



ATHOL SPRINGS, N.Y.





## HOW I LEARNED ABOUT THE NEW SOCIETY FOR UNIVERSAL HARMONY

*Certum est, quia impossibile est. It is certain because it is impossible.*

—Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, c. 5. 4<sup>1</sup>

IT WAS SEPTEMBER 1999. When the moon was in its first quarter I could not easily take the elevator to my tenth floor apartment.<sup>2</sup> The elevator's rapid acceleration and deceleration caused me to nearly faint. I had to bend over and hold my finger on the red emergency button while the elevator was in motion. If people asked me why, I said I was resting my finger. At night I had a recurring dream that the elevator was going through the roof.

Another thing, I seemed to be fixated on the compass points: The windows in my apartment faced east and west and it annoyed me that they didn't face north and south. The grid of the streets, a geometric purity I used to love, threw me into despair. Now I saw only endless impassible facades with canyons between them. I would walk for hours looking for the parking lots that make a diagonal shortcut from street to street or the ground-level stores that run through a building with an entrance on one block and an exit on another.

On a Sunday in October I was at the Brooklyn Museum. I noticed a flock of starlings perched on the branches of a tree near the entrance. All of a sudden they flew out making a black shape in the sky. There were hundreds of them. They swirled up and disappeared. The next week I began to research the migration of the birds and their connection to magnetism. Magnetite crystals are found near the olfactory nerves.

What did that mean?

At the same time I was losing my friends. I kept calling them, asking, "Is it gravity or is it magnetism?" "There's nothing wrong with you," they said. But I continued calling anyway and, one by one, over a period of months, they stopped calling me back.

Depressed and confused, I thought that it might help to get away for a while. After the holidays I summoned the energy to visit my cousins in Buffalo, New York. On Saturday, February 5th we sat in their kitchen lingering over the local newspaper, *Ananova*. The cover story, by C. Colligan, referred to Doctor F. A. Mesmer, the physician founder of The New Society for Universal Harmony, located on County Route 122 in Athol Springs, which my cousins told me was only eight miles away. According to Simpson the society was situated on a 1,250 acre estate with a magnificent view of Lake Erie.

The article went on to say:

*We live in a network of institutional settings, each one with its own rules, goals and rewards, the ensemble of which mediates our existential reality. The cumulative effect has long been identified under the rubric of alienation for which the corporate institutional power brokers have supplied their own palliative, epitomized in the term spectacle whose main manifestation has been television.*<sup>3</sup>

*For many, however, the existential pain is too strong and they seek other more authentic solutions. A small coterie of these seekers have come together around the charismatic figure of Doctor F.A. Mesmer, who has established a thera-*

peutic community expanding and updating the principles of her illustrious 18th-century eponym, Franz Anton Mesmer, the physician founder of the original Société de l'harmonie universelle. The contemporary group seeks solutions for spiritual dislocation through symbolically mediated magnetic treatments devised by F.A. Mesmer. They call themselves the Harmonites.

"Interesting," I thought. The very next day we took the short drive to The New Society.

FEBRUARY 6TH, 2000

County route 122 turned out to be a beautiful road and The Society stood there gracefully alone, with nothing on either side of it for a couple of miles. We parked in the small front lot and, seeing no one entered the main building whose door was unlocked. The waiting room was very plain, except for a nice Oriental carpet on the floor.

Our eyes fell on a bulletin board wedged in the corner that listed upcoming weekend lectures: February 26th: From Aristotle to Mesmer; March 4th: New Analysis of the Michelson-Morley Experiment; March 11th: Fourier's Passional Attraction; March 18th: The Cure at the Sanctuary at Pergamum (Aelius Aristides); March 25th: Early Martian Magnetism Tape-recorded in Rock.

Off the entrance room were corridors lined with chalkboards on which were written numerous equations, citations and quotations.

