

## Julian Ochorowicz and His Contribution to Psychical Research<sup>8</sup>

Zofia Weaver

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to present the contribution of Julian Ochorowicz to the field of psychical research. From early youth Ochorowicz was interested in psychology, particularly in magnetism, hypnotism and mental suggestion, and his experience in these areas influenced his theoretical approach to the subject. His passionate belief that the essence of true science had to be to establish facts before forming conclusions led him to investigate a number of mediums, including Eusapia Palladino and Stanisława Tomczyk.

**Keywords:** hypnotism, hypnosis, animal magnetism, mediumship, suggestion

### The Man and his Times

Julian Leopold Ochorowicz (1850-1917) was a passionate enthusiast of science, inventor, researcher, therapist, philosopher, and writer. He made important contributions in all of these areas, but the very breadth of his interests was perhaps a limitation on what he achieved in each of them. Although known in the West mainly for his publications in French, much if not most of his multifaceted work was carried out in Poland (or, rather, the part of Poland which had been annexed by Russia), where he was born and where he grew up. Having started out by studying the humanities, he graduated in natural sciences from Warsaw University (1872), obtained his doctorate at the University of Leipzig (1874), and his next degree, that of *privat dozent* in the areas of psychology and philosophy of nature, at Lviv (1875). His early works included a dissertation on positivist philosophy, and he became well known as one of the leaders of the positivist movement in Poland, his writings resonating greatly with the younger generation (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1971; Krajewski, 1978; Stachowski, in Ochorowicz, 1996).



Much of the discussion of positivist philosophy in Poland of that time concentrated on its social aspect, and Ochorowicz was very much a social reformer and public activist throughout his life. However, it was the positivist stance on science and empiricism that had the greatest influence on him, becoming the guiding principle in all his research. He regarded science as having no limits and as being the highest value in itself; empiricism, establishing the facts and laws of nature, was the only way forward, without mysticism or idealism of any kind. One of the first popularizers of Darwin's theory, he was always de-

<sup>8</sup> Address correspondence to: [zofiewe@ntlworld.com](mailto:zofiewe@ntlworld.com)

terminated to go wherever the facts as he saw them might lead. It was this that led him to champion the cause of psychical research, regardless of the cost to his chances of an academic career. He was also an enthusiastic experimenter in new technologies, and access to the physics laboratory when lecturing at Lviv enabled him to test for himself such claims as the possibility of sending speech over a distance. His lively interest in scientific developments generally, and examining ideas that he had originally judged impossible, led him to the conclusion that “Impossible is only  $2 \times 2 = 5$ ,” while the “laws of nature” had to be constantly re-examined in light of new facts (Ochorowicz 1913/2018a, pp. 107-109)

## Psychology and Other Interests

His main interest, and main object of study, was psychology as an empirical science, with particular emphasis on what is now described as altered states of consciousness and how they could be induced. The prospects for pursuing such interests in Poland were limited, but France offered a much more welcoming environment.

It is easy to forget that during the 1870s and 1880s, when Ochorowicz was starting out, even in France the subject of psychology was little known, often regarded as a hobby for philosophers and doctors (Ochorowicz, 1916, p. 4), met with hostility in serious scientific circles, and the exploration of human psyche was in its early stages. Psychology was taught as an aspect of philosophy, dealing with concepts and general views. While still a student in Warsaw, Ochorowicz challenged that approach in a prize-winning essay *Jak należy badać duszę? Czyli o metodzie badań psychologicznych* [How to investigate the soul? On the method of psychological research], self-published in 1869 (Ochorowicz, 1869). In it, he reviewed the existing methods in psychology and their value to science, proposed a classification of methodology appropriate to the subject, and provided a detailed analysis of possible empirical approaches to external and internal observation, as well as the social aspect of human behavior.

