the kinship of logical thought with unorganized matter, and where the intellect has only to follow its natural movement, after the lightest possible contact

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<sup>36</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 384-385. Italics are in the original.

with experience, in order to go from discovery to discovery, sure that experience is following behind it and will justify it invariably.<sup>37</sup>

He compared Spencer's 'illusion' to a picture that is cut up into several pieces: the fragments may be placed together again to reproduce the image, but it is not the same act as the initial act of creating the drawing or painting. Thus,

[B]y combining together the most simple results of evolution, you may imitate well or ill the most complex effects; but of neither the simple nor the complex will you have retraced the genesis, and the addition of evolved to evolved will bear no resemblance whatever to the movement of evolution.<sup>38</sup>

In addition,

He [Spencer] takes reality in its present form; he breaks it into pieces, he scatters it in fragments which he throws to the winds; then he "integrates" these fragments and "dissipates their movement." Having *imitated* the Whole by a work of mosaic, he imagines he has retraced the design of it, and made the genesis.

Is it matter that is in question? The diffused elements which he integrates into visible and tangible bodies have all the air of being the very particles of the simple bodies, which he first supposes disseminated throughout space. They are, at any rate, "material points," and consequently unvarying points, veritable little solids: as if solidity, being what is nearest and handiest to us, could be found at the very origin of materiality!<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>38</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 385.

<sup>39</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 385-386. Italics are in the original.

Thus, Bergson did not believe that Spencer's conception of evolution as blocks of progress and change was an adequate representation of the process of Becoming for living organisms. He explained the main problem of the study of evolution in the opening chapter to *Creative Evolution*:

But from this it must follow that our thought, in its purely logical form, is incapable of presenting the true nature of life, the full meaning of the evolutionary movement. Created by life, in definite circumstances, to act on definite things, how can it embrace life, of which it is only an emanation or an aspect? Deposited by the evolutionary movement in the course of its way, how can it be applied to the evolutionary movement itself?<sup>40</sup>

Bergson goes on to explain the inadequacy of the Spencerian 'block' conception of evolution:

I find, first of all, that I pass from state to state. I am warm or cold, I am merry or sad, I work or I do nothing, I look at what is around me, or I think of something else. Sensations, feelings, volitions, ideas—such are the changes into which my existence is divided and which colour it in turns. I change, then, without ceasing. But this is not saying enough. Change is far more radical than we are at first inclined to suppose.

For I speak of each of my states as if it formed a block and were a separate whole. I say indeed that I change, but the change seems to me to reside in the passage from one state to the next: of each state, taken separately, I am apt to think that it remains the same during all the time that it prevails. Nevertheless, a slight effort of attention would reveal to me that there is no feeling, no idea, no volition which is not undergoing change every moment: if a mental state ceased to vary, its duration would cease to flow.<sup>41</sup>

Bergson then provides a more concrete example:

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<sup>40</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. x.

<sup>41</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 1-2.

Let us take the most stable of internal states, the visual perception of a motionless external object. The object may remain the same, I may look at it from the same side, at the same angle, in the same light; nevertheless the vision I now have of it differs from that which I have just had, even if only because the one is an instant older than the other. My memory is there, which conveys something of the past into the present. My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing—rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow. Still more is this the case with states more deeply internal, such as sensations, feelings, desires, etc., which do not correspond, like a simple visual perception, to an unvarying external object. But it is expedient to disregard this uninterrupted change, and to notice it only when it becomes sufficient to impress a new attitude on the body, a new direction on the attention. Then, and then only, we find that our state has changed. The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.

This amounts to saying that there is no essential difference between passing from one state to another and persisting in the same state. If the state which “remains the same” is more varied than we think, on the other hand the passing from one state to another resembles, more than we imagine, a single state being prolonged; the transition is continuous.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, according to Bergson, when we perceive change, it is because the change is major enough to be perceived as a change of state. However, the reality of evolution is that changes of state are continuous, and therefore, evolution cannot be thought of as a series of blocks or fragments such as Spencer conceived it. And a continuous evolution—a creative evolution—depended upon several factors. These will now be discussed.

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<sup>42</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 2.

## **Intellect and Intuition:**

By contrast with most other philosophers and because of some of his own work in the realms of psychology and biology, Bergson focused on the workings of the human mind in understanding the process of evolution. One of the most important observations that he made in this regard was the difference between human intelligence and instinct. According to Bergson, the normal way our intelligence works is guided by needs. Consequently, the knowledge it gathers is not disinterested—it is relative knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Intelligence gathers knowledge through analysis, which Bergson defines as the act of dividing things according to specific perspectives taken. Comprehensive analytic knowledge then consists in the reconstruction or re-composition of a thing by means of synthesizing the perspectives, and “this synthesis, while helping us satisfy needs, never gives us the thing itself—it only gives us a general concept of things.”<sup>44</sup> As Kolakowski has stated, “Our intelligence is at home among solid bodies and is designed to deal with them efficiently. It is therefore naturally prone to investigate the phenomena of life in the same way that it studies inert matter. The specificity of life eludes it, whereas instinct grasps life itself directly, but is unable to search for it and to express what it ‘knows.’”<sup>45</sup>

Intuition consists of entering into the thing, rather than going around it from the outside, thus giving absolute knowledge. However, intuition also requires intellectual

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<sup>43</sup> Leonard Lawlor. “Henri Bergson,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, accessed 12 June 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Lawlor, “Henri Bergson.”