The chalkboards fascinated us. The equations had symbols we had never seen. There were quotes by Goethe and Rousseau; there was a line by Poe: "But there are gradations of matter of which man knows nothing; the grosser impelling the finer." We looked at

$$D(K) = \sum_{j=0}^K (-1)^{K-j+1} \binom{N-j}{K-j} Q(N-j),$$

$$Q(N-j) = - \sum_{\{i_1 \dots i_j\}} \sum_S P(s_1 \dots s_N) \log_2 (\sum P(s_1 \dots$$

$$p_j = - \frac{\partial H}{\partial q_j} \quad q_j = \frac{\partial H}{\partial p_j}$$

$$E(K) = C \epsilon^{2/3} K^{-5/3} f(K\eta) \\ \eta = (\nu^3/\epsilon)^{1/4}$$

$$i\hbar \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial t} = H \psi$$

$$S(t) = - \iint f(\vec{r}, \vec{w}, t) \ln f(\vec{r}, \vec{w}, t) d\vec{r} d\vec{w} \\ \frac{dS(t)}{dt} \geq 0$$

all the chalkboards, one after another for a long time before retracing our steps down the hallways.

Standing outside in the near dark of late afternoon I said to my cousins, "Something important is going on here." I knew I would come back.



MAY 10, 2000

The next time I visited The New Society I went alone. It was a brisk spring afternoon, the sky a light gray. I parked in the same small lot we had used before and seeing no one, walked freely on the grounds. Not far from the main building I discovered a vegetable garden; farther along the path which led to an old barn, freshly painted, then a pasture with cows and their calves, and finally, in a valley, a sheep meadow, bordered on its near side by a stone wall. In the



valley I saw dozens of sheep, all grazing. Their heads turned, bells clinking as I walked by. I followed a logging trail and up it went, very steeply. I climbed for a long time, in solitude beneath the high branches of old beeches, oaks, and maples.

In the late afternoon at the edge of a field I saw a group of men and women carrying iron pipes, jugs of water, and other mysterious objects toward a wooden tub.

"Could these be the Harmonites?" I wondered. I remembered Simpson's article. Keeping a respectful distance, I stared for a while and then said loudly, "Excuse me." They didn't seem surprised. A young woman separated herself from the crowd and came toward me. She extended her hand and greeted me expectantly.

"Hello, I'm Maureen. I'm a cellular biologist." She had a long blond braid and pale eyes colored a milky blue. She said quietly, "I worked at the spa Hygeology for twelve years and when it closed Mesmer

recruited me to treat the Harmonites." Her warm manner drew me to her.

Whispering into my ear she repeated what I had read in the *Ananova*: "F. A. Mesmer is attempting to update and expand the principles of her illustrious for-bearer, Franz Anton Mesmer, according to modern discoveries in physics and biology."

She spoke about animal magnetism.<sup>4</sup> Pointing to the wooden tub Maureen said in a dreamy voice, "You see, there, on our left, that is the baquet, the bath. People are bathing in the magnetized water." Walking slowly side by side we came to an apple orchard where I saw men and women tied to the apple trees with ropes.

Maureen gestured broadly toward them. "Mesmer magnetizes trees<sup>5</sup> and ties people to them in daisy-chain fashion. She is particularly keen on fruit-bearing trees."

"Is that so?" I finally replied.









"Listen," said Maureen, "cure by the magnetized tree has a long therapeutic history. You can find references to it in many works by Franz Anton Mesmer and in the *mémoires* of his follower, the Marquis de Puységur. She paused. "Puységur cured his peasant, Victor Race, under the magnetized elm of Buzancy." <sup>6</sup>

We continued walking and she did most of the talking. Maureen's thoughts were abstract. Inclining her head towards me, she said, "One of the most interesting technical problems may be called psychology. It is the central problem of the mind or the nervous system. Also, there is the physical problem common to many fields that is very old, and that has not been solved. It is the analysis of circulating or turbulent fluids. Mesmer is addressing these issues. She believes that the route to the psyche is through the basic sciences." <sup>7</sup>

She continued, "People want to be happy."

I nodded, "It makes perfect sense."

