



Replanting a Deserted Field: Kardecism's New Establishment in German-Speaking Countries

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Abstract

Kardecism has been reintroduced to all German-speaking countries over the past four decades. Here, its lines of tradition have factually been severed, since the Second World War. It has been reintroduced successfully by a handful of local influential personalities engaged in quests for new orientation in the fields of spirituality, therapy and medicine, striving for integrated views and practices and by Kardecist Brazilian professionals established here. This essay retraces the lines of tradition in countries of German culture which have influenced the genesis of Kardecism and which have contributed to its development here. In a systemic perspective, it takes aspects of therapy, philosophy, culture, religion, science and spirituality into view, including resonances to related movements from the 19th entry to the present. These factors are discussed as conditioning the reception and claim to legitimacy in present German-speaking societies. In addition to the perspectives of cultural and social history, the composition and developments on the realm of religious adherence here are taken into view as conditioning the reception of Kardecism. Its activities and organisation are presented. An account of its reintroduction is given from personal sources. The outlook for its further development and integration here are considered.

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Resumo

O Kardecismo foi reintroduzido em todos os países de língua alemã nas últimas quatro décadas. Suas linhas de tradição até o estabelecimento anterior foram efetivamente interrompidas desde a Segunda Guerra Mundial. Foi reintroduzida com sucesso por um punhado de personalidades influentes locais envolvidas em buscas por novas orientações nos campos da espiritualidade, terapia e medicina, buscando visões e práticas integradas, e por profissionais brasileiros kardecistas estabelecidos aqui. Este ensaio refaz as linhas da tradição nos países da cultura alemã que influenciaram a gênese do kardecismo e que contribuíram para o seu desenvolvimento aqui. Em uma perspectiva sistêmica, leva em consideração aspectos da terapia, filosofia, cultura, religião, ciência e espiritualidade, incluindo ressonâncias para movimentos relacionados, desde o século 19 até o presente. Esses fatores são discutidos como condicionando a recepção e reivindicando legitimidade nas atuais sociedades de língua alemã. Além das perspectivas da história cultural e social, a composição e os desenvolvimentos no campo da adesão religiosa aqui são considerados como condicionantes da recepção do Kardecismo. Suas atividades e organização são apresentadas. Um relato de sua reintrodução é dado a partir de fontes pessoais. As perspectivas para seu desenvolvimento futuro e integração aqui são consideradas.

Keywords Spiritual therapy · Spiritism · Mediumism · Religious transformation

Palavras-chave terapia espiritual · espíritismo · mediúnismo · transformação religiosa

Introduction

The history of Kardecism's establishment in German-speaking countries in recent decades has not been written yet. It has been taken notice of however by the Lutheran World Federation. Thus, Matthias Pöhlmann, former director of the institute for the monitoring of new developments in the field of religion in Germany, run by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Germany (EKD), the 'Evangelische Zentrale für Weltanschauungsfragen' (EZW), writes on Kardecism's renewed advent here:

'Modern Spiritism is a child of the nineteenth century. In connection with secularization and an increasingly this-worldly proclamation in the churches, some extra-ecclesial religiosity began to form. The central themes that Spiritism took up and articulated in its practice were death and the otherworld, the postmortal fate of the dead in the spirit world, but also relations between the living and the dead. In so doing spiritism, in a secular cloak, picked up forgotten or suppressed themes of Christian theology and ecclesiastical proclamation'. (Pöhlmann 2004)

This representative assessment indicates that the renewed establishment of Kardecism here is taken seriously by the major Protestant Church of Germany. Pöhlmann combines this with a well-observed self-critical view on the deficits of a Church that has been assimilating itself to a positivistic world view that eclipses the realms which he enlists. Thus, he indicates that Protestantism may have deserted some fields of spiritual

and religious concern, like perceptions of the after-life, relation to those departed from this world, the relation of body and soul, issues of spiritual energy, a spiritual anthropology, mediumism and its forms, the ‘discernment of spirits’ (cf. 1. Corinthians 12:10) and relation to spirits, obsession, dis-obsession and spiritual cleansing etc. that Kardecism may re-cultivate. It is a host of substantial issues, as M. Pöhlmann rightly observed, that have been abandoned. They were central elements of cosmology, anthropology, ritualistics and spiritual practice of Christian Churches: fields that have been abandoned, for others to re-cultivate. It is on this ground that Kardecism is understood in German-speaking countries and claims the legitimacy of reviving lost traditions—as may be shown. M. Pöhlmann gives a perceptive and remarkably un-polemical evaluation. It suggests that Kardecism, although still small in numbers in Europe, as he shows before (Pöhlmann 2004), has come to stay. His analysis suggests that Kardecism’s re-establishment has systemic reasons. His position contrasts favourably with the pressure under which research in this field, by academic approaches, has come in the field of culture and politics, as of recent—with the explicit aim of targeting ‘sectarian movements’, of ‘alternative epistemologies’, as in spiritually based therapeutic approaches, of ethnically ‘alternative discourses’ and of ‘psychic research’ (Kleinhempel 2020). Christophe Pons, in his extensive research on possession and spiritism in Europe and in South America, has diagnosed that differences in its cultural evaluation, have come to define normative epistemologies, in academia and in societies. Thus, in Europe, it has been banned to the ‘margins’, geographically, e.g. to Iceland, and is hardly taken seriously in academic research, whereas it is widely cherished, as spiritual and mediumistic practice and experience, in the ‘global south’ and acknowledged in academia (Pons 2017). Kardecism has been connected to this field from its beginnings. However, it has largely ‘evaporated’ under this pressure during the mid-twentieth century in the German-speaking realm, as well as in France. Its reintroduction here, empowered by Brazilian expatriates, can thus be understood on this background of cultural difference. The re-establishment of Kardecism here may reflect growing acceptance in the ‘global north’, especially in Europe, that epistemic differences, as to what constitutes ‘reality’ may exist between cultures. Impulses from the counter-cultural movement of the late twentieth century have facilitated this reorientation in the north, and gradual acceptance of ‘alternative epistemologies’. The reintroduction of Kardecism into the German-speaking realm, from the mid-1980s on, is connected to these cultural shifts.

There is an M. A. thesis of 2010 in Germany (Correia Wittkowski 2014) that discusses the roots of Kardecism in the nineteenth century, its genesis in Brazil, its position towards other religious communities there and its ‘functioning’ of in Germany. It does not cover the emergence of Kardecism in German-speaking countries in an historic perspective. Her thesis of regarding its presence in Germany as a mere extension of Brazilian Kardecism falls short of the history and structure of the cultural and religious field that lead to its reception in German-speaking countries. This will be retraced and reflected here. On this background its ongoing reception and establishment may be understood.

The first establishment of Kardecism in Germany before the First World War, took place as part of a wide movement seeking spiritual and religious innovation or new orientation—in opposition to the technocratic Materialism also powerful at the time—and with close connection to academic research, in science of religion, cultural history, natural sciences, psychology, psychic research, philosophy and the arts. These links

and orientations have remained in the renewal of these movements at the end of the twentieth century, after the devastations of two world wars and after the culturally conservative restoration period, in the decades after 1945. Among these Kardecism is strongly oriented to Christianity, other than contemporary movements (Linse 1998), like Neopaganism with its ethnic orientation, and Theosophy with its orientation to Hinduism and Buddhism as well as Neoplatonism.

A general introduction to Kardecism with a focus on Germany has been published in the widely used *Handbuch der Religionen* [Handbook of Religions] (Kleinhempel and da Silva 2019). The *Encyclopedia of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* has a brief entry on the founder of Kardecism (Bergé 2006). An overview of its structure of worldwide, about its engagements and links to the works of Allan Kardec, as well as other introductory literature can be found on the website of the International Spiritist Council (n.d.). Here, I will briefly present Kardecism, with its doctrine and organisation, before considering reasons for its successful establishment in German-speaking countries.

Studies on Kardecism in Brazil—as by Ferreira de Camargo (1961)—are considered inasmuch as they are relevant to the perspective of this essay.

The practice of mediumism and the social acceptance of the spiritistic cosmology and anthropology on which its different forms and doctrines are based, has received renewed scholarly and public interest in recent decades. This may be recognised as a sign of changing attitudes in cultures of northern countries too, after the heydays of a secular Modernity. Thus the anthropologist Christophe Pons has researched this phenomenon in comparative studies of ‘north’ and ‘south’. He declares that while a general divide can be found between a widespread acceptance of spiritism and mediumism in the ‘global south’, it remains marginalised to the European periphery, as in Iceland, where it continues to thrive, and is only regaining cultural acceptance in the course of global exchange of recent:

‘Entre le Nord et le Sud, la question de la possession a connu un sort inégal au sein des sciences sociales. Délaissée au Nord, surinvestie au Sud, cet écart d’attention n’est pas du seul fait d’une moindre matière nordiste mais rend compte, aussi, d’une construction historique au sein de laquelle la possession – et avec elle la sorcellerie – a joué un rôle de frontière entre divers horizons de pensée. Au Nord, sa mise à l’écart d’une histoire sociale et des mentalités est ancienne, héritière d’un long processus de dressage des personnalités et des corps ... (Pons 2017).’