<sup>45</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, p. 55.

effort,<sup>46</sup> and when instinctive knowledge is combined with the synthesizing knowledge of the intellect, the result is complete knowledge of something. In the words of Bergson,

Indeed, if the fringe [between intellect and intuition] exists, however delicate and indistinct, it should have more importance for philosophy than the bright nucleus it surrounds. For it is its presence that enables us to affirm that the nucleus is a nucleus, that pure intellect is a contradiction, by condensation, of a more extensive power. And, just because this vague intuition is of no help in directing our action on things, which action takes place exclusively on the surface of reality, we may presume that it is to be exercised not merely on the surface, but below.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Bergson considers intuition a reversal of habitual intelligence—where human experience becomes concerned with utility and becomes an essential effort. Thus, “[i]ntelligence and instinct are two different organs which nature produced to enable living creatures to cope with their environment, both organic and inorganic.”<sup>48</sup>

The distinction between intellect and intuition is fundamental for Bergson’s concept of creative evolution. It affects the understanding of several other key concepts from his theories, such as time, space, duration, and the *élan vital*. In a similar manner, Rudhyar also distinguishes between intelligence and intuition (although he does not call it intuition *per se*), in particular in his philosophical work *Art as Release of Power*.

According to Rudhyar:

At present the race, or rather the elite of the human race, is more and more polarized in the mind. There is its point of emphasis. Its desires are, if not

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<sup>46</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism : Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, p. 55.

very intellectual or mental as yet, still strongly dominated by intellectual concepts and reactions. Human will has thus become mentalized, individualized; and as a result divorced from purely physical-biological nature with which it does not want any longer to *commune*, but which it essentially wants to *master*. The two italicized terms mark the difference, a difference of will, of emotional reaction and purpose.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, Rudhyar implies, along the same lines as Bergson, that the intellect does not provide complete knowledge of a thing—it is external, rather than internal, knowledge. In fact, Rudhyar goes so far as to say that it results in an individualized state of mind, and not a communal state of mind.

A communal sense of identity was an important notion for Rudhyar and it led to a universal sense of morality. It was also a fundamental notion for Bergson, who was convinced that in order to insure the survival of the human species, modern people needed some sort of universal religion that could help them live together without killing each other, since most modernists after the turn of the century became aware of the potential humans had for mutual destruction, and the role that religion played in it.<sup>50</sup> Also, a universal religion was seen as essential for a universal sense of morality because it would allow for the re-enchantment of the world through its potential for mystical experience. He eventually identified social instinct and mystical intuition as the two sources of morality and religion. Furthermore, he emphasized religious experience as an essential component to the universal religion that would save humanity, for Bergson

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<sup>49</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Hill, “Henri Bergson and Alfred Loisy: On Mysticism and the Religious Life,” p. 107. Bergson crystallized his ideas on religion and morality in his fourth major book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. The thoughts contained in this work eventually result in a fierce debate with the French priest and biblical scholar Alfred Loisy (1857-1940).



argued that “mystics could transcend their historical and social context and then, based on this transcendent experience, introduce a dynamic element into an otherwise static religion.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, while intellect was an asset, instinct and intuition were still the most fundamental qualities for a complete understanding of life.

Rudhyar’s philosophical and spiritual beliefs also relied on intuition rather than intelligence, but he extended his thoughts to music. As Judith Tick has stated, “[I]ike early French modernists, Rudhyar attacked Western musical practice as decadent and overintellectualized, rejecting the traditional structural forms of tonality and the techniques of counterpoint as rationalistic rather than intuitive.”<sup>52</sup> In addition, Rudhyar argued for an intuitive compositional process, which, in music, he linked to the mystic mood of a tone—Rudhyar’s theory of the symbolic content of the single tone, a concept which he took from non-Western music and in which the “mystic moment is linked to the value of spontaneity or unpredictability.”<sup>53</sup> Rudhyar further expanded and developed these ideas to fit a broader philosophical system, and they bear the stamp of Bergson’s own thoughts. For example, Rudhyar combines the intellect with analytic knowledge (Rudhyar talks about energy here), while the intuitive knowledge is linked with internal, instinctive states:

This new type of energy assumed by mental man requires a new technique of performance. This technique is based essentially upon the intellectual method developed by mathematical studies. It rests upon intellectual abstract formulas, just as the old magical technique of the sanctuaries rested upon the handling of certain magnetic forces

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<sup>51</sup> Hill, “Henri Bergson and Alfred Loisy: On Mysticism and the Religious Life,” p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept’: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 44 (1991), p. 234.

<sup>53</sup> Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept’: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930,” p. 235.

of a biological physiological nature by means of the training and development of an aspect of the human will. Now the mathematician or electrical engineer needs relatively little development of his will. What is developed is his abstract mind... The two methods lead to the development of two different faculties... Through them two different types of Energy are assumed, two different kinds of forms-of-power are built through which two different modes of power will be released.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear that both Bergson and Rudhyar distinguished between intellectual and intuitive forms of knowledge or energy, and that these two different modes were essential for a complete understanding of the state of being.