When we parted, she beamed, "Perhaps our paths will cross again."

I answered, "You never know."

JULY 15, 2000

On my next visit I immediately took the path to the logging trail without lingering near the main building. It was a long distance to the field. On the way there it suddenly became hot and windy. I looked up at the sun. It was fierce and bright. A man approached me. He was thin and very tall.

"I'm Ben," he boomed. The trees were rustling and bending furiously in the wind.

"I'm Lenore." I looked up at him. Our eyes met and I didn't turn away. We stood in the intense heat and wind for some time.

"I'm an investigator," he said. "I do research. My field is terahertz radiation, particularly the investigation of the terahertz spectral region, that's the wavelength that lies between 30  $\mu\text{m}$  and 1 mm. I'm interested in terahertz radiation's ability to penetrate deep into many organic materials without causing the damage associated with ionizing radiation, such as X-rays."

Then he said with a grave look, "That wind, that heat. You are now witnessing an electromagnetic storm, the kind that produces excessive agitation in some guests."

The earth's regular magnetic patterns are suddenly disrupted by storms that originate in the sun, causing magnificent light displays in the sky or, alternately, power outages and radiation exposure, and occasionally arousal and nervous excitation in human beings. Their bodies become receivers."

The following day I read a report about the storm in *The New York Times*. I was amazed. Ben and I did witness that storm.

AUGUST 12, 2000

I visited Athol Springs again in August and planned on staying a week or longer. I rented a room at the Lavender Lakeview Motel, which isn't really a motel, but more of a bed-and-breakfast. It's run by an energetic woman with very short hair who, with much waving of hands, told me about the interesting sights in the area: the numerous hikes to mountaintops and waterfalls, the old canals and caves, the museum that devotes an entire wing to the display of large taxidermied animals. She stuck her finger into the air. "They have wolves and mastodons and saber-toothed tigers!"

The motel was an Adirondack-style cottage, painted lavender-gray with a screened-in porch facing the



lake. Two dormered windows perched on its broad sloping roof. Barely fifty yards from the house was a babbling brook that runs into the lake. Upstairs my bedroom walls were lined with pine paneling polished to a golden brown. From my window I had a view of the lake. I tended to linger there at the window a little too long, staring at the lake's glassy surface. I kept rearranging the furniture. The armchair faced west, which was fine in the morning, but in the evening I turned it to face south. I asked the owner to remove the extra chest of drawers, which she did with a smile. "You may use our Betty Crocker kitchen," she told me enthusiastically. In the refrigerator I found an unopened bottle of Rose's lime juice and an unopened bottle of tonic. I threw them away and very carefully arranged my own food on the shelves.

I called The New Society to announce my visit and, found, to my surprise, that they remembered who I was. Ben came to the phone.

"Please," he said, "take the tour."

The following morning Ramona, a helpful guide, showed me the assembly room, the conference room and the bedrooms where the Harmonites rested after treatment. The atrium and the basement laboratories were off-limits. Ramona talked eloquently about all of the Societies of Harmony. "They were radicals," she said. "Right before the French Revolution mesmerism was a radical political theory; its initiation rites combined occult science and masonic-like rituals." In its heyday *La société* had many branches all over Europe. Mesmerism was widely known and respected throughout the 19th century in Europe and in America."

She went on, "We revere our director for her brilliance, her sensitivity, patience and thoroughness, her compassion, the depth and breadth of her knowledge, but most of all because she believes that every ailment

has a cure and every question has an answer." <sup>8</sup>

She continued emphatically. "Remember this: the Harmonites are important people who lead complicated lives. They talk among themselves about matters of significance. They often ask each other, 'Why have we fallen out of harmony? What is the nature of existence? Is there redemption in rejecting modernity?' I've heard them read outloud from Nicolas Bergasse." She paused briefly, putting her hand on my shoulder. "In the 1780s he wrote, 'We have lost almost all connection with nature; We owe almost all the physical ailments that consume us to our institutions. We are on the brink of a Great Revolution.' You know," she said, "Bergasse was a co-founder of the old *La société*." <sup>9</sup>

Ramona then inquired, "Would you like to take a treatment?"