He might have won the first prize, but was only given a silver medal, having upset some of the judges with his criticisms, and this failure to benefit from his achievements dogged him throughout his career in Poland. He attracted controversy, not only because of his uncompromising confidence in his judgment but above all because of his passionate interest in hypnotism and magnetism. He began exploring these subjects while still at school, sometimes by experimenting with hypnosis on other schoolboys (Ochorowicz, 1876), and wrote papers about them (Ochorowicz, 1890); however, the general opinion in Poland tended to regard hypnotic experiments as charlatanry. This affected his chances of establishing an academic career, to the point that even the grant he was entitled to when he went to Paris to study was unexpectedly withdrawn. Because of this Ochorowicz turned to his earlier experiments and, working with a friend from his student days, produced, among other things, commercially successful improved versions of telephone and microphone.

In Paris he was among people with similar interests and was befriended by, among others, Théodule Ribot, Charles Richet, and Jean-Martin Charcot. Having worked with Charcot and August and Jules Voisin during 1880-882, experimenting with hypnosis on “hysterical” patients at the Salpêtrière Hospital, Ochorowicz came to the conclusion that the hypnotic state was neither pathological (the view of the Salpêtrière school), nor just due to suggestion (the view of the Nancy school of Auguste Liébeault

and Hypolyte Bernheim), but represented an anomalous state of consciousness. His interpretation of it was that people sensitive to hypnosis had a tendency to monoideism – a narrowing of the field of awareness.

This period of experimentation was followed by the publication of one of his most important works, *De la Suggestion Mentale*, with an introduction by Charles Richet, in 1887. It provided extensive coverage of experiments with somnambulistic subjects by Ochorowicz, Pierre Janet, and others, as well as the main ideas and theories relating to hypnotism, mental suggestion and magnetism, extending to thought-transference, clairvoyance, and table-turning. In the preface to the book, Richet praised it for “the resolute, unflagging determination to weigh all objections, to put away all causes of bad faith, whether conscious or unconscious, to take note of the difficulties of the problem, sometimes magnifying them, and not to be content until every possible cause of illusion has been removed” (Richet, 1887/1891, p.5) While not absolute evidential, Richet regarded the experimental evidence presented by Ochorowicz as clearly demonstrating correlations between the thoughts of individuals that could not be regarded as due to chance. He was less impressed by the theories, which he did not regard as of great importance. And he went on to say, “And yet I do not think that this book, strong as it is in proofs, will convince all, or even many persons. I know too well ... how difficult it is to believe what we have seen when it does not accord with the general tenor of our thoughts, with the commonplaces that underlie all our knowledge” (Richet, 1887/1891, p. 6)

Much of Ochorowicz's work that followed bears out Richet's prediction as to the inability to convince many of the truth of his findings. His efforts to make psychology a proper science bore fruit, both in the increasing number of platforms for sharing ideas both in France and Poland, and in the recognition of psychology in Poland as an essential part of medical studies (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1971; Ochorowicz, 1996). However, the particular aspects of psychology that were his main interests throughout his life, and the theories to which they led, did not resonate with the academic milieu. He qualified in medicine and established a successful practice as a therapist first in Paris and then in Warsaw, but his ideas on hypnotism, the subconscious, and later on mediumship, which he presented in various papers, were largely ignored.

Ochorowicz's ideas on psychology, mediumship, and psychical research, are inextricably bound with his research into hypnotism and mesmerism/magnetism (Zielinski, 1968). In its early stages, hypnotism involved varying usage of terms denoting the magnetic state and the state of hypnosis (such as “magnetic sleep,” “somnambulism,” “hypnotic sleep”), as well as overlapping techniques of inducing an altered state by monotonous sensory stimulation, verbal suggestion, and mesmeric passes (Gauld, 1995 pp. xvi, 430). Both in his earlier and later writings, Ochorowicz insisted that there was a clear difference between hypnotism and mesmerism/magnetism: hypnotism was a state in which sensitive subjects were open to suggestion regardless of the person making it, while magnetism involved the influence of one organism on another, the individuality of the magnetist being of prime importance (Ochorowicz, 1917, pp. 209-210). It was also vital that a “rapport” should exist between the magnetist and the subject, established over a period of sessions and requiring “sustained concentration of thought” on the part of the magnetist (Ochorowicz, 1891, p. 285).