### **Space, Time and Duration:**

One of the major concerns for Bergson was the study of time and change. In fact, early in his career, he devoted an entire book, *Time and Free Will*, to the question of time and how change plays into it. Furthermore, the issue continues to play a central role in his later works, notably *Creative evolution*. As Mark Muldoon has remarked, “Bergson was the first thinker to seriously challenge the scope of science and give an acceptable summation of what science cannot do, namely, deal properly with change and time.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Mark S. Muldoon, *Tricks of Time: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self and Meaning* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), p. 67.

According to Bergson, time as it is commonly described is in reality space that has been mischaracterized.<sup>56</sup> This was derived from the Spencerian notion of time, which itself was an offshoot of the Newtonian notion of time: the result of Spencer's conclusions was that

Newtonian time was assumed to be mental time; that human mental apprehension of time was only knowable through sequence and the succession of mental states. In other words, mental relations constituting our ideas of time are the result of inner relations, by perpetual repetition, being organized into correspondence with outer relations.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Bergson's main goal was to show that space and time, as it was usually conceived, could not be juxtaposed, for space was static and time was change. The problem with Spencer's mechanical approach to time was that precisely the fact that he equated it more with space than with change, and this view resembles his notion of evolution as a fragmentary process, for space *per se* is infinitely divisible, and we can perceive an object or a living being as moving along a trajectory consisting of a collection of fragments which can vary in size, thereby rendering the state immobile.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the "confusion [that] lies at the bottom of our abstract concept of time" consists "in reducing a single, indivisible quality to a number of units in a homogeneous entity such as space, or a series

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<sup>56</sup> Kent Cleland, "Musical Transformation as a Manifestation of the Temporal Process Philosophies of Henri Bergson," Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2003, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Muldoon, *Tricks of Time: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self and Meaning*, p. 71. "Perpetual repetition" refers to the process by which relations repeat themselves exactly and forever: it is similar to Nietzsche's later teaching of the eternal return, a perpetual process by which the eternal shows its absolute development in the mirror of time, and so a perpetual repetition of the same show. Thus, it implies staticism.

<sup>58</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, p. 14.

of numbers.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, this homogeneous, spatial representation of time is symbolic of the real duration (*durée*), and not the duration itself, which has no parts or segments external to each other. No separation of this kind can be established between the present and previous states. In other words,

Once the habits of spatialization and visualization were no longer regarded as legitimate ways to describe the activity of consciousness, Bergson argued that the real sustenance of consciousness could then be grasped—namely duration (*durée*).<sup>60</sup>

Thus, we perceive real duration when we concentrate on our internal experience only, leaving the external world behind—that is, when we use our intuitive knowledge, rather than our intelligence. And when we experience time as duration in a non-spatializable way, the future completion of any action, as well as its ramifications, is unforeseeable. In the words of Bergson himself:

That is why again they agree in doing away with time. Real duration is that duration which gnaws on things, and leaves on them the mark of its tooth. If everything is in time, everything changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs. Repetition is therefore possible only in the abstract: what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect, have singled out from reality, just because our action, upon which all the effort of our intellect is directed, can move only among repetitions. Thus, concentrated on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time. It dislikes what is fluid, and solidifies everything it touches. We do not *think* real time. But we *live* it, because life transcends intellect. The feeling we have of our evolution and of the evolution the intellectual concept properly so-called an

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<sup>59</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>60</sup> Muldoon, *Tricks of Time: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self and Meaning*, p. 70.

indistinct fringe that fades off into darkness. Mechanisms and finalism agree in taking account only of the bright nucleus shining in the centre. They forget that this nucleus has been formed out of the rest by condensation, and that the whole must be used, the fluid as well as and more than the condensed, in order to grasp the inner movement of life.<sup>61</sup>

This rests at the heart of Bergson's conclusions on creative evolution. As a result, evolution, which is always creative, is intimately connected to time as duration, because time as duration is real, constantly flowing, unidirectional, and thus non-repeatable and always changing.<sup>62</sup>

### **Élan vital or Vital Impulse:**

One of Bergson's essential concepts of evolution is the *élan vital*, or vital impulse. This is the natural direction-giving tendency which all species, and even individuals, possess. The result of the vital impulse is endless struggles for change, thereby causing evolution. This tendency is a creative energy because the goal cannot be predicted, and always results in something new and different for each species, depending on the challenges that the species or individual must face.<sup>63</sup> Although some of Bergson's contemporaries and successors criticized and even attacked the concept of the vital impulse as a "verbal device lacking any explanatory value...which, as a tool for

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<sup>61</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>62</sup> Cleland, "Musical Transformation as a Manifestation of the Temporal Process Philosophies of Henri Bergson," p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, p. 57.

understanding life, leaves us in exactly the same place that we were without it,”<sup>64</sup> it is not an empty term, for it implies a kind of intentionality in the evolutionary process. As Bergson stated, “each species, each individual even, retains only a certain impetus from the universal vital impulsion and tends to use this energy in its own interest.”<sup>65</sup>

While we cannot anticipate the future result of any evolutionary movement, each species and individual nonetheless retains part of the whole from which it evolved. Thus the whole and the part are intimately connected:

But evolution has actually taken place through millions of individuals, on divergent lines, each ending at a crossing from which new paths radiate, and so on indefinitely. If our hypothesis is justified, if the essential causes working along these diverse roads are of psychological nature, they must keep something in common in spite of the divergence of their effects, as school-fellows long separated keep the same memories of boyhood. Roads may fork or by-ways be opened along which dissociated elements may evolve in an independent manner, but nevertheless it is in virtue of the primitive impetus of the whole that the movement of the parts continues. Something of the whole, therefore, must abide in the parts; and this common element will be evident to us in some way, perhaps by the presence of identical organs in very different organisms.<sup>66</sup>

Rudhyar also uses the idea of the vital impulse in his writings on art and music. For him, human will undergoes struggles and therefore acts by creating an efficient form to solve the problem posed. Thus, the human will consists of the vital impulse:

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<sup>64</sup> Kolakowski, *Bergson*, p. 58.