A bit startled, I tried changing the subject.

"Where is F.A. Mesmer?"

"In Calgary, Ontario, lecturing."

"I may write a human interest story about the society," I told her.

She said, "If you come again you may see the



archives.”

“If I come back can I also see the laboratories?”

“Yes.”

She left me alone for a few minutes. I put my ear to the basement door over a sign that read: NO METALS OF ANY KIND. Then I opened another door onto a large room that seemed to be an office. The windows faced north and east.

I saw a square table, a round table, an oval table, an armchair, and shelves that held bottles of water at the bottom of which had settled a metallic dust. Hundreds of photos and diagrams lined the walls with notes pasted above and below them. There were bookshelves everywhere. The books were arranged according to topics too numerous to name. There were old but valuable works in many volumes and many languages, complete editions. I noticed two marble busts placed so that they appeared in apparent conversation with one another. It was Mesmer’s office.

I felt a sudden peacefulness and thought, “I can’t bear to leave Athol Springs.” But as soon as I had this realization I chastised myself, “I must go home, return my rental car, resume my life, my work.”

I went back and forth.

On the one hand, “I must go home.”

On the other hand, “I mustn’t go.” I felt that Mesmer was onto something big. I wanted to see the laboratories. I would take pictures. I wondered what I had to lose anyway? Better to stay here. Do what I’ve had never done before.

I went home and returned the car.

In New York City at a rooftop party on Labor Day I met a woman who knew an editor at an important publishing house. I raved about The New Society and told her about the mysterious Doctor Mesmer.

“There is nothing else like this. I’m a writer and



a photographer.”

“This is interesting. Maybe I can do something,” she said.

I handed her my card. A few days passed and I received an e-mail from the editor asking to get together.

We had a long meeting and at the end she said, “There’s a story here. Write the book. Don’t rush it. Get involved. Take a year or longer if you need it.”

Several weeks later I received a contract with a sizable advance. I would write and shoot the photos, too. “This never happens so fast,” I thought. I sublet my apartment and came back to Athol Springs. I took a month-to-month lease at the Lavender Lakeview Motel.







## RESEARCH

*athol-ôtos on, untroubled, of water, Hes.Op.595; of pure air, Luc. Trag.62: metaph., logos; Them. Or.19.232d*

SEPTEMBER 14, 2000

I arrived at The New Society on Monday, September 12, at 9:30 A. M. Maureen and Ben greeted me at the door.

“We are so pleased to see you,” they said cheerfully. They knew about my book proposal. “Mesmer welcomes you too, but she is away in Leeds.”

After making their rounds, and introducing me to the staff they ushered me into a small office and said I could use it as my own. A computer and monitor occupied most of the desk, so I worked on the little remaining space, laying things on the floor when necessary. My watch had broken and Ramona gave me a wind-up clock that made a loud ticking noise and did not keep proper time. I did not buy a replacement watch.

I was given the key to the Archives Room, where many shelves were stacked with folders, books, photographs and clippings, scores of boxes all organized chronologically from 143 BC to 2000 AD. Someone had been working here recently. On a table I found a newspaper clipping about the National Spherical Torus Experiment Device at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory; a proposal from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt Maryland; a copy of the *Journal of Geophysical Research* and a reprint of a paper by Dr. Eric Priest, an applied mathematician and solar physicist at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

One by one I carried bulging files from the Archives Room to my little office. I made a decision to study first and then to shoot my photographs. I organ-

ized my reading carefully so that first I read the file on Franz Anton Mesmer, and later the files on the Marquis de Puységur and somnambulism, James Braid, Bernheim, Charcot, Salpêtrière, and finally Freud.

When I began to work in earnest it was raining outside, almost a storm. The rain was coming down in sheets, pelting the windows and the wind blew hard. Inside it was clammy with air conditioning. I couldn't concentrate. But gradually the wind died down, the rain stopped, the skies cleared, it turned warmer, and I regained focus.