Pons indicates that the marginalisation of mediumism and trance possession in the north can be understood as the result of a long disciplining of bodies and minds by societies, with the result that mediumistic perceptions and practices, in the minds and bodies, have become a marker of distinction from cultures of the global south.

The fascinating process will be retraced here, by which European mediumism, in its most recent theoretical and cultural formation in Kardecism—after having been marginalised in the course of the twentieth century—returns from its ‘exile’, which it has found successfully in Brazil. The factors that enable its new reception in German-speaking countries, in the course of the religious, epistemic and cultural transformations, of secularisation and re-spiritualisation, currently observable, shall be analysed.

The Size and Structure of the Kardecist Community in Brazil and in German-Speaking Countries

To assess the size and development of the Kardecist community in German-speaking countries, a look at the structure, size and development in its main ‘home country’, Brazil, is necessary. Here, it is by far the most influential and best-organised religious community. From here, it came in recent decades. According to the last national census of 2010, of Brazil’s population, 2% adhere to Kardecism, identifying as ‘espírita’. This makes 3.8 million people. In the south-east, especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the proportions are 3.3 and 4%. Kardecism’s growth continues unabated. At the previous census, conducted by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE)* in 2000, the proportion of Kardecism was still at 1.3% (IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [n.d.](#))). This is a growth by 65%. Among all religious communities, Kardecism has the highest levels of education and income (Último Segundo-iG 2012). To evaluate these figures properly, one has to take the common Brazilian practice of dual religiosity into account. Based on the inclusiveness of the Roman Catholic Church in its poimonic approach, a substantial proportion of those who ultimately identify as ‘Roman Catholic’ in a census, will also participate in spiritism, be it of Kardecism, Umbanda or Candomblé or Esotericism (Spliesgart 2011). The actual range of adherent of Kardecism may thus be even substantially higher than the official census figures show. This may become effective abroad, when Kardecist groups become a social field for living and sharing Brazilian identity.

As to the social composition: the statistic results of the IBGE about the social rank in education and income of Kardecists, compared with other religious communities, are averages. This obviously does not imply that all Kardecists are of wealthy upper middle class. The social mixture of Kardecists can also be observed at conventions in Germany, where a broad spectrum of social and cultural classes and milieus of Brazilians are present. In this context, we may remind that Chico Xavier was born into a poor family and had limited possibilities for higher education. Nevertheless, he became the most prominent Kardecist of the twentieth century. As to the social dynamics of Kardecism, Ferreira de Camargo, in his pioneering sociological study on Kardecism in São Paulo noted, that it was regarded as a prestigious means of social climbing, in spite of the slight stigma attached to spiritism in general society:

‘Tanto a Umbanda como o Kardecismo constituem meio poderoso de elevação do ‘status’ dos indivíduos. É verdade que ainda há, na sociedade paulista, um preconceito levemente pejorativo para com o Espiritismo.[...] Entretanto, o próprio crescimento numérico dos mediúnicos, sua extensa ação social e vasta literature que produziram, conquistam um crescente respeito da sociedade global’ (Ferreira de Camargo 1961).

His observation—at the height of Modernism, in 1961—that the vast literature on mediumism and the training of mediums contribute strongly to the attractiveness of Kardecism in general culture and the wider society, can well be applied to its reception abroad too. (He also discusses its position in comparison with Umbanda, which are both regarded as being on a ‘mediumistic continuum in Brazil’. This feature is,

however, not relevant to the reception of Kardecism in German-speaking countries, despite the presence of communities of Umbanda here.)

Since 1884 Brazilian Kardecism is organised in the *Federação Espírita Brasileira* (FEB), as a charitable organisation under Public Law. It has regional federations and local groups belong to this common national organisation (Federação Espírita Brasileira n.d.-a). The FEB also comprises some professional associations of Kardecism, such as the *Associação Brasileira de Divulgadores do Espiritismo* (ABRADE) for its promotion, the *Associação Brasileira dos Magistrados Espíritas* (ABRAME) or civil servants, the *Associação Brasileira de Artistas Espíritas* (ABRARTE) or artists, the *Associação Médico-Espírita do Brasil* (AME) for the medical doctors and health workers, the *Associação Brasileira de Psicólogos Espíritas* (ABRAPE) or psychologists, the *Associação Jurídico-Espírita do Brasil* (AJE) for jurists, the *Cruzada dos Militares Espíritas* (CME) for the military, and the *Instituto de Cultura Espírita do Brasil* (CEB) as forum and centre for spiritist culture (Federação Espírita Brasileira n.d.-b).

This is relevant to our interest in Kardecism in German-speaking countries, since some of these federations are engaged here too. The professional federations enlisted here show, how deeply Kardecism is enrooted in the elites of the Brazil and how far its influence ranges. This sound basis in leading fields of Brazilian society enables Kardecism to present itself abroad too with professionals of high degree, as at medical symposia, conferences and lecture tours. It enables Kardecism to actively promote its ideas and approaches in a variety of fields, such as medicine and psychotherapy, abroad too. These resources have been helpful in the establishment of Kardecism in German-speaking countries. The annual symposia on spiritism in medicine and therapy, organised in with prominent Kardecistic medical doctors and therapists from Brazil with German partners, organised by the association ‘ALKASTAR’ manifests this (Göbel et al. 2020).

A view at the bilingual website of the Kardecist group of Munich, the *Grupo de Estudos Espíritas/Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec* (GEEAK) shows these manifold engagements (Grupo de Estudos Espíritas/Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec (GEEAK) (n.d.)). These cultural and educational activities are a regular part of the programme of Kardecism here, apart from the spiritual work of common worship, prayer and lecture, as well as laying on of hands for blessing and energetic cleansing, the mediumistic work and social activities. This background allows us to better understand the calibre of Kardecism’s presence in German-speaking co, which exceed what might be expected for such a small community in numbers.

Considering that the proportion of Kardecists in the economic and educational centres of south-eastern Brazil is close to 4% of the population, many from the professional middle and upper middle classes—from whom professionals will go abroad for study and work. A careful estimate may be that some 2000 Kardecists from Brazil live in Germany alone, possibly more. Many of them are actively organised here. There are some 60 groups in German-speaking countries (CEEAK 2020a, b, c, d, e), with 35 of them in Germany. Some of these are organised in a national federation, the *Deutsche Spiristische Vereinigung*, for Germany, similarly for Austria and for Switzerland. Many groups are bilingual; non-Brazilian friends and spouses are also joining in the activities. This raises the number of adherents substantially. Kardecism has a well-maintained presence online. Websites of groups and federations display a host of activities, such as spiritual conventions, worship for different age groups, lectures, talks, seminars and congresses, therapy

and charitable engagement. They also provide literature, such as the works of Allan Kardec and of other authors of Kardecism in German and in Portuguese, some in both languages. The overall impression is one of professionalism and of high engagement, by smaller groups, such as that of Würzburg (Freundeskreis Allan Kardec Würzburg 2020),¹ and by large groups as the GEEAK of Munich (GEEAK e. V. - Münchner Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec).² It is also present on other social forums, such as Facebook³ or Instagram.⁴ The German Spiritistic Association (*Deutsche Spiritistische Vereinigung*) as umbrella organisation, enlists links to other Brazilian (FEB) and German associations (Deutsche Spiritistische Vereinigung 2020).⁵

The overall impression is one of efficiency, organisational know-how, intellectual quality, engagement, spiritual, ethical and humanitarian orientation and of cultural savviness. In spite of the organisational structure and connections, it remains perceptible that this is a network of groups and associations, rather than a unified organisational endeavour. With regard to its organisational form, Kardecism in German-speaking countries has a middle position between the organisationally disconnected spiritual movements, that have arrived here, such as Umbanda, where every community is on its own, with hardly any links with the other communities, and almost no common actions or representations—as a look at their websites shows—which applies to a lesser degree also to Yoga, and the religious formations that have the full church structure of a unified organisation. This reflects its inner structure.

History

The Foundation and Origins of Kardecism

Kardecism is certainly the most important spiritist religious community of the Modern era, by number of adherents, by organisation on local, regional, national and international level, by its duration and by its influence in various societies, especially in Brazil and in other Latin American countries. It was founded by Denizard Hippolyte Léon Rivail (Lyon 1804–Paris 1869). His family had been jurists for generations. Catholics, they were nevertheless discontent with the authoritarian spirit of the clerical, political and cultural restauration of the early nineteenth century. Thus they sent their son to the boarding school of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, to Yverdon in Switzerland, who applied reformed pedagogics, aimed at stimulating the intrinsic desire for learning and self-initiative of a child. Pestalozzi's theory became influential for pedagogics to this day. His views were inspired by the anthropology of Romanticism and by Jean J. Rousseau. Here, the individuality of children was emphasised. Pedagogy should enable the unfolding the individual endowment of a child. Pestalozzi also worked passionately for providing disadvantaged children from poor families and orphans, with good education. These ideals have influenced Rivail throughout his

¹ Freundeskreis Allan Kardec Würzburg e.V., (eds.) (2020), [website], “Wie wir helfen“,

² GEEAK e.V. - Münchner Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec, (eds.) (n.d.-c), [website], “Home - Herzlich willkommen bei Geeak e.V.! Spiritismus lernen, verstehen, erleben!“

³ GEEAK e.V. - Münchner Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec, (eds.) (n.d.-a), [Facebook website], *Geeak München - Spiritismus mit uns lernen, verstehen, erleben @geeak.muenchen*.