<sup>65</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 53.

<sup>66</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 56-57.

Whenever Man, under the stress of a desire, wills to act, he assumes power... Having assumed it, he either builds a form-of-power, or else sets into operation one which nature has endowed him with, viz. usually his body, in parts or as a whole. Having assumed the power, having set the form-of-power in operation, release of power follows. The action is *performed*; which means the will has become act (release of power) *through* a form adapted to the releasing of the special type of power considered and assumed.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Rudhyar acknowledges that life consists of a “continuous assumption, enforming and performing of power,”<sup>68</sup> which is essentially a way of describing Bergson’s theory of creative evolution, and this is something that Rudhyar recognized and acknowledges:

All organic bodies have the same function. They differ in form because the type of energy they release varies. Evolution can be defined: the continual perfecting of a form for the release of a certain type of power which it is the Will of the Species to release; which the Genius of the Species (as Bergson understands such) has assumed.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, Rudhyar calls this process of evolution Magic, since it is the conscious manipulation of form as a means of achieving a desired result. As Rudhyar conceived of magic, the desired result was the release of energy. Furthermore, his definition implies mysticism because it implies the conscious awareness of energy which the “Species” needs to release.

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<sup>67</sup> Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power*, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power*, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Rudhyar, *Art as Release of Power*, p. 2.

### **Chapter 3: Analyses of Rudhyar's Musical Works in Terms of Bergson's Philosophical Concepts**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the most important concepts in Bergson's philosophical works, and I attempted to show how some of these concepts influenced Rudhyar's own philosophical thoughts about art and music. In this chapter, I discuss how these concepts manifest themselves in Rudhyar's musical compositions. Each musical work, although exhibiting most of the Bergsonian concepts that I discussed in chapter 2, will focus on one aspect.

#### ***Granites*: An Example of Bergsonian Vital Impulse**

Rudhyar composed *Granites* in 1929 (but it was published in 1935). In many ways, this piece typifies Rudhyar's compositional style, mainly in his heavy use of dissonances and its very improvisatory manner. Most importantly, like most of Rudhyar's pieces, he entitled his works after objects or concepts that were thought to contain a special form of energy. Thus, by using a pre-existent meaning or form of energy to create a new meaning, he believed he was creating an even more efficient form of energy than the one with which he had begun, which he did by taking the pre-existent form of granite and converting it into a musical medium.

There are several reasons why the mineral of granite was attractive to Rudhyar. First, mining as well as mineralogy and geology had become important institutions in



Europe, notably in France, Germany and England, and although it was very popular as both a practical field and a literary phenomenon during the Romantic era, it continued to play an significant role in modern culture, for it was not “simply a cold dark hole in the ground,” but a mine was a “vital, pulsing place into which man descends as into his own soul for the encounter with three dimensions of human experience: history, religion, and sexuality.”<sup>70</sup>

In fact, since the late eighteenth century people looked at stones as sources of historical information, speaking of *lapides literati* and “graphic granite” in which the history of the ages was recorded. We can see this trend not only in literary works, but also in certain scientific documents. For example, Goethe attempted both in his scientific writings, which combined poetry with scientific knowledge. And although, “his ideas of artistic and natural forms were strongly integrated,”<sup>71</sup> they reveal the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cultural ideas about the mystical potential of minerals, especially granite:

Filled with these thoughts I approach you, the most ancient and worthiest monuments of time. As I stand high atop a barren peak and survey the wide expanse below, I can say to myself: “Here you stand upon ground which reaches right down into the deepest recesses of the Earth, no younger strata, no pile of alluvial world. What you tread here is not the perpetual grave of those beautiful, fruitful valleys; these peaks have never given birth to a living being and have never devoured a living being, for they are before all life and above all life.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Severine Neff, “Schoenberg and Goethe: Organicism and Analysis,” in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, eds. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 410.

<sup>72</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, ed. and trans. by Douglas Miller (New York, 1988), p. 132. This passage is taken from his essay “On Granite”. Goethe did not study mining formally (he was a

Consequently, Goethe experienced granite in a mystical way, the mineral having almost spiritual or magical powers.

There was also another aspect about minerals that fascinated both artists and scientists: the mysterious generation, or re-generation of stones.<sup>73</sup> In particular, the organic conception of minerals placed them within the Romantic ideal of organicism. Additionally, we can see parallels between certain concepts of organicism and Bergson's ideas on creative evolution. Consequently, it is no coincidence that Rudhyar used a mineral as his source of inspiration for *Granites*. From classical antiquity to the eighteenth century people believed that stones and metals grew beneath the earth in the same way that organic matter does.<sup>74</sup> There were three main theories to account for the generation of stones in the earth as most other organisms: the Aristotelean theory of celestial influences, according to which the rays of celestial bodies penetrate into the earth, causing elements to recombine to produce stones; the theory of the "petrific seed," according to which minerals generate themselves in a similar manner to plants; and the theory of "lapidifying juice," according to which the juice in the earth's crust transmutes various substances into stone.<sup>75</sup> The last theory was the basis for alchemy—the magical

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jurist by training), but he was charged with reopening the silver mines at Ilmenau in the duchy of Saxe-Weimar. There he devoted himself to both the technological and administrative aspects of the assignment, and the experience complemented his lifelong interest in geology and inspired several poems.