Ochorowicz's quite dogmatic claims illustrate the problem affecting much of the research of that time. To quote Gauld again: "The mesmerists are not quite so easily dismissed or assimilated to certain stereotypes as has commonly been supposed. Their most conspicuous failing was one that they shared with a very large proportion of the hypnotists who followed in their footsteps in the second half of the nineteenth century – an almost complete failure to appreciate the powerful workings of "experimenter effect" and "doctrinal compliance" upon mesmerized or hypnotized subjects, and to grasp the methods of controlled experimentation which are necessary to offset these dangers" (Gauld, 1995, pp. 266-7). These failings are clearly apparent in the evidence that Ochorowicz provides of the kinds, degrees and proofs of influence on hypnotized/ mesmerized patients in his *Mental Suggestion*, often involving clairvoyance and what was then described as thought transference.

Yet , while assured of the veracity of his experimental results, Ochorowicz was not unaware of the problem: "We believe ourselves to be candid observers, while we are unconsciously suggesting the phenomenon that is to be verified. Thus it is that the somnambulant subjects of the 'fluidist' magnetizer see the fluid emanating from his finger-tips, while the somnambules of the hypnotizer see nothing, and those of the spiritist discover spirits everywhere, the same being invisible for the somnambules of the materialist." In this way the unconscious played tricks on both the subject and the experimenter (Ochorowicz 1891, pp.36, 39).

### **Theoretical Contributions to Psychical Research**

Even in his earliest writings, Ochorowicz hypothesized that the subconscious was greater than the conscious (Ochorowicz, 1876). Gradually he came to the conclusion that the subconscious played a crucial role in creating and maintaining one's sense of identity, and his studies of the development of "multiple personalities" led him to see this aspect of the subconscious as closely involved in mediumistic phenomena. His work with mediums played a large part in forming his views. In his later publications he proposed that awareness was a stream of impressions, while the subconscious had a constant, immutable element in the features of a person's character, will and strivings; a wider, more knowledgeable psyche, not accessible normally but manifesting in dreams and in somnambulism (Ochorowicz, 1916, pp. 328-336 ).

Ochorowicz became interested in mediumship after reading Allan Kardec's *Le Livre des Esprits* and *Le Livre des Mediums* while on holiday in the summer of 1869 (Ochorowicz, 1876, pp.51-52). In the 1850s the table-tipping craze also spread to Poland and Ochorowicz arranged a table-tipping session. He was amazed to find that it worked, often because of unconscious muscle movements, and was driven to explore further. From the beginning, he included mediumistic phenomena in his research program, rejecting spiritualism but interpreting them as a momentary transfer of nervous-muscular energy beyond the organism and into the environment under the influence of the imagination when the medium was in a monoideistic state. To describe this phenomenon he used the term "ideoplasty", and first presented it to the Biological Society in Paris in 1884 (Ochorowicz, 1916, pp. 195-205). The term had been used by Durand de Gros, a French physiologist researching the influence of thought on human organism,

in the sense of the “art of suggesting” (Ochorowicz, 1916, p. 274), but Ochorowicz used it to refer to physiological realization of a given impression, which could be brought about by suggestion as well as autosuggestion; the nature of ideoplasty was revealed most fully by hypnotism. What made ideoplasty possible was the “law of reversibility,” a special form of the general law of nature. In simple terms, “If the effect A can be produced by the cause B, then, inversely, the effect B can be produced by the cause A.” Thus mechanical work produces heat and heat can produce mechanical work; and, giving an example of something then only recently discovered, “the mechanical action of speech ... may reproduce speech in Edison’s phonograph” (Ochorowicz 1891, p. 333). The law of reversibility was part of the attempt to arrive at a “theory of everything,” with all the laws of nature reducible to a few. The main ontological concept, that of force or energy, was not unique to Ochorowicz, but he may have been unique in his determination to capture its essence by extending concepts from material, natural sciences far beyond their usual scope. This universal energy could not be destroyed, only transformed, and thought was a manifestation of that one force, the “motion of the ether” (Ochorowicz, 1891, pp. 332-336; Stachelski, 2013).