⁴ GEEAK e.V. - Münchner Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec, (eds.) (n.d.-b), [Instagram website], *Geeak München - Spiritismus mit uns lernen, verstehen, erleben*

⁵ Deutsche Spiritistische Vereinigung e.V. (eds.) (n.d.), [website], „Links“

professional life as a grammar school teacher, who founded his own school in Paris, supporting in particular disadvantaged children, together with his wife and colleague Amélie Boudet. He gained a public reputation as authors of teaching manuals, especially in the natural sciences. He became member of several scientific societies.⁶ The values that Rivail adopted have been inscribed into the core of Kardecism: it is deeply ‘pedagogical’, assuming that it is the destiny of each soul to develop its intrinsic faculties and ethics from incarnation to incarnation.

In his early fifties, he reluctantly followed an invitation to Spiritist séances, held in groups of Swedenborgian tradition. This is relevant, since it situates Spiritism in a religious context—a combination that Kardecism adopted. Although E. Swedenborg faculty of clairvoyance manifested itself independently from religious contexts too—most famously, his vision of the great fire of Stockholm in 1759—his otherworldly visions mostly had religious content. Like Swedenborg Rivail also was a natural scientist by formation. In spite of his scepticism he was enthralled by what he saw and experienced in the séances. The spiritual and religious significance attributed to the encounter with the spirits likewise appealed to him. Swedenborgian groups were well established in leading milieus of society. This sociological position of spiritism lasted, from its origins in the late eighteenth century, up to the demise of spiritism after the First World War all through the nineteenth century, in European societies, including Russia. This social position has remained a feature of Kardecism.

Convinced of the reality of what he observed during séances, Rivail embarked on a thorough systematic study of Spiritism. In the course of 11 years, he wrote five books which became the foundational, ‘canonic’ literature of Kardecism:

- *The Spirits Book (Kardec 2006b)*⁷ (*Le Livre des Esprits*), Paris, 1857, on foundations of cosmology, anthropology and doctrine of spirits, with the informative subtitle: ‘Containing the principles of the Spiritist doctrine concerning the immortality of the soul, the nature of spirits and their relationships with humankind, moral laws, the present life, the future life and the destiny of humanity – according to the teachings given by highly evolved spirits through several mediums received and coordinated’.⁸
- *The Book of Mediums (Kardec 2009a)*⁹ (*Le Livre des Médiums*), Paris, 1861, on different forms of mediumism and medial work, with the content in the subtitle: ‘Special teaching by the spirits concerning the theory of all the genres of manifestations, the means of communicating with the invisible world, the development of mediumship, the difficulties and pitfalls that may be encountered in the practice of spirits’.¹⁰
- *The Gospel According to Spiritism (Kardec 2008)*¹¹ (*L’Évangile selon le Spiritisme*), Paris, 1864, a reading of the Bible with its reports of spirit, ‘paranormal’ and ‘transcendent’ phenomena and experiences,

⁶ Kleinhempel, U. R. and I. Scharf da Silva, (2019), “Kardezismus“ in: HdR, IX-26.1, pp.6ff.

⁷ Kardec, A., (2006b), *The Spirits Book* (orig. 1857)

⁸ Idem

⁹ Kardec, A., (2009a), *The Book of Mediums – or Manual for Mediums and Evokers. Experimental Spiritism* (orig. 1861)

¹⁰ idem

¹¹ Kardec, A., (2008), *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, (orig. 1864)

- *Heaven and Hell* (Kardec 2006a)¹² (*Le Ciel et L'Enfer*), Paris, 1865, Kardecism's eschatology. The subtitle gives as content: 'A comparative examination of doctrines concerning the passage from corporeal life to spirit life, concerning future punishment and reward, concerning angels and demons, concerning suffering etc., followed by several examples regarding the true situations of the soul during and after death'¹³—in other words: issues of theodicy and near-death experiences (NDE) are discussed here.
- *The Genesis, Miracles and Premonition According to Spiritism* (Kardec 2009b)¹⁴ (*La Genèse, les Miracles et les Prédications selon le Spiritisme*), Paris, 1868, Kardecism's ontology and epistemology in a conspectus of religious, scientific and philosophical perspectives.

These books convey an impression of the range of Kardec's systematisation. That he did not publish them by his proper name (L. Rivail) may reflect an intention to keep his professional public identity separate from his authorship of the religious spiritistic movement that he formed. He did so in the same systematic way characteristic of his writings as well. It has remained so since. His work of systematisation was terminated by his premature death due to an aneurysm.

Further History

After his death, Kardecism continued to grow. It was supported by major French authors like Victor Hugo, George Sand, Honoré Balzac, Alexandre Dumas and Gustave Flaubert. They discussed Kardecism and shared its views (Aubrée and Laplantine 1990).¹⁵ Scientists among its members contributed to its reputation as founded in a rational world view—thus to reconcile faith and reason in an age of increasing 'disenchantment' by Positivism (Asprem 2014).¹⁶ Thus Kardecism grew in all classes and segments of society, rural and urban. The movement that grew to hundreds of thousands of members in France, peaked in the 1920s. It interacted with other movements of spiritual and religious reform, like the Theosophical Society. Kardec's successor Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie (1817–1901) organised the First International Spiritistic and Spiritualistic Congress in Paris, with some 5000 delegates attending. In spite of their different beliefs they were united by the conviction of the immortality of the soul and the possibility of contacting souls in the otherworld. A following congress in 1924 saw delegates from 24 countries participating.¹⁷

Thereafter, Kardecism waned in Europe. The anthropology of psychoanalysis, with its identification of the 'unconscious' offered an explanatory model of psychic phenomena that appeared to be less divergent from a materialistic world view than spiritism. Carl Gustav Jung expanded the concept of the unconscious into the

¹² Kardec, A., (2006a), *Heaven and Hell – Divine Justice According to Spiritism*, (orig. 1865)

¹³ idem

¹⁴ Kardec, A., (2009b), *The Genesis, Miracles and Premonition According to Spiritism* (orig. 1868)

¹⁵ Aubrée, M. and F. Laplantine (1990), *La Table, le livre et les esprits. Naissance, évolution et actualité du mouvement social spirite entre France et Brésil*, pp. 32ff.

¹⁶ Asprem, E., (2014), *The Problem of Disenchantment – Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939*, p. 300

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 93ff.

transpersonal and transgenerational concept of the ‘collective unconscious’. This included paranormal phenomena like ‘synchronicity’ to him (Jung 1951).¹⁸ William James included spiritistic phenomena in his voluminous research that led to the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1902).¹⁹ The psychoanalytic model of interpretation of spiritistic manifestations and perceptions certainly narrowed the ‘cognitive dissonance’ towards a positivistic world view. It also integrated these phenomena into a wider concept of ‘self’. With psychoanalysis on the rise as a formation of thought in European and North American cultures throughout the twentieth century, spiritism waned. The Christian orientation of Kardecism may have contributed to this decline too.

The engagement of symbolism, the dominant arts’ movement of the early twentieth century was intensely spiritual and oriented to contact with an ‘otherworld’,²⁰ but it was not very Christian. Spiritism and mediumism were core elements in theory of art of symbolism. The artist was to fulfil the role of a ‘medium’ and art to be the symbolic form of expression of spiritual and spirits’ realms. The ‘otherworldly’ realms were appraised as spheres of higher wisdom and revelation to be accessed through art. Kardecism had a formative role in this in some European countries, like Italy for ‘futurism’. In German-speaking countries it influenced poets like Rainer M. Rilke—to name the most eminent of his generation. Like other members of the symbolist movement, he adopted the views and practices of Kardecism along with those of Esotericism and Occultism. This background is indispensable to the understanding of Rilke’s poetry, with its motifs, symbols and patterns of thought (Gísli 2009).²¹ Other major poets of this time, like Robert Musil (Fick 1993)²² and Thomas Mann²³ may be recalled here, who were associated with this spiritual and spiritistic complex. Rilke was in particular fascinated by Kardec’s doctrine of re-incarnation.²⁴

The violent cataclysms of the First World War called the optimism of continual improvement and evolution into question.²⁵ The understanding of the shadier aspects of the human psyche and the fragile nature of society, recognised S. Freud early on in his theoretical development, were applied in a treatise on the fragile psycho-social basis of civilisations, which proved to be prophetic all too soon (Freud 1948).²⁶ Nihilistic views and a sense for the irrational became important in consequence,²⁷ which were at odds with Kardecism’s views of harmonious development. C. G. Jung’s insights into the role of unconscious elements of the soul in the generation or evocation of mediumistic and paranormal phenomena called for a strict separation between the realms on both sides of

¹⁸ Jung, C. G., (1951), “Über Synchronizität” [lecture delivered at the Eranos conference]

¹⁹ James, W., (1902), *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

²⁰ Loers, V., “Einführung”, in: Loers, V. (ed.), (1995), *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900–1915*

²¹ Gísli M., (2009), *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik. Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R. M. Rilke* (Epistemata Literaturwissenschaft Bd. 673). Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, p. 45 f.