<sup>73</sup> In the words of Goethe, "Composed of familiar materials, formed in mysterious ways, its origins are as little to be found in fire as they are in water." See Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, p. 131.

<sup>74</sup> Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, p. 28.

<sup>75</sup> Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, pp. 29-30.

counterpart of chemistry—for it espoused the notion that minerals and metals grow and, in the process, become increasingly refined.

We can see from the preceding discussion of minerals the reasons why granite was an enticing subject matter for one of Rudhyar's works. Furthermore, we can see the similarities between the theories which people had developed to account for the generation of minerals and the concepts from Bergson's *Creative Evolution* that I discussed in chapter 2, in particular the idea of the vital impulse. The vital impulse is one of the essential characteristics of Rudhyar's style, and it is exemplified in *Granites*.

The work begins with the following musical cell:

Example 1 Opening Musical Cell from Dane Rudhyar's *Granites*, m. 1

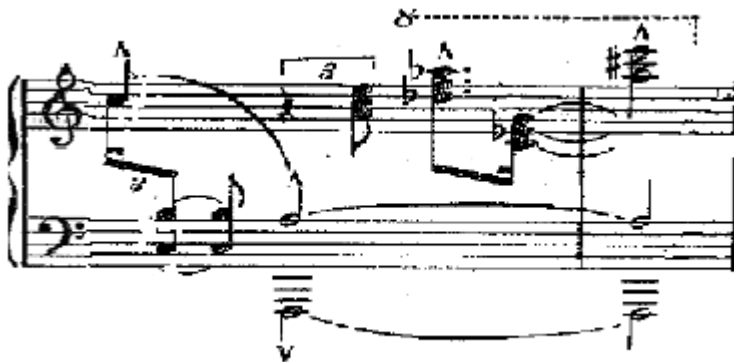


In Bergsonian terms, this musical cell, in terms of its melodic direction and intervallic content, as well as rhythmic and spatial qualities, is the vital impulse of the piece. That is, all other gestures in the work are based on this initial impulse. Since the vital impulse represents a struggle, and the final result cannot be anticipated, it signifies constant

change. Consequently, each of the iterations of the opening musical cell differs from the initial one, sometimes in the minutest detail. Example 2 (a) to (d) shows various transformations of the vital impulse of the first piece in the cycle:

Example 2 Transformations of the Vital Impulse of Dane Rudhyar's *Granites*

(a) mm. 2-3



(b) m. 4

Musical score for measure 4. The piano part is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The violin part is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The piano part features a complex texture with multiple voices, including a prominent melodic line in the right hand and a more active bass line. The violin part consists of a single melodic line with some grace notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

(c) m. 10

Musical score for measure 10. The piano part is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The violin part is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The piano part features a complex texture with multiple voices, including a prominent melodic line in the right hand and a more active bass line. The violin part consists of a single melodic line with some grace notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

(d) mm. 11-12

In Example 2 (a) Rudhyar repeats the vital impulse, but he expands the range downwards through the interval of a seventh **C-B**, and he expands the range upwards. **C-B-A** plus the **A** minor triad pulsates against **A-B-D<sup>b</sup>-E<sup>b</sup>-F**, the whole-tone scale. The aural energy is enhanced through this juxtaposition of tones. In Example 2 (b) Rudhyar shortens the time value of the **F-A** and repeats the initial gesture with added dissonant intervals and in reduced rhythmic values. He also expands the range by inverting the melodic direction of the vital impulse to an upward leap until the musical space is polarized at very high and very low registers, without filling the middle space.

In Example 2 (c) Rudhyar first increases the musical space and the resonance of the vital impulse by having it sound in three octaves over a heavy chord and by almost

doubling the rhythmic values of the descending gesture, since the lower register would naturally resonate longer than the upper. This is an exploitation of the energy of natural materials. Second, he states the descending seventh after a rest and adds dissonant harmonies, while the rhythm is only slightly altered from a triplet to a sixteenth and dotted eighth note plus eighth. In addition, an eighth-note rest follows the block chord; finally, the upward inverted gesture from Example 2 (a) is altered rhythmically, while the block chord is held for double its length. Then in Example 2 (d), Rudhyar plays with the musical space, exploration both high and low registers, but ultimately finishing with the lower register and a bare texture of a tritone. In addition, although this is the end of this movement, the vital impulse is not reiterated using the same pitches as in the opening, even though the melodic direction of the gesture links it back to the opening.

Consequently, as we can see from only the few short excerpts from Example 2 (a)-(d), Bergson's concept of the vital impulse is a strong factor in the piece. The motive, in all its iterations, is consistently altered, be it through pitches, intervals, rhythm, or register. Another aspect which is characteristic of Bergson's concept of the vital impulse in Rudhyar's *Granites* is the unpredictability of the transformations of the musical cell, and consequently, the result of the whole piece. A simple case in point is Example 2 (d), in which the melodic interval of the vital impulse is transformed from a seventh to a tritone. However, the form of the piece is also unpredictable as a result of these continuous changes and the continuous unfolding, or evolution of the piece. The form of the piece is most clearly seen in the spatial registers of the *Granites*. The whole of the work and its component parts, such as phrases, are shaped through an expansion of the texture, often emphasizing the outer registers and omitting the middle one, followed by a

section in which the middle register is exploited, and finally another section that expands the texture even further than the first section. Rudhyar used this process to shape the so-called unpredictable form. Furthermore, the form of the *Granites* continues throughout all of the movements, so that the whole work unfolds through musical space.