The person was thus a kind of energy machine, in which transformation of energy keeps taking place; there is the purely organic transformation in cells and tissues, but there is also the transformation of organic, or physical, energy, into the spiritual one. For Ochorowicz, this was the most important aspect of investigating mediumship; it meant taking the first steps in a new science which would bring revolutionary developments to psychology in general and throw light on the question of self and personality. The concept of ideoplasty was to alter the concept of reality, acting as a bridge between psychology and physiology by demonstrating physiological realization of the imagination. As an example, he quotes witnessing the formation of “artificial stigmata,” when the letter V, imagined by a hypnotized subject as being scratched on his forearm, appears as if scratched on the flesh with a pin (Ochorowicz 1916, p. 201; 1913/2018a, p. 139).

Ochorowicz’s ideas evolved over time, and since ether as the medium filling the atmosphere was part of the then current scientific model, he incorporated it into his hypotheses: “According to today’s concepts, the various states of ether may only be in the form of changes in density—but the changes in its density may also explain everything: the motion of heavy bodies, changes in weight, light effects, and the formation of etheric haze that develops into appropriate bodily forms with an unstable existence” (Ochorowicz 1913/2018a, p. 142). He thus postulated an etheric body that could at times separate from the tactile body. As an example of the etheric shape supporting the form of the body he quoted people feeling pain in an amputated limb (Ochorowicz, 1913/2018a, p. 159).

In his early writings Ochorowicz expressed the opinion that the question of immortality was beyond being solvable in the then current state of science. In his later writings he changed his mind about the possibility of experimental research into life after death, but thought it would be very difficult to provide scientific evidence in view of how much happened in the unconscious. Mediums sometimes created new personalities, while human personalities were collections of various contradictions, with the mediums’ “collections” connected more loosely and insufficiently integrated, and participants in séances making their own unconscious contributions (Ochorowicz, 1916, pp.193-6).

A practical invention for which Ochorowicz became well-known, and on which he relied to a great extent, was the hypnoscope, an instrument designed to reveal people's susceptibility to hypnosis when they placed a finger inside a cylindrical magnet, which was supposed to produce sensations indicative of their hypnotizability. Ochorowicz claimed to have successfully tested it on hundreds of individuals; however, when the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* reprinted his article on it from *The English Mechanic* it added what seems like a fair editorial comment that the generalizations were "somewhat hasty", and insufficient effort had been made "to preclude the effect of the imagination, due to expectant attention" (Ochorowicz, 1885, p. 282). A well-grounded criticism also came from Frank Podmore's review of *De la Suggestion Mentale* in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. Podmore complained that Ochorowicz's "parental partiality for that rather dubious little toy, the hypnoscope" prevented him from experimenting with the wider field of people who did not respond to the device and led him to make sweeping generalizations. (Podmore, 1886-1887, p. 566) The hypnoscope, after a flurry of interest, passed into history.

### Experiments in Mediumship

Although aspects of Ochorowicz's work on what might be described as "depth psychology" were gradually becoming accepted in Poland as part of mainstream scholarship, his experiments in physical mediumship exploded in controversy and brought him increasing isolation in the academic circles and in the popular press in his homeland. Yet that very controversy confirms the veracity of Ochorowicz's account of his experiments with Eusapia Palladino, which took place in Warsaw from November 1893 to December 1894 (Ochorowicz, 1913/2018a, 1913/2018b). These experiments produced a stream of detailed accounts in the press, from a variety of witnesses who were numerous, articulate, vocal, and often neutral in their beliefs. As a consequence, we have detailed contemporary corroboration, analysis, and discussion of what happened in the sittings (Stachelski, 2013, pp. 81-233).