²² Fick, Monika, (1993), *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele – der psychophysische Monismus in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende*, pp. 262ff.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 13ff.

²⁴ Gísli M., (2009), *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik. Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R. M. Rilke*, p. 121

²⁵ Aubrée, M. and F. Laplantine, (1990), *La Table, le livre et les esprits. Naissance, évolution et actualité du mouvement social spirite entre France et Brésil*, p. 98 f.

²⁶ Freud, S., (1948), *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (orig. 1930)

²⁷ Eksteins, M., (1989), *Rites of Spring, The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, pp. 33ff.

the dividing line of death into question. All of this impacted on Kardecism's acceptance in Europe, sending it into decline.

Kardecism is not established in historic continuity in German-speaking countries. Formations of organised Kardecism existed in some parts of Germany, notably in Saxonia, and in the northern parts of Bohemia, that belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the late nineteenth century (Sawicki 2000).²⁸ This is the region where the revivalist Pietism of the Moravian Church was at home, established here by Nikolaus Graf von Zinzendorf in the early eighteenth century. They were open to personal spiritual revelations. This provided the basis for the formation of Spiritist circles practicing mediumism in all segments of the population, also in rural areas. Kardecist Spirits had a markedly religious and ethical orientation here.

Spiritism in German-speaking countries brought forth a multitude of publications up to the Second World War. Corinna Treitel enlists some four pages for periodicals in Germany and Austria alone, and some two pages for printing presses (Treitel 2004).²⁹ Among the publishers, Oswald Mutze was especially important. He led the Max Spohr Verlag in Leipzig. His publications promoted themes of 'life reform', in physical and spiritual aspects, endorsing reformist views on women's rights, sexuality, including the acceptance of homosexuality, on housing, lifestyle, aesthetics and on spiritism. The latter included manuals for the organisation of spiritist sessions and circles.³⁰

Others, like Oswald Mutze, published works on psychology and on occultism, in particular by A. Kardec and by other spiritists from Russia, Great Britain, the USA and Switzerland. Wilhelm Friedrich published works of literary avant-garde authors, philosophers and by spiritists. The Eugen Diederichs Verlag remains important to this day, publishing mystical literature from the world's traditions. Paul Zillmann published Theosophical, Spiritist and Occultist authors, like Annie Besant, Helena P. Blavatska and Card du Prel.³¹ A culturally diverse and manifold universe presents itself here, of politically diverse orientations, but consistently with mystical and often spiritist outlook.

This rich cultural, spiritual, spiritistic and aesthetic heritage was literally and figuratively burnt to cinders by National Socialism and the Second World War. Only of late is German culture retrieving this heritage in popular publications and scholarship, often burdened with ideological suspicion and critique. For Kardecism's renewed advent in German-speaking countries, there are many lines of tradition to be picked up in culture. Some of these have remained alive and have organised themselves in other formations, such as Anthroposophy, which is very influential in the fields of education and alternative medicine.

In Brazil, where Kardecism established itself as an alternative to the dominant Roman Catholic faith, organised from 1884 on, increasingly assuming the shape of a religious community (Theodoridis 2015),³² Kardecism flourished. Its practice of contacting the spirits – of personal ancestors and of more generic 'risen masters'—resonated both with Roman Catholic cult of saints and with the spiritistic doctrines and practices of Umbanda—with

²⁸ Sawicki, D., (2000), *Leben mit den Toten. Geisterglauben und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland 1770–1900*, p. 312

²⁹ Treitel, C., (2004), *A Science for the Soul. Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, pp. 264ff.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 73

³¹ Ibidem, pp. 71ff.

³² Theodoridis, N., (2015), "O Espiritismo no Brasil Oitocentista: Antecedentes, Introdução, Propagação, Conflitos e Mídia", pp. 25ff.

which it formed a continuum (De Vasconcelos Lisboa 2009)³³—which thrived in the same regions as Kardecism. Mediunity was and remains an important phenomenon, manifested in different cultural forms in the collective imagination of Brazil (Maraldi 2011).³⁴

The vastly different development of Kardecism in Brazil and in Europe thus has discernible cultural reasons. Its successful establishment in Brazil, especially in the upper middle class, with its organised formations in various professional segments, became the basis for its successful reintroduction in German-speaking countries since the late twentieth century. Due to its basis in Brazil, Kardecism may be regarded as the most successful spiritual spiritistic community and religion at present.

Lines of Tradition as Factors Determining Reception

Kardecism's chances and pathways of establishing itself in German-speaking countries may be determined by the lines of tradition, arising in this culture, that have shaped Kardecism. These are bound to elicit responses of 'resonance' and allow it to 'speak to' societies here.

Kardecism has maintained concepts and practices of anthropology, cosmology, spirituality and therapy, that have been important, and which have influenced the subsequent emergence and development of psychoanalysis, of S. Freud and of C. G. Jung.³⁵

Swedenborgianism

The first line of tradition is Swedenborgianism. Immanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was an accomplished natural scientist, member of academic societies, a civil servant for natural resources in the Kingdom of Sweden, and the son of a Lutheran bishop who was conferred hereditary nobility. His social credentials were thus most prestigious. His paranormal perceptions, precognitions and visions of transcendent realms were well received. He developed them into a system that he taught in various countries of northern and western Europe. His writings fascinated leading intellectuals. They achieved lasting recognitions and social esteem over the following century (Williams-Hogan 2006).³⁶ A. Kardec regarded E. Swedenborg as his predecessor, although he distanced himself in some points from his theology.³⁷

Kardecism's combination of mediumism, Spiritism and visionary apperception of transcendent religious realms is a heritage from Swedenborgianism (Cuchet 2007).³⁸ Swedenborgian societies were connected to Freemasonry, Theosophy and Rosecrucianism (Mayer 2006).³⁹

³³ De Vasconcelos Lisboa, D. A., (2009), *Identidades (In)visíveis: um Estudo de Caso da Cultura Espírita em Santana do Ipanema – Alagoas*, p. 12

³⁴ Maraldi, E. de Oliveira, (2011), *Metamorfoses do espírito: usos e sentidos das crenças e experiências paranormais na construção da identidade de médiuns espíritas*, p. 31

³⁵ Ellenberger, H. F., (1989), *The Discovery of the Unconscious. "The History and Development of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (orig. 1970), p. 111

³⁶ Williams-Hogan, J., (2006), "Swedenborg", in: *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, p. 1103

³⁷ Kardec, A. (ed.), *Revue Spirite. Journal d'études psychologiques*, 2, November 1859

³⁸ Cuchet, G., "Le retour des esprits, ou la naissance du spiritisme sous le Second Empire" in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2007/2 (no. 54–2), p. 81.

³⁹ Mayer, J.-F., (2006), "Swedenborgian traditions", in: *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, p. 1106

Magnetism

The second line of tradition is to Magnetism of Anton Mesmer (1734–1815). Kardec was aware of it. Thus he declared in the *Revue Spirite. Journal d'études psychologiques* that he edited, that the broad reception of Kardecism was certainly due to the widespread acceptance of Magnetism in France, from the late eighteenth century up to the 1840s (Kardec 1859).⁴⁰ Mesmer's discovery and therapeutic work with 'spiritual energy' had made him famous by the therapeutic success that he achieved thereby. From Austria-Hungary he moved to France, where he found renowned followers.⁴¹ Among the successors of this heritage are Jean Marie Charcot and Sigmund Freud, whose therapeutic techniques and some concepts are derived from Mesmerism. The theory of spiritual energy, including the notion of a 'spiritual field' and therapeutic practices based thereon, were adopted by Kardec.