### ***First Pentagrams (The Summons): An Example of Bergsonian Duration***

We can interpret the rhythmic and metric organization of Rudhyar's musical compositions as exemplifying the Bergsonian concept of duration. In fact, this is one of the most characteristic features of Rudhyar's musical style. We will recall that, according to Bergson, space and time were frequently misunderstood and confused, and that properly said, space was static and time was change. Space would convey a fragmentary and sequential form of evolution, while time would equal a continuous process of evolution. We can translate this into musical terms: a static, fragmentary and sequential form of musical time would be highly metrical, while musical time in terms of Bergsonian duration would be so rhythmically fluid that we might perceive it as having no meter at all.

Rudhyar acknowledged the concept of Bergsonian duration in his works. In fact, he was preoccupied with expressing music in terms of duration. He admitted to the difficulty of fitting the musical flow of time into a medium that was "a straightjacket of rigidly defined measures with their strong and weak beats."<sup>76</sup> However, Rudhyar manages to evoke the Bergsonian notion of duration through the use of unconventional metric signatures and by masking the hierarchical relationships of the rhythmic values

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<sup>76</sup> Ertan, *Dane Rudhyar: His Music, Thought and Art*, p. 74.



within the measure. We can see this clearly in his work, *First Pentagrams (The Summons)*.

Rudhyar composed *First Pentagrams (The Summons)* in 1974, and although it is one of his later works, Bergson's philosophical thoughts are still prominent influences on the style of his musical compositions. *First Pentagrams (The Summons)* is symptomatic of Rudhyar's work in the field of astrology, for which he was very well-known during this time in his career. The astrological basis for this work cannot be denied. A pentagram is a cycle. It is a five-petaled star, which first originated from the observations of Venus by ancient astronomers. Therefore, it was once associated with the worship of the goddess Venus, who was the bringer of inner light and knowledge. The five petals themselves can either symbolize the five planets of Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Saturn and Venus (the queen of heaven); or they can symbolize the elements of water, earth, air and spirit. When viewed from Earth, the successive inferior conjunctions of Venus plot a nearly perfect pentagram shape around the zodiac every eight years.

Rudhyar composed the *First Pentagrams (The Summons)* as five short piano works, each of which represents one of the five petals of the pentagram. In each of these five short movements, he invokes the Bergsonian concept of duration, as shown in Example 3:

Example 3 Bergsonian Duration in Dane Rudhyar's *First Pentagrams (The Summons)*, "Surging," mm. 1-4

**Surging**

As we can see from Example 3, Rudhyar created metric signatures with added half beats, and the metric changes occur without any perceptible pattern. The piece begins with a  $5/4^{1/2}$  time signature, followed by  $2/4^{1/2}$ ,  $5/4^{1/2}$ ,  $3/4$ ,  $5/4^{1/2}$  and  $4/4^{1/2}$ . The shifts between the various metric signatures with added half beats and complex surface rhythmic activity take away the rigidity of metric accents. As Rudhyar stated in his preface to the *First Pentagrams (The Summons)*,

I have spoken of it as a “music of speech” to differentiate its substance from that of classical music (suites, sonatas, symphonies) which originally came from the dance and thus features even rhythms, rigid developmental patterns and repetitive statements. If the score contains bars, these are merely for the sake of convenience. No strong or weak beats are implied. The flow of

music in most instances should have the freedom—yet the consistency and directiveness—of the beautiful recitation of a poem.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, Rudhyar avoided exact repetition of thematic and rhythmic modules and strove for metric freedom in the *First Pentagram (The Summons)* as a means of avoiding a static sense of time—by promoting continuous change and fluidity, he was composing along the lines of Bergson’s concept of duration.

In addition, the Bergsonian notion of duration fit well with Rudhyar’s work in astrology, for it was compatible—and even favorable—to his ideas on cycles and cyclic time, and consequently, the title of the work, which represents the cyclic patterning of the pentagram, acquires greater significance in light of the composer’s philosophical and spiritual beliefs. I have already discussed the meaning of the pentagram in astrology. But a better understanding of Rudhyar’s concept of cycles will help us better see its correlations with Bergson’s notion of continuous time or duration.

Rudhyar defines astrology in this way:

Astrology can be defined as a technique for the study of life-cycles. Its main purpose [is establishing] the existence of regular patterns in the sequence of events constituting man’s inner and outer experience; then, to use the knowledge of these experiences... Indeed the study of cycles—that is, of periodical activities in nature, human and otherwise—is the root of all significant knowledge, be it scientific or philosophical. And the study of cycles is a study of Time.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *First Pentagram and Second Pentagram* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 1.