For the next four months I read the archives every single day. I was researching Mesmerism. From time to time I wrote in my diary. The entries were brief.

SEPTEMBER 20, 2000

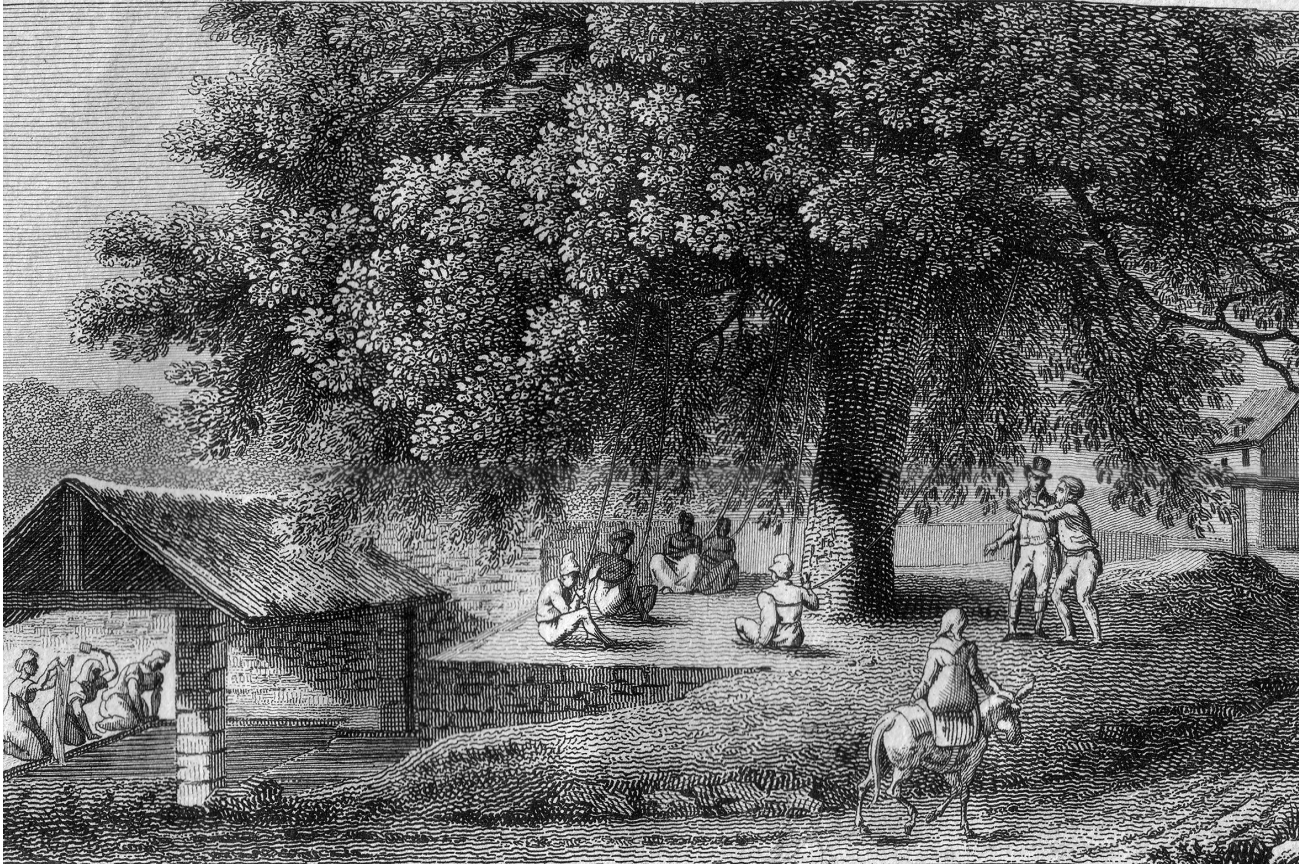
On Friday the moon was in its first quarter. It was affecting my ability to drive. No question about it. I could only drive on the left side of the road. That night I woke in the darkness and had no idea of where I was. The following day I went canoeing, tipped the canoe in the middle of the lake and had to push it to the dock with my arms.