Magnetism comprises⁴²:

1. The use of hypnosis as inducing an altered state of consciousness. In Kardecism, this is used to attain a state of mediumistic receptivity.
2. The assumption that subconscious or semi-conscious states allow access to specific regions of the soul or a wider consciousness.
3. The idea of a pneumatic 'fluid'. It is believed to manifests itself between the magnetic therapist and the patient. Mesmer believed it to be a cosmic substance, like the 'pneuma' of antiquity.
4. Mesmer believed that it envelops a person. He also ascribed the function of connecting a person to all the living environment to it. Kardecism derives the idea of a 'perisprit' from here.
5. The idea of 'psychic energy'. It reappears in different theoretical definition in Psychoanalysis. It is also present in Kardecism.
6. The special role of the 'magnetiseur' for accessing the unconscious of a person

The concept of a pneumatic intermediate real, between the 'body' and the 'mind', connected to both, and to its an analogous realm in nature and the cosmos, conceived as having 'energetic' properties, as well as dimensions of 'purity', 'harmony' health and ethical quality, are deeply Neoplatonical and define the anthropology and cosmology of Romanticism. (Schweizer 2008),⁴³

These elements are adopted in Kardecism, with some modifications. Therapeutic practices are part of Kardecism. This applies in particular to the practice of the 'passes', of distributing the energetic 'fluidum' of a person evenly, in order to create a harmonic energetic field in the 'perisprit' for healing,⁴⁴ health and wellbeing. This kind of 'pneumatic healing' by treating the 'energetic field' of a patient was applied in

⁴⁰ Kardec, A. (ed.), *Revue Spirite. Journal d'études psychologiques*, 2, November 1859

⁴¹ Ellenberger, H. F., (1989) *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Development of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (orig. 1970), pp. 58ff.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 111f.

⁴³ Schweizer, S., (2008), *Anthropologie der Romantik - Körper, Seele und Geist. Anthropologische Gotteswelt- und Menschenbilder der wissenschaftlichen Romantik*, pp. 109ff

⁴⁴ Ellenberger, H. F., (1989), *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Development of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (orig. 1970), p. 46

Germany by the medical doctor, poet and author of medical books Justinus Kerner (1768–1862) who applied the ideas of an ‘energetic field’ of pneumatic character to administering healing motions by gently stroking it around the body with the hands, called ‘passe’ in Kardecism. Kerner also applied spiritistic and mediumistic therapy in the famous case, of Friedericke Hauffe. In the course of this therapy she fell into mediumistic trance: Sie conveyed messages of spirit beings. Her precognitions and clairvoyant perceptions across great distances have been documented, as well as the specific manifestations of her states of trance.⁴⁵

The legacy of Romanticism’s spiritual anthropology, mediumism and spiritual therapy, as adopted by Kardecism, has begun to be retrieved from the last decades of the 20th century onwards, into Esoteric therapeutic practice, as evidenced and unfolded by the well-published manual for ‘energetic healing’ by Barbara A. Brennan: *Hands of Light* (Brennan 1987).⁴⁶ Considering this ‘revival’ of Mesmer’s therapy by working with the energetic spiritual field, in present Esoterically founded therapies, Kardecism resonates well here.

According to A. Mesmer, this energy is not evenly strong in all people and may be distributed unevenly in a person, creating vulnerability and suffering. The ‘harmonisation’ of this surrounding field, is considered to have powerful healing effects and was at the core of A. Mesmer’s therapy.⁴⁷ Kardecism adopted Mesmer’s technique and concept of the ‘passes’, of stroking gently around a person in a hand’s width of distance.⁴⁸ A. Kardec declared expressly that Kardecism had done much to promulgate both the ideas and practices of this ‘energetic healing of ‘magnetism’ in France.⁴⁹ He drew on the work of the brothers De Puységur, who had systematised and taught Mesmer’s ‘energetic healing’ in post-revolutionary France.⁵⁰ In their tradition both A. Kardec and S. Freud adopted these ideas, adapting them and integrating them into their respective system. They resonated deeply with Romanticism’s belief in an enlivened world, permeated by divine or spiritual ‘energy’ and ‘inspiration’. This line of tradition is most important for the spiritual and therapeutic practice of Kardecism, as well as for its public appeal, at present in German-speaking countries. While the image of Kardecism in literature is often dominated by themes of reincarnation, spiritism and karma, which mark its difference to Christianity and to Positivism, the therapeutic aspects of work of ‘spiritual energy’, for ‘harmonisation’ and spiritual healing are very important, but tend to be overlooked. They are regularly present on the websites of Kardecist communities in German-speaking countries.

⁴⁵ Schweizer, S., (2008), *Anthropologie der Romantik - Körper, Seele und Geist. Anthropologische Gottes-Welt- und Menschenbilder der wissenschaftlichen Romantik*, pp. 79ff.

⁴⁶ Brennan, B. A., (1987), *Hands of Light. A Guide to Healing Through the Human Energy Field. A New Paradigm for the Human Being in Health, Relationship, and Disease*

⁴⁷ Ellenberger, H. F., (1989), *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Development of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (orig. 1970), p. 62

⁴⁸ Aubrée, M. and F. Laplantine, (1990), *La Table, le livre et les esprits. Naissance, évolution et actualité du mouvement social spirite entre France et Brésil*, pp. 191ff.

⁴⁹ Cuchet, G., „Le retour des esprits, ou la naissance du spiritisme sous le Second Empire“ in: *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2007/2 (no. 54–2), p. 81

⁵⁰ Ellenberger, H. F., (1989), *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Development of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (orig. 1970) pp.70ff.

Traditions of Romanticism: Panentheism, Metempsychosis and Panpsychism

For German culture the era of Romanticism is defined as lasting from about 1775 to 1848, its end marked by the collapse of the national democratic movement. In France, Romanticism came to the fore later, due to the rationalistic French Revolution; however, it lasted longer here, in to the 1850s. This means that Kardecism can be well interpreted as arising from the spirit and world view of Romanticism. To this day it resonates with cultural, spiritual and therapeutic theories and traditions descending from it. This applies to the concept of the human being, of the cosmos, of nature, God and the spiritual realm.

Magnetism was very much based on Romanticism's anthropology and world view and provided a therapeutic method expressing it. This accounted for its reception and influence on the development of Psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century. Swedenborgianism, although developed before Romanticism, was received and sustained as compatible and expressive of its core views. The theme of Spiritist séances, and of the influence of spirit forces—in conjunction with the unconscious and the darker, fateful sides of the human soul—was adopted by prominent literary authors of the Age of Romanticism, such as by E. T. A. Hoffmann in numerous stories (Frenschkowski 2013).⁵¹ He presented spiritism as part of a 'nightly' realm, in which citizens well established in social life, participated in more or less arcane societies and circles. The uncanny influence exerted by this sphere, disrupting, mystifying or enchanting and enriching otherwise well-ordered civil lives, is a recurrent theme of his work.

The pantheistic ideas of a world permeated by divine forces, with an otherworldly realm of spirits and transcendent forces surrounding the visible realm, and interacting with the wider sphere of the 'soul' was essential to Romanticism. This worldview drew strongly on Neoplatonism and on Indian Vedānta. Thus, the idea of the transmigration of souls was widely shared. In German culture, the conviction of reincarnation was proposed influentially (Zander 1999)⁵² by the literary author and scholar, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his treatise *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts (On the Education of Mankind)*, published in 1780 (Obst 2009).⁵³ Johann W. Goethe and Immanuel Kant shared these views. All of them shared the idea of 'ascending metempsychosis' (Hanegraaff 1998).⁵⁴ Metempsychosis became a widely shared conviction of the ages of Classicism and Romanticism (Benz 1957).⁵⁵ Lessing's authority became important for the legitimization of spiritism in German culture in the later nineteenth century (von Rappard 1912).⁵⁶

Kardec coined the term 'reincarnation' which subsequently became widely adopted. Soon it was recognised that hereby the traditions of Greek philosophical tradition, of Pythagoreanism, Platonism and Neoplatonism became connected to Indian views, especially of Vedānta, which subsequently influenced major European and American

⁵¹ Frenschkowski, M., (2013), "Okkultismus, Spiritismus, Seelenwanderung", in: Brittnacher, H. R. and M. May (eds.), *Phantastik – ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, pp. 335–341

⁵² Zander, H., (1999), *Geschichte der Seelenwanderung. Alternativer religiöse Traditionen von der Antike bis heute*, p. 474

⁵³ Obst, H. (2009), *Reinkarnation. Weltgeschichte einer Idee*, p. 7 f.

⁵⁴ Hanegraaff, W. J., (1998), *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, pp. 475ff

⁵⁵ Benz, E., „Die Reinkarnationslehre in Dichtung und Philosophie der deutschen Klassik und Romantik“, in: *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 9 (1957), pp. 150–175

⁵⁶ Rappard, C. von, (2012), *Der Spiritismus und sein Programm, dargelegt von einem Deutschen*, (2nd ed.) p. 15

movements of religious innovation, such as Kardecism, and later Theosophy and Anthroposophy.⁵⁷ In this merger of reception, the idea of reincarnation became a major challenge for orthodox Christian theology, and an innovative element, distinguishing these movements from it (Schmidt-Leukel 1996).⁵⁸ Kardec's insistence on empirical observation to support the belief has influenced the subsequent reception, engendering research in its field (Bauer 1996).⁵⁹ Kardecism—with its background in the world-view of Romanticism and its recent impregnation by Brazilian culture—calls for a review of customary distinctions between the 'normal' and the 'para-normal' as well as between the 'religious' and the 'secular', reminding of debates which have become somewhat marginalised in the prevailing secularistic-positivistic culture of Germany in particular (Kleinhempel 2018).⁶⁰ This context is important for the legitimisation of Kardecism in contemporary German-speaking countries.