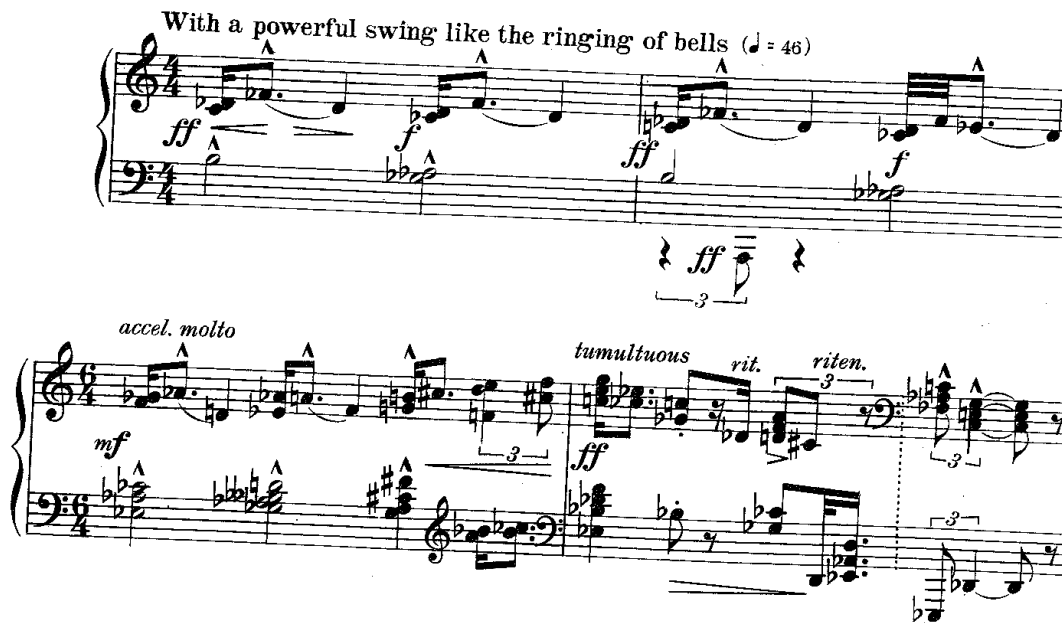
<sup>78</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Personality; A Re-formulation of Astrological Concepts and Ideals, in Terms of Contemporary Psychology and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), p. 54.

Rudhyar speaks of two phases within each cycle. The first half of any cycle is called involutory. This is when a new tone sounds, and while it starts out as formless, a form soon emerges until it reaches a culmination at the halfway point, at which point the motives have expanded and the musical space has reached its most widely-spread out point. It is a form-building process, or in other words, the form is in a process of becoming. At the midway mark, the form becomes either evolutionary or devolutionary. This depends largely on whether or not the creation of form was successful. When an evolutionary path is taken, growth, movement, and development of meaning occurs; when a devolutionary path is taken, exact repetition is accompanied by stasis and disintegration of form. The quality of tone of the next cycle depends on the success of the previous cycle. Rudhyar describes the movement of one cycle into the next in an evolutionary cycle as a spiral—as it comes back to its point of departure, it crosses it, but does not touch it—it has evolved and continues to evolve. The devolutionary cycle, however, is described as a circle—it comes back to its exact point of departure, unchanged. Bergson’s notion of duration is at work in Rudhyar’s ideas of cycles in that continuous change and flow of time is advocated.

The first movement of *First Pentagram (The Summons)*, entitled “The Call,” is exemplary of both Bergsonian duration and Rudhyar’s concept of cycles. It contains many of the elements of continuous flow such as changing and irregular metric signatures. The opening begins with a short two-beat rhythmic and melodic cell—the vital impulse of the piece—that employs Rudhyar’s principle of “cumulative

resonances,”<sup>79</sup> which allows for the piling up of seconds and other intervals traditionally considered dissonant. The opening is shown in Example 4:

Example 4 Opening of Dane Rudhyar’s *First Pentagram (The Summons)*, “The Call,”  
m. 1-4



Each of the repetitions of the vital impulse is varied in some way—much as in *Granites*. Rudhyar’s concept of life cycles appears at the midway point of the piece at m. 6, whereby, after a development of the initial motive into a virtually unrecognizable state, it returns, as shown in Example 5:

<sup>79</sup> Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, p. 104.

Example 5 Midway Point of Dane Rudhyar's *First Pentagram (The Summons)*, "The Call," mm. 5-14

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 5-8) begins with a piano introduction in 4/4 time, marked *ff*. The right hand (R.H.) plays a melodic line with accents and slurs, while the left hand (L.H.) provides a harmonic accompaniment. Dynamics range from *ff* to *f*. The second system (measures 9-14) continues the piece, marked *mf* at the start. It includes markings for *accel. molto*, *riten.*, and *rit.*. Dynamics range from *f* to *ff*. The third system (measures 15-18) is marked *Tempo primo* and *Largo*. It features a *rit.* marking and dynamics ranging from *fff* to *fff*. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

The return of the initial motive is not without change. While the first section was what may be called the involuntary stage of the cycle, in which creation of form takes place,

the midway point represents the evolutionary stage of the cycle, in which meaning is acquired and energy is released. Rudhyar makes the evolutionary process of the cycle, in which inexact repetition and continuous growth and movement persists, quite obvious by the continuously expanding registral and textural space. The work finally achieves its fundamental goal of **D** in the bass in m. 5 of Example 5, which is also brought into greater relief as the first *fortissimo* chord in the piece, and the triple-*forte* in m. 10 is the moment at which the registral space is the widest. Finally, the cycle returns to its point of departure through the interval of a minor second, **G#-A** in the right hand, while it shows the changes it has undergone by including the **D**, as opposed to the more prominent **D<sup>b</sup>** of the opening. Rudhyar's application of Bergsonian duration to life cycles is fully realized musically in "The Call," producing the spiral shape of evolutionary cycles.