Ochorowicz first met Palladino in Rome in May 1893, and his account of the experiments there goes some way towards explaining why Palladino (probably like many of his successfully treated patients) responded so willingly to the attention of the figure of friendly authority he projected; these accounts, as well as the ones relating to the Warsaw sittings, also give us a unique insight into Ochorowicz's personality as an experimenter. We get detailed observations on the Palladino phenomena, the controls and the ingenious devices used, discussions of the question of conscious and unconscious fraud, and ideas for creating the best séance conditions. Although written at the time of the experiments, Ochorowicz did not publish these accounts until 1913 because of the general hostility at the time, even to the fact that the experiments took place at all (Ochorowicz 1913/2018a, 1913/2018b). The popular press focused mainly on making jokes about Palladino, assuming her to be a greedy fraud who managed to fool naïve academics (Olkusz, 2012). Even though in 1894 a committee formed by persons who attended the sittings came to the conclusion that hallucination or conjuring could not explain the phenomena, which needed a proper scientific investigation, the hostile opinion-shapers prevailed whether they attended the sittings or not. The decisive voice came from Napoleon Cybulski, an eminent physiologist, who did not attend any of the sittings, but was hostile to Ochorowicz and the idea of hypnotism, and dismissed mediumship research as unscientific and a waste of time (Stachelski, 2013, pp. 125-140).

The other notable medium investigated by Ochorowicz was Stanisława (Stasia) Tomczyk. The Tomczyk phenomena are more complex than those produced by Palladino, and so is the relationship between the medium and the experimenter. Stasia Tomczyk was a young woman whose mediumistic powers became apparent after she suffered the shock of being imprisoned in 1905. She came to live at Ochorowicz's house in 1909 (by that time he had moved from Warsaw to Wisła, a resort in the south of Poland), as his patient and his medium. There were spontaneous phenomena of the poltergeist type and various experiments involving the movement of objects, but the new and spectacular phenomena produced by Tomczyk included levitation of small objects without touching them, and visual imprints of mediumistic energy on photographic plates. On October 30, 1909, Tomczyk gave a public demonstration of her ability to levitate objects to a specially formed commission at a research institute in Warsaw; earlier in the same month Ochorowicz presented a paper on his discovery of two kinds of mediumistic rays produced by Tomczyk (rigid rays and Xx rays) at the First Congress of Polish Neurologists, Psychiatrists and Psychologists Institute. Both events inevitably produced a great deal of controversy, with the predictable dismissal of the reported phenomena as tricks played by conjuring mediums on naïve researchers. Yet the public demonstration of levitation given by Tomczyk was judged to preclude fraud (as were the experiments carried out with her in Paris by Flournoy earlier that year). Another commission, of experts in photography, examined the negatives presented by Ochorowicz that showed levitations of objects, and came to the conclusion that they were originals not subjected to any manipulation (Ochorowicz 1913, Stachelski, 2013, pp. 209-219).

Both the phenomena regarded as genuine, and the many attempts at cheating produced during the Tomczyk séances, were supposed to be the work of a "fluidic personification" called "Little Stasia." According to Tomczyk, this was a much smaller double of herself (Ochorowicz 1909, p. 3), capable of various feats, which included becoming a thin and elongated vapor (Ochorowicz 1909, p. 47). "Little Stasia" was playful and mischievous, had a pronounced personality of her own, was consulted on the nature of the phenomena, and is altogether a much more puzzling phenomenon than Palladino's "control," John King, judged to be the creation of Palladino's unconscious, also influenced by the sitters (Ochorowicz 1913/2018a, b). The difficulty of deciding what was illusion and what was reality in the experiments with Tomczyk can be exemplified by Ochorowicz's discussion of the presence or otherwise of a thread between the medium's hands when lifting objects. The thread seemed to become thinner and vanish as the hands were pulled apart. Ochorowicz interpreted this as the presence of a mediumistic thread, i.e., the idea of a thread producing the phantom thread from the ether, and argued that real mediumistic phenomena could imitate the fake mediumistic ones (Ochorowicz 1909, pp. 68-70).

From 1909 until 1912, *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* regularly carried detailed reports of Ochorowicz's experiments with Tomczyk, descriptions of the two kinds of rays he claimed to have discovered, and photographs of the "fluidic" phenomena produced. The issue for 1912 carried the article *Les mains fluidiques et la photographie de la pensée*, which included photographs of fluidic hands in various degrees of materializations and in various degrees of deformation, and examples of thoughtography in the form of photographs of a full moon (Ochorowicz, 1912). Some of the criticisms of these reports pointed to Ochorowicz being the only witness to the experiments and the medium, or her invisible "double," too much in control of them, judging them to be fatal flaws (Rosenbusch, in Schrenck-Notzing, 1926). Evidence from other witnesses was quoted in defense of Ochorowicz (Oes-

terreich, in Schrenck-Notzing, 1926), but the issues surrounding these accounts, as well as their possible implications, still await a comprehensive examination by contemporary researchers.