Kardecism's strong emphasis on ethics, on charitable action and on self-improvement, is combined with a Spiritist world view, including the idea of universal 'connectedness', expressed by Karma, understood as 'law of cause and effect'. Kardecism's deep roots in the ideas of Romanticism, which is most formative for modern German culture, with specific developments in different Germanophone countries, is a powerful foundation for its reception. Kardecism can connect to major themes engrained in the long-term cultural memory, thus to the deeper strata of culture and spirituality here.

The Heritage of 'Conflicting Modernities' Since the Late Nineteenth Century

The ideas and practices, widely known and discussed during Romanticism, have left a legacy, which came to be revived in the last decades of the twentieth century, after the devastations of the Second World War, and the 'barren years' of post-war re-construction and rationalism. Here anything 'mystical' in German culture, that was not safely corralled by Christianity or Positivism was readily associated with the era of National Socialism, with its appeal to the 'irrational'. The persecution and elimination of non-Christian movements, including Anthroposophy—to name a prominent formation—is wholly eclipsed from this view of history. This created a tradition of polemics, to associate the Spiritistic and Spiritual 'Alternative Modernity' of German and Austrian culture – which has been most influential to its avant-garde movements—to National Socialism. It is unquestioningly suggested that this 'Alternative Modernity' fostered is ascent. This figure of vilification by association remains virulent, as even recent publications show (Staudenmaier 2012).⁶¹ In this regard recent Kardecism in Germany and Austria has the advantage of being perceived as 'foreign import', unencumbered by Germany's lasting historic trauma and its instrumentalisation for cultural polemics of the present.

⁵⁷ Obst, H., (2009), *Reinkarnation. Weltgeschichte einer Idee*. Munich, p. 10

⁵⁸ Schmidt-Leukel, P., (1996), „Einführung“, in: Schmidt-Leukel, P., (ed.), *Die Idee der Reinkarnation in Ost und West*, pp. 7–13

⁵⁹ Bauer, E. (1996). „Läßt sich Reinkarnation wissenschaftlich beweisen? Methodologie und Ergebnisse der empirischen Reinkarnationsforschung“, In: Schmidt-Leukel, P., (ed.), *Die Idee der Reinkarnation in Ost und West* pp. 152–176. 228–230

⁶⁰ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2018), "Extended Naturalism": Dis-entangling questions of the boundaries of reality from religious perceptions and interpretation of experience

⁶¹ Staudenmaier, P., (2012), *Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Spiritual Seekers, Fluid Worldviews, and the Modern Occult Revival*

It is in the spirit of technological rationality that the sociologist Max Weber proclaimed the ‘disenchantment’ of modernity after the end of the First World War. It has been interpreted as the proclamation of a turning point in predominant culture of Modernity since.⁶² Weber declared:

‘The increasing intellectualization and rationalization does therefore not mean an increasing general knowledge of conditions of life, under which one exists. It rather means something different: the knowledge of it or the faith in it: that, if one would only want to know it, one could experience it at all times, that there be in principle no secret (ive), uncontrollable powers, which might exert effects here, that one could, in principle, control all things by calculation. This however means: the disenchantment of the world. No longer does one have to resort to magic means, like the savage, to whom such powers existed, in order to control the spirits or to ask from them. Rather technical means and calculation will provide that. This means in particular Intellectualisation as such’ (Weber 1919).⁶³

These words were spoken after the First World War, in Munich, in the cultural environment of a city which had been a centre of spiritism, by the activities of the journalist and author Carl du Prel, who coordinated international spiritistic networks, as with the Russian author Alexander Aksakov, in the late nineteenth century, and continued to be some by the wealthy medical doctor and psychotherapist, count Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929). He organised spiritistic séances, a Spiritistic society, edited a journal and published on these issues himself. Although Max Weber spoke about the magical means of ‘savages’ he probably had the Spiritistic culture of Munich in mind, which was socially most influential, as evidenced by the participation of the prominent literary author Thomas Mann in it. The artists’ movement of Symbolism, which comprised visual arts, literature, dance, and other forms, was deeply engaged in Spiritism, formulating its theories on the basis of a Spiritistic world view, defining Art as form of mediumism. The painter Vasily Kandinsky, resident near Munich, engaged here. The foundation of symbolism in spiritism, in a pan-European movement of Art, was retrieved and re-presented in 1995 in a major art exhibition in Frankfurt a. M. dedicated to it. Its voluminous catalogue presents the different forms of spiritist orientation in the arts in this movement and specific receptions in concise background articles (Loers and Schirm 1995).⁶⁴ The inauguration of the exhibition by the chancellor of Germany at the time, Dr. Helmut Kohl, underlined the awareness, that this exhibition marked a break with the hitherto rather unquestioned equation of Modernity with Rationalism and Positivism. The exhibition was presented in London too.

A few years later another major arts exhibition was dedicated to Occultism between 1750 up to the present, entitled: ‘Gespenster, Magie und Zauber. Konstruktionen des Irrationalen in der Kunst von Füssli bis heute’. It was shown in Zurich, Strasbourg and in Nurnberg in 2012 (Kliege 2011).⁶⁵ A part of this exhibition showed how mediumistic

⁶² Aspren, E., (2014), *The Problem with Disenchantment. Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939*

⁶³ Weber, M., (2019), *Wissenschaft als Beruf*

⁶⁴ Loers, V. and Kunsthalle Schirn (eds.), (1995), *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900–1915*

⁶⁵ Kliege, M. (ed.), (2011), *Gespenster, Magie und Zauber in der Kunst: Konstruktionen des Irrationalen von Füssli bis heute*

approaches and perceptions came to adopted anew in Modern art in the late twentieth century—often after a stage of ridicule in the preceding decades.

Kardecism was not very important in Symbolism and fin-de-siècle Spiritism, as in Munich, due to the more Universalistic orientation of the former and the less religious formation of the latter. However, its legacy in the arts, in spirituality, in therapy and world view, that shaped major movements in these fields, as indicated here, has remained influential, resurging in a different cultural climate, as from the late twentieth century onwards. It has laid the foundation for the recent reception of Kardecism in these fields, as interesting and credible, beyond the confines of the Brazilian expatriate community in German-speaking countries.

Kardecism and—more widely—spiritism was closely connected to the movement of ‘Life-Reform’, which flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has had a lasting, enduring effect on the cultures of German-speaking countries. Its world view and ethics, focussed on ecology and a harmonious relation to ‘nature’ as well as attainment of congruity between inner and outer ‘nature’, have deep influence here. This may explain why the Green party is on the second rank in present political polls in Germany and partner in the ruling coalition in Austria. Its historical connection with this movement may explain some of the present appeal that Kardecism exerts in German-speaking countries – along with other religious/spiritual movements of the Brazilian ‘spiritistic spectrum (Bahía 2020)’.⁶⁶

The Recent Reception of Kardecism

Systemic Views on Reception

The reception of Kardecism in German-speaking countries can be understood in a systemic perspective. The religious landscape of German-speaking countries represents a ‘field’ with systemic features. The reception of Kardecism into this field need thus not be viewed as a random and singular event. The theoretical approach considered here is Ulrich Berner’s Theory of Syncretism.⁶⁷ Berner proposed to understand religions as ‘systems’ in terms of Systems Theory. This implies that religions behave (and interact) as coherent entities, aware of their boundaries, their structures and their defining features. They are not ‘residual’ as sets of doctrines, but, as long as they exist, they are ‘live’, which means that they react to their environment, by adaptation, assimilation, delimitation, adjustment etc. They also behave auto-recursively. Their adherents share a common sense of religious identity, regardless of differences between them. The boundaries between what belongs to a religion and what is rejected as alien, are constantly in review and discussed, formally or informally, by doctrinal and/or ecclesiastical authorities and by the lay members - even by some outside of the respective community.

⁶⁶ Bahía, J., “Europa ‘underground’: enverdecimento do ser, Reforma da Vida, bruxarias e outros modos de pensar o espiritual Underground Europe. Greening of the self, Reform of life, witchcrafts and other ways of thinking the spiritual. In: *Revista Antropológica*, no. 48, (2020/1), pp.142–167

⁶⁷ Berner, U., (1982), *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes*

The recent advent of Kardecism in German-speaking countries can thus be viewed as a process of ‘reception’ as well as of ‘spreading’. It is the result of efforts of indigenous people here, taking interest, and of immigrants adhering to Kardecism. Its enrootment here however can be attributed to ‘systemic’ factors in the religious field of German-speaking countries. It is thus proposed here to understand this advent of Kardecism from the late twentieth century on, not merely as a fortuitous event as may be inevitable in the context of globalisation. If it were so, Kardecism here would remain largely confined to the groups of Kardecists among the Brazilian expatriates here, and to a few of their friends and associates.

Indications that Kardecism has begun to be recognised in segments of Germanophone societies, may show, that the ‘religious field’ here is beginning to react to Kardecism, taking note of it, taking interest, criticising or engaging with it. These may be understood as systemic reactions, and not as random individual events. The concept of ‘system’ is applied here both to the established churches and to religious society at large. The application of Theory of Syncretism to this process does not imply that Kardecism has engendered any syncretistic processes here, so far. However the perceptible reactions and specific receptions of doctrines and spiritual, therapeutic and mediumistic practices of Kardecism, can be shown to be conditioned by the respective features of the religious field in Germano-phone societies, as proposed by Theory of Syncretism.

The Religious Field of German-Speaking Countries as Determinant

In Germany, Switzerland and Austria, an overall majority are Christians, with about 57–72% of the population. Of these, the proportion of Roman Catholics and of Lutherans or Calvinists in the former is about equal. In Austria, the Roman Catholic Church is predominant by far. Historically, Protestantism dominated in most of the important cities and territories, giving the German and Swiss national cultures and mentalities are markedly ‘Protestant’ character, accounting for values like—low power distance (hierarchical distance), reflecting Protestant values and Church structure (Hofstede 1984).⁶⁸ (Kardecism may resonate with that.) The distribution of Protestants and Catholics is regionally very distinct, which accounts for regionally quite distinct cultures. The proportion of atheists is highest in Germany. Here, Atheism is the by far predominant value world view in Eastern Germany, including Berlin. The 5% Muslims in Germany, or 8% in Austria, form distinct immigrant communities, with little influence on the national religious cultures. The same applies to the Orthodox Churches, of 2% in Germany or 5% in Austria. The values for the proportion of Christians in the Swiss population are between those of Austria and Germany.

For the appeal of Kardecism, this is relevant for the following reasons: being a declaredly religious community of Christian orientation, however with no liturgical rites nor sacraments and with no ecclesiastical hierarchy but with a well-developed practice of relating to the deceased by spiritistic means, different fields of convergence emerge, as to Protestantism and to Roman Catholicism—and of course as to Christianity, Islam or Atheism. Thus, Kardecism may not appeal to those interested in Spiritism, but averse to Christianity or to religion at all.

⁶⁸ Hofstede, G., (1984), *Culture's Consequences. International Differences in Work-Related Values*, p. 104

Its connecting to the deceased may resonate with Roman Catholic (and Orthodox) convictions and veneration of saints. Its lack of formal liturgy in religious assemblies and lack of religious hierarchy may appeal to Protestants, especially when communal reading of the Bible and common prayer are done. Its ethics and practice of charity certainly appeals to people feeling a religious obligation to social responsibility and engagement. Its practice of connecting to spirits for inspiration may resonate with Revivalist traditions in Protestantism, seeking new inspiration, beyond what is mediated by tradition. The practice of ‘spiritual cleansing’—by the practice of ‘passes’: stroking the ‘energy field’ of a person for purification, may appeal to a Roman Catholic understanding of blessing, or to Pentecostal or Orthodox notions of ‘pneumatic’ spiritual action for purification, healing or exorcism. The working with ‘spiritual energy’ may attract Esotericist—provided they come to terms with Kardecism’s Christian orientation.

Kardecism’s religious orientation to Christianity—regardless of its assessment as heretic by the ecumenical community of Churches—also conditions its reception. The contexts of ongoing secularisation, and of transformation of a majority to more detachment from the liturgical life of the Church, may also be considered here. A look at the form and strength of religious orientation in Germany may show this.

For the present reception of Kardecism in countries of the German language Roland Spliesgart has an interesting case for comparison, in which some of the reasons for its attractiveness may be mirrored. In his voluminous study of acculturation of German and Swiss emigrants to Brazil in the nineteenth century, he reports that Kardecism quickly gained followers among them in Brazil (Spliesgart 2006).⁶⁹ While one factor may have been, that these immigrants and their descendants could thus join a decidedly ‘Brazilian’ religious community, thus integrating themselves into society, other factors of belief, world view and laity-based organisation may have contributed to it. These may have been about the same factors that also motivated conversions to Kardecism (on a small scale) in Germany at the same time.

The distribution of types of faith and beliefs in Germany has been investigated in representative studies by the Bertelsmann foundation, conducted in 2008 and 2013 (Vople and Weig 2013).⁷⁰ The study shows that of West Germans, 54% profess strong belief in God in 2013 (52% in 2008), and little or none, 27% in 2013 (25% in 2008).⁷¹ This is most relevant for our purpose, since most Kardecist groups are established in West Germany, not in the East. The religious profiles of Austrian and Switzerland resemble that of West Germany, with a significantly higher proportion of Christians in Austria. By comparison, in 2013, 23% professed strong belief in God (12% in 2008) and 68% little or no belief in God in 2013 (73% in 2008).⁷² This shows that the field of theistic religious belief is stable, with slight increase in faith, more markedly in East Germany. The question for ‘spiritual orientation’ shows a self-assessment as ‘strong’ for 13% of West German in 2013 and 6% in East Germany (both risen since

⁶⁹ Spliesgart, Roland, *Verbrasilianerung und Akkulturation – Deutsche Protestanten im brasilianischen Kaiserreich am Beispiel der Gemeinden in Rio de Janeiro und Minas Gerais (1822–1889)*, Wiesbaden, 2006: Harrasowitz, pp. 415ff.

⁷⁰ Vople, S. and B. Weig, (2013), *Religionsmonitor verstehen was verbindet. Religiosität und Zusammenhalt in Deutschland*

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 12

⁷² idem

2008).⁷³ While ‘spirituality’ may cover both Christian and Esoteric as well as other religious orientations, the Esoteric orientation is most likely to be found in this segment. 29% of West Germany and 16% of East Germans profess a syncretistic and universalist orientation in 2013 (both rising since 2008).⁷⁴

While regular religious practice in church is on the decline, the values of Christianity are held in high esteem.⁷⁵ For Kardecism this means that its professed Christian orientation, its emphasis in Christian values, charitable work, and volunteer engagement are in line with the values and beliefs of the majority population. Its lack of liturgical worship and sacramental practice is probably not perceived as detrimental by many. The Esotericist aspects of Kardecism however may appeal to a far smaller segment of the population. It appears that Kardecist groups in German-speaking countries resonate to this: the orientation to Christian spirituality and charitable engagement and ethical values is emphasised, the mediumist and spiritistic work—essential to Kardecism—while mentioned, is not in the foreground. It appears in announcements on lectures and work of ‘spiritual purification’ and in the activities of special groups in the community engaged in this work.

Conclusions or the Reception of Kardecism in German-Speaking Countries

As to the doctrine and religious, spiritual, therapeutic and spiritistic practices, Kardecism covers a specific field that has so far remained largely vacant. It may therefore be assumed that it has come here to stay and will expand from the Brazilian expatriate communities into the wider German-speaking societies. This can be observed already. Kardecism’s place in can be determined by several criteria:

- 1) Its character as a professed Christian community: It shares this with the established ‘ecumenical’ Christian Churches. (These regard Kardecism as heretic however for several reasons.) Kardecism posits itself in the (wide) field of Christian faith. About two thirds of the population in these countries are Christians. Thus, it can appeal to people who see themselves as Christians, but who disagree with or who miss certain elements in their Churches.
- 2) Its professed belief in reincarnation: Kardecism shares this with a large segment of the population. Somewhat over 20% of Germans believe in reincarnation (Tesche 2015),⁷⁶ with a rising tendency. The figures for Austria and Switzerland are somewhat higher. This means, that Kardecism, with its central doctrine of reincarnation appeals to that part of the population believing in reincarnation—of which a large part also identifies as primarily Christian. The proportions of Protestants and Roman Catholics who believe in reincarnation are over 20%—among the more pious members even 30%, according to latest surveys (Ruch 2009).⁷⁷

The rejection of reincarnation by the orthodox Christian Churches gives

⁷³ idem

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 13

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 59

⁷⁶ Tesche, T., (2015), *Nachtodvorstellungen in Deutschland heute – Ein religionswissenschaftlicher Forschungsbeitrag*, p. 21ff.

⁷⁷ Ruch, C., “Reinkarnationsglaube als Alternative?” in: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW) (eds.), *Materialdienst* 6/2009

Kardecism a special position here—which it only shares with the Anthroposophy, which is traditionally strong and well enrooted in German-speaking culture and society in many fields—such as private schools—in spite of the rather small number of its professed adherents. Anthroposophy also teaches reincarnation (Zander 2007).⁷⁸ However, it does not connect a common practice to it. This gives Kardecism a singular position here.

- 3) Kardecism's practice of spiritism: while spiritistic practice proper has rather vanished from public discourse, the relation to an 'otherworld' and issues of life after death or of pre-existence have come into view again, by research dying itself, and marginal experiences and phenomena in the orbit of dying (von Lucadou 2010),⁷⁹ on near-death experiences (Zaleski 1995)⁸⁰ and by 'Past Life Regression' therapy, which applies hypnosis. These are both receiving sustained public attention and are in the process of formation of networks of communication, publication and establishment. For the latter, a professional association was founded in Europe in 2006 (The Earth Association for Regression Therapy 2020).⁸¹ The phenomena and experiences, documentation and models of explanation involve respected members of the medical profession, some of them in academia. They have received public attention by serious films on these issues, as well as by publications by respected publishers. In short, these issues have attained 'respectability' in public discourse. This provides a fertile field for the acceptance of Kardecist teachings and practices in this regard. Kardecist groups are moving in this direction, by organising seminars and public lectures on these issues.
- 4) Kardecism's working with 'spiritual energy'. This concept has attained widespread public recognition. As to practice, Tantric subtle anthropology, of the chakras and nadis, are included here, as well as Reiki or Esoterically based practices. A wide range of therapeutic practices has become established, especially in the fields of 'alternative healing' which is partially funded by health insurers, when practiced in accepted forms, like Yoga. Kardecism's form of working with spiritual energy by means of 'passes' is not 'out of the ordinary' in this context—nor is it singular. It may be expected that Kardecism integrates well into this field.

The Introduction of Kardecism in the 1980s: the Early History of Renewed Reception

Kardecism began to be reintroduced to German-speaking countries by the joined efforts of some pioneers: Thus in 1982 Stanley Krippner (USA) and Alberto Villoldo (Cuba) organised a shamanic convention in Alpbach, Tirol (Austria), together with Austrian and German partners. Among them was a German psychotherapist and sociologist, Ilse Korte, who had worked in an influential position in science management and who had excellent societal contacts. She had visited the Esalen Centre, and Brazil, where she met with prominent Kardecists and was

⁷⁸ Zander, H., (2007), *Anthroposophie in Deutschland*, vol. 1, pp. 934ff.

⁷⁹ von Lucadou W., (2010), „Paranormale Erfahrungen im Umfeld des Sterbens“

⁸⁰ Zaleski C., (1995), *Nahtoderlebnisse und Jenseitsvisionen. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. (original: 1988)

⁸¹ The Earth Association for Regression Therapy, [homepage]. <https://www.earth-association.org/committees/>

connected to the Jungian Society. The organisers of this conference invited the Kardecist couple Jarbas and Carmen Marinho to demonstrate their practice of mediumistic healing. From then on Ilse Korte invited the Marinhos to her seminars in Germany (Trance und Geistheilung - mit Ilse Korte 2001). From here on Kardecist doctrine and practice became introduced to many practitioners in the therapeutic fields, among them the owners of well-known clinics for rehabilitation in southern Germany. Kardecism had thus received a forceful entry on the stage of spiritually oriented therapy. In this context, a German engineer, Dagobert Göbel, who worked in the medical field, came to know the Marinhos, seeking healing for his gravely ill wife. In 1994 the Marinho's daughter Fernanda, came to Germany. With Dagobert Göbel she founded a school for mediumism (Medienschule Marinho Göbel 2020).⁸² They organised revised translations of Kardec's works and made them accessible in German. In 1998 they founded a legally registered association, the ALKASTAR e. V.⁸³ to re-edit and republish the works of Allan Kardec. A publishers, the Lichttropfen Verlag⁸⁴ was founded for this purpose.

In 2007, the founder of the Kardecist Medical Association (Associação Médico Espírita (AME)), Dr. Marlene Nobre invited Dagobert Göbel to present his work at the first congress of the association in London. Here, the plan was born to organise similar congresses in Germany, to which she was invited, along with other prominent Kardecist medical doctors.⁸⁵ In the meantime, different forms of co-operation developed with the Kardecist communities founded by Brazilian expatriates in German-speaking countries. Many of these groups belong to the umbrella organisation, the *Deutsche Spiritistische Vereinigung (DSV)*, which represents the *Federacao Espirita Brasileira (FEB)*.⁸⁶

The renewed establishment of Kardecism in German-speaking countries thus evolved by two processes: by reception, organised by local professionals in the therapeutic fields, in particular, in the context of the spiritually oriented cultural transformation inspired by the counter-culture of the late twentieth century. It brought many submerged and repressed traditions of religious, scientific, spiritual, therapeutic and mediumistic as well as aesthetic thought and practice to renewed life, public attention and cultural establishments in society. The main lines of these have been presented and discussed here above. The other process is one of introduction by Brazilian Kardecist professionals. With their expertise in organisation and their often high 'social capital' they have established efficiently run, attractive groups that are well presented on the internet and reliably and vitally established in their social formation and work. Accordingly, Kardecism in German-speaking countries is presently well connected to the Kardecist Federation in Brazil, with lively exchange, for public seminars, presentations and conventions. The work is mostly done in both languages, in Portuguese and in German.

⁸² Medienschule Marinho Göbel [homepage], www.medienschule-marinho-goebel.de

⁸³ ALKASTAR e. V. (2020) [homepage], www.alkastar.de

⁸⁴ Lichttropfen Verlag (n.d.) [homepage], www.lichttropfen-verlag.de

⁸⁵ [ALKASTAR e. V. (2020)], „Kongress Psychomedizin“, www.kongress-psychomedizin.com

⁸⁶ I owe the information presented here to personal talks with Ilse Korte (died in 2008) and to Dagobert Göbel, Nordheim (Germany), who can be contacted on demand.

Sociological Aspects

Its introduction by Brazilians—many of them specialists with high qualifications and their spouses—has situated Kardecism in a markedly academic segment of society. This determines its organisational structure, its activities and societal position and media presence. There are about 40,000 Brazilians among the 83 million inhabitants of Germany, staying on the average for 10 years (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018.⁸⁷ Considering the qualifications of many Brazilians and their high societal integration this is a sizeable presence. Among them Kardecism has a higher percentage of adherents than in Brazil since it is most strong in the educated and affluent cities of the southeast, with close to 4% of the population, and rising share here.⁸⁸ Kardecism has the highest rank as to education and socioeconomic position among all religious communities and denominations in Brazil.⁸⁹ This obviously affects the composition of Brazilian expatriates in German-speaking countries too. Three groups may be discerned here:

- 1.) The Brazilian spouses of employees working in Brazil for some time
- 2.) Brazilian students and
- 3.) Brazilian professionals working mostly for international companies in specialized and high-ranking positions, most of them with their families. Some of their spouses are not employed due to the good income of their partners.

Members of all three groups can be encountered in Kardecist events in German-speaking countries. Among the leadership of the local Kardecist groups that have established themselves here, those from the third group are well represented. Thus the chairman of the group in Würzburg, Dr. Alexandre Orth, came to Germany for a doctorate at the prestigious Technical University of Aachen, and became a specialist engineer for deep-sea mining with the Siemens-Rexroth company. The husband of the director of the group in Erlangen—likewise a university city in Bavaria, Marisa Chiappina, is the wife of a Siemens Sales Manager for Latin America. With this professional and social background comes management capability, as well as social and cultural ‘capital’. These can be observed in the quality of websites, efficiency of organization, networking and internet presence. The bi-lingual website of the Munich group, directed by Cleide Ferreira, product manager at the major German automobile association, is a fine example.⁹⁰

Conclusion

The view to the historical roots of Kardecism in German culture shows how deeply it can resonate to the present societies of Austria, Switzerland and Germany. Kardecism

⁸⁷ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (eds.), „Ausländische Bevölkerung nach Staatsangehörigkeit“, (1st April, 2018).

⁸⁸ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (eds.) *Censo 2010: número de católicos cai e aumenta o de evangélicos, espíritas e sem religião*, (29. 06. 2012)

⁸⁹ Último Segundo – iG (eds.), *IBGE: com maior rendimento e instrução, espíritas crescem 65% no País em 10 anos*, São Paulo, (29. 06. 2012)

⁹⁰ GEEAK (Grupo de Estudos Espíritas/Spiritistische Studiengruppe Allan Kardec), [website], “Über uns”

is rooted in all three, with local traditions going back to J. H. Pestalozzi in Switzerland, to A. Mesmer in Austria and Germany and to several influential personalities of Romanticism, the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, in the fields of medicine, literature, philosophy, religion, natural sciences, therapy, the life-reform movements, the arts and so on. If present Kardecism is able to re-connect to these, it may be perceived and legitimised deeply in the cultures of German-speaking countries. In addition, it also resonates with new developments of thought and practice inaugurated by the counter-culture movements of the late twentieth century, that have increasingly been adopted by the mainstream of society. Its decidedly Christian orientation may facilitate adherence to Kardecism to some, it may be suspicious to others. Its many facets, some of them derived from Esoteric traditions, as well as Indian religious thought, provide many points of interest and access to a wide range of people who seek to integrate faith, spirituality, therapeutic practices and forms of relating to a wider, and otherworldly reality and realm. Thus it has much to offer, especially in fields which the established mainline Churches of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism do not fill or have vacated under the impact of positivism. It also appears that Kardecism can relate to present research and new discourse on near-death experiences and related phenomena. Thus participation in societal discourse in such realms appears as possible. The relatively small numbers of Kardecists at present may be an impediment. Thus further growth, cultural establishment and integration may be expected in the future. Kardecism, for all the disruptions of its traditions here, is certainly not on alien ground.

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