### **Rudhyar's *Paeans* and Aaron Copland: A Disagreement Between Two Composers**

Some scholars have noted the similarities between Rudhyar's works and Aaron Copland's *Piano Variations*, but the relationship between the two pieces has been little explored. Carol Oja has acknowledged a connection between Rudhyar and Copland. She states: "One of the most surprising cases is Aaron Copland's *Piano Variations* of 1930, which shares melodic gestures with one of Rudhyar's *Granites* and conveys a similar spacious sense of authority."<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Oja provides the following description, which I cite in its entirety:

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<sup>80</sup> Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, p. 110.

Also intriguing are the potential connections between the *Piano Variations* of Copland and *Granites* by Dane Rudhyar. While Rudhyar fancied a thickness of texture alien to Copland's ear, he produced a body of piano music notable for epic statement and angular gestures. Over the course of the 1920s, Rudhyar's thick masses of sound were pared down a bit, and by the time of *Granites*, composed in August of 1929 in Carmel, California, and performed (perhaps premiered) by Rudhyar at a League of Composers concert in New York on 2 February 1930, they had become more linear. The League concert came just as Copland began immersing himself in the *Variations* (recall that he had moved to Bedford in January for a secluded stint). I do not know whether or not he attended Rudhyar's premiere. But the opening of *Granites* has a similar enough conception to the *Piano Variations* to warrant attention. Both employ a strong attack, singling out individual notes, and both have a similar melodic and rhythmic profile to their opening gestures. According to sketches for Copland's theme, he had already conceived of it before Rudhyar's *Granites* was performed at the League; the basic idea was his own. But the shaping of it—gesturally, rhythmically, spatially—merits comparison to Rudhyar.

The works intersect again at their conclusions. After an ecstatic buildup that was typical for Rudhyar, *Granites* culminates in a descending three-note motive, drawn from the opening, which is punched out before a definitive concluding chord. Copland, too, returns to the opening gesture—this time with only three notes, yielding a literal reduction of what had occurred at the opening. Then he finishes with what seems his own tensile version of a Rudhyaresque conclusion: lots of big sounds spanning at the breadth of the keyboard, “surging” to a fierce resonance. Copland certainly knew Rudhyar's earlier works, especially *Three Paeans*, which was performed on a Copland-Sessions concert in May 1928. In other words, there had been time for the grandiloquence of Rudhyar to settle in.<sup>81</sup>

However, Rudhyar's *Three Paeans* appears to have had a greater influence than Oja implies. In 1929, Aaron Copland wrote a letter to Roger Sessions, in which he mentions that he heard the pianist Richard Buhlig perform nine pieces by Rudhyar, including *Three Paeans*.<sup>82</sup> Thus, when Copland published his *Piano Variations* in 1930, Rudhyar had already composed the *Three Paeans* (1927) as well as the *Granites* (1929). The use of

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<sup>81</sup> Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, p. 250.

<sup>82</sup> Aaron Copland. Copland to Roger Sessions, 1929. (Aaron Copland Collection, Box-Folder 262/17. Music Division, Library of Congress).



musical space in the pieces of both composers is indeed one of the features with the greatest similarities. In addition, as stated by Oja, melodic angularity and dissonance are also prominent features. Although we might say that Copland was influenced by Rudhyar, I find it unlikely that the opposite was true, scholars believe that Rudhyar did not agree with Copland's *Piano Variations*.<sup>83</sup> The reasons for this are unclear, but I think that they reside with the aesthetics of the *Piano Variations* and may be understood in terms of Bergson's concept of duration. In Copland's *Piano Variations*, there is an opening motive, but this is not really a vital impulse, since Bergson was not talking about music or a compositional technique and Copland did not use Bergsonian concepts in his aesthetics. However, one of the marking characteristics of Copland's *Piano Variations* is its rigidity of rhythm—even though he does employ changes of metric signatures. With Copland's work, we always perceive the strong and weak beats, while with Rudhyar's *Three Paeans*, *Granites* (as well as the later *First Pentagram (The Summons)*), we never perceive this. Consequently, we can say that Rudhyar adheres to the Bergsonian principle of duration, while Copland's *Piano Variations* exhibits a more static, rigid concept of time.

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<sup>83</sup> Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999).

## Conclusions

Dane Rudhyar was a complex and fascinating figure for the history of American music and philosophy of art. While his music was usually misunderstood because of the high levels of dissonance and changing textures, and he was criticized for having taken a “passionately articulated antiformalist stance,”<sup>84</sup> a study of his philosophical influences clarifies some of his compositional choices. In particular, a very early influence was that of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose ideas about creative evolution, intuition and intelligence, duration and vital impulse permeate the writings and musical compositions of Rudhyar. Once we look at his music from the standpoint of Bergson’s philosophies, we can perceive his compositions as unfolding continuously and fluidly in a creative manner, rather than in the haphazard way described by some of Rudhyar’s contemporaries. In addition, when we examine both Rudhyar and Bergson in the twentieth-century context of magic, both of these figures begin to acquire even greater significance.

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<sup>84</sup> Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*, p. 98.

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