But when I settled in at The New Society I felt good.

Mesmer — I read his *dissertatio physico-medica de planetarum influxu*, 1766, the *Mémoires de F.A. Mesmer, docteur en Médecine sur ses decouvertes*, 1799, and *Précis Historique de faits relatifs au magnetisme animal jusque'en avril*, 1781, and *Catéchisme du magnétisme animal*, in *L'Antimagnétisme, ou origine progres, décadence, renouveau et réfutation du magnétisme animal*, 1784.

Drawing from Newtonianism and astrology, Mesmer argued in his dissertation that the gravitational attraction of the planets played a role in human





health by affecting an invisible fluid found in the body and throughout nature. Disease, he believed, was the result of obstacles in the fluid's ebb and flow and these obstacles could be broken by trance-like crises or convulsions. Mesmer initially used magnets as a curative agent, but eventually dispensed with them, considering himself to be an animal magnet.

I held in my hand engravings of Mesmer and his followers, Bergasse and Kornman. Also emblems and

diagrams of Bergasse's "physio-moral" laws of nature. I found pages torn from folios, also pictures of palaces and engravings that showed Mesmeric treatments from the 1780s through the 1850s, sheaves of paper with occult texts, slim books in French and German with marginalia written by F. A. Mesmer and others before her, dating back to 1784. Many pieces referred to the Societies of Harmony, to politics and to the occult, which, on the eve of the French Revolution made an

interesting alliance. An underground current of radicalism ran through the Mesmeric movement.

I discovered a text undated, but probably written in the 1780's or 90's—a discourse on Egyptian religion from *La Societe de l'harmonie of Bordeaux*.

"Take a glance, my brothers, at the order's harmonic tableau, which covers this mysterious tub. It is the Isiac (sic) table, one of the most remarkable antiquities, where Mesmerism is seen at its dawning in the symbolic writing of our first fathers in the animal magnetism to which only Mesmerists have the key."



*Mille, jaloux, experts en tout l'art de la magie,  
Mélangez, par les vôtres, généraux,  
Ses vœux ont disparus, l'humanité respire,  
Poursuivez les destins glorieux  
Ouvrez la science en grande  
Qu'il soit bon, ou il est grand l'art des sciences,  
En faisant le bonheur du monde...*

But Franz Anton Mesmer distanced himself from the occult. I began to sense that his ideas were modified early on and Mesmerism, as it evolved in the 19th century had less and less to do with his original theses.

OCTOBER 15, 2000

Today I attended a lecture on rebuilding the body. How do we stay healthy? How do we feed ourselves well and cheaply?

I hoped to meet Mesmer. "You will, some day," said Ramona. "But this week Mesmer is in Argentina conducting seminars."

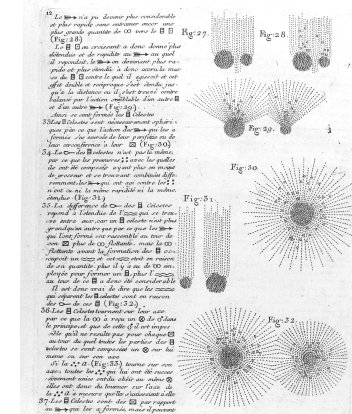
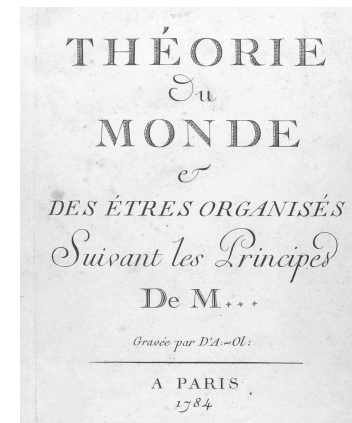
OCTOBER 22, 2000

Ramona took another job and was replaced by