### Summing Up

The mainstream view on the assumption that mediumistic phenomena are impossible often implies that Ochorowicz's principle of pursuing facts led him into the blind alley of being duped by fraud (Stachowski, Introduction, in Ochorowicz, 1916/1996, p. 22). To anyone familiar with Palladino's story who reads closely Ochorowicz's account of his dealings with her in his *Mediumistic Phenomena*, as well as other reports of the Warsaw sittings, that charge does not look well founded. His discussion of conscious and unconscious fraud, in an article critical of the SPR investigation of Palladino in 1895, is largely based on his own close observation of her mediumship, but also on investigating other mediums both in Poland and abroad, and his very considerable experience of patients presenting a variety of dissociative states. The article continued to be influential for many years, and still deserves attention (Alvarado, 2010; Ochorowicz, 1896).

Ochorowicz was very much a "hands on," practical investigator, pursuing every manifestation as far as possible, inventing devices for excluding fraud, and examining every possible and impossible explanation to its logical conclusion in his search for the truth. However, in his pursuit of facts he tended not to allow for the possibility of different interpretations, and in particular was not aware of the "experimenter effect" his powerful personality might produce. In his impatience for answers he would construct theoretical explanations prematurely and without detail, something he acknowledged himself in his later writings when reflecting on the reception of his theory of ideoplasty (Ochorowicz, 1916, pp. 383-385). Working with the model of the world current at that time, he tried to go beyond it, yet in some respects perhaps he was not so much wrong as ahead of his time, as in his exploration and application of the idea that energy could not be destroyed, only transformed. But perhaps his most important contributions were as an innovative experimenter and a "science activist," who had the courage to keep pushing at the boundaries of current worldviews, always asking, "What is impossible?"

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## **Julian Ochorowicz et sa contribution à la recherche psychique**

Résumé: L'objectif de cet article est de présenter la contribution de Julian Ochorowicz au champ de la recherche psychique. Depuis son plus jeune âge, Ochorowicz était intéressé par la psychologie, en particulier par le magnétisme, l'hypnotisme et la suggestion mentale, et son expérience dans ces domaines ont influencé son approche théorique de ce sujet. Sa croyance passionnée selon laquelle l'essence de la vraie science était d'établir des faits avant de formuler des conclusions l'a poussé à étudier de nombreux médiums, dont Eusapia Palladino et Stanisława Tomczyk.

## **Julian Ochorowicz und sein Beitrag zur parapsychologischen Forschung**

Zusammenfassung: Absicht dieses Artikels ist es, den Beitrag von Julian Ochorowicz auf dem Gebiet der parapsychologischen Forschung zu würdigen. Schon in seiner Jugend interessierte sich Ochorowicz für die Psychologie, insbesondere für Magnetismus, Hypnose und Mentalsuggestion, und seine Erfahrung in diesen Bereichen beeinflussten seinen theoretischen Zugang zum Thema. Seine leidenschaftliche Überzeugung, dass das Wesen der wahren Wissenschaft darin bestehen müsse, Fakten zu ermitteln, bevor man Schlussfolgerungen ziehe, bewog ihn dazu, eine Reihe von Medien zu untersuchen, darunter Eusapia Palladino und Stanisława Tomczyk.

## **Julian Ochorowicz y su Contribución a la Investigación Psíquica**

Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es presentar la contribución de Julian Ochorowicz al campo de la investigación psíquica. Desde la juventud, Ochorowicz se interesó por la psicología, particularmente el magnetismo, el hipnotismo, y la sugestión mental, y su experiencia en estas áreas influyó en su enfoque teórico del tema. Su apasionada creencia de que la esencia de la verdadera ciencia tenía que ser establecer los hechos antes de formar conclusiones lo llevó a investigar a varios médiums, entre ellos Eusapia Palladino y Stanisława Tomczyk.