

Summary

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Investigation of electricity as scientific practice and the origin of metaphors in popular science press and messianic philosophy

The main goal of the doctoral dissertation is to prove the influence of scientific practices related to the study of electricity on Polish representatives of literature and philosophy of Romanticism and messianism. The research covers the historical period that began in 1770, i.e. when the first Polish publications on electricity appeared, and ended in 1850, as a conventional boundary marking the emergence of the leading messianic theories. Three main theses were put forward in the dissertation. Firstly, the science of electricity was socially co-produced, i.e. its effectiveness was determined by cultural and political aspects. Secondly, science understood in this way became a source of controversy discussed in the pages of the scientific and popular-science press, which at the beginning of the 19th century began to play a fundamental role in creating the social imaginary. Thirdly, by circulating the references of electricity, both as material factors and metaphors, science had contributed to the grounding of new imaginative figures and epistemological tools in Romantic works and in the philosophy of messianism.

The first chapter discusses a scientific culture focused on the study of electricity that developed roughly between 1770 and 1815. Development of the scientific culture coincides with undertaking new efforts for public education. It was a period marked by the reform of universities (Main Schools), the change of curricula, and thus the negotiation of various strategies undertaken to publicize science. This chapter shows that some conclusions taken from research on the new force, e.g. its universal and divine features, helped to establish the public authority of science. The problem is discussed in line with the performative theory of science proposed by science and technology studies. The discussion is based on a thorough reconstruction of scientific practices and metaphorizations from numerous physical textbooks, undertaken in order to describe the performative function of a new social actor – electricity. The chapter explains the functions of this actor in shaping new social practices and patterns of experience.

The purpose of the second chapter is to discuss the circulation of reference of electricity in Vilnius in the period around 1800-1825. The chapter shows the function of electricity as agent, which was binding with other actors and thus stabilized various systems of knowledge, e.g. the theories by Jędrzej Śniadecki, Stefan Stubielewicz, Józef Frank and other lecturers at the University of Vilnius. Additionally, in reference to these theories, the animal magnetism controversy that occurred in Vilnius is discussed. The purpose of this juxtaposition is to draw attention to the electrical *episteme* shared by both – institutional and quack – sciences. Finally, the chapter shows that the circulation of reference of electricity determined the activities of the Philomath Society, primarily the group of ‘Radiants’ (including Adam Mickiewicz). The group used the concept and models determined by the science of electricity and animal magnetism to create new, Romantic ideas of interpersonal communication and community.

The third chapter shows how, in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, the culture of Romantic science contributed to certain aesthetic and philosophical categories of the “national spirit”. The analysis covers press articles on electricity from magazines such as “Izys Polska” [“Polish Isis”] and “Pamiętnik Warszawski” [“Warsaw Diary”]. The chapter proves that the popular articles used eschatological and metaphysical figures characteristic for the paradigm of the new school of Romantic literature in order to popularize knowledge about electricity. The same strategy of hybridization of metaphors and literary strategies was found in texts by Maurycy Mochnacki and Kazimierz Brodziński, the leading figures of the early messianism. They had contributed to creation and consolidation of the metaphor ‘spirit as electricity’, which became crucial for later messianists. The last subsection focuses on the function of electricity metaphors in *Dziady, cz. III* [*Forefathers’ Eve, part III*] by Mickiewicz.

The fourth chapter discusses the process of stabilizing the metaphor of spirit as electricity in the early 1840s. The chapter begins with analysis of popular opinions about Mickiewicz. They prove that an energy of the prophet was commonly associated with electricity. Then, the chapter discusses teachings and practices of the Circle of God’s Cause. The main thesis of the chapter is that Andrzej Towiański, the founder of the Circle, used the metaphor of the spirit as electricity in presenting his mystical vision. This metaphor helped him to express the spiritual theses about the world, but also to gain new believers (like Mickiewicz). Thus, it determined the efficiency of the new messianic movement. The chapter also focuses on the functions of electricity in the mysticism of Juliusz Słowacki. The teachings of the Circle of God’s Cause convinced him that the spirit works as electricity. He

wanted to transform this idea in a 'fact' – by exploring new theories on electromagnetism, making speculations and conducting self-experiments. He aimed to include these discoveries into his new science on spirit.

The fifth and last chapter deals with the messianic theories of Bronisław Trentowski, Karol Libelt and August Cieszkowski. The reconstruction of the discourse on electricity in the Poznan and Warsaw press proves that electricity was described in metaphysical terms. In this context, the popularizing and scientific activity of Józef Żochowski, a physicist, constructor, journalist and author of messianic concepts presenting electromagnetism as the soul of the world, is discussed. Moreover, it is shown that the articles in the press – about philosophy and social life – were believed to play the “electrifying” role in stimulating national life. Hence, the metaphors of electricity in national philosophy carried at least two meanings: not only did they provide a language to describe the spirit, but they also conceptualized every attempt at philosophy as a manifestation of the electric-spiritual energy. The analysis of *Chowanna* by Trentowski and *Ojciec Nasz* [*Our Father*] by Cieszkowski proves that the authors adopted these metaphorizations of electricity widespread in the discourse to create history and the future of the spirit as well as messianic visions of the “new man”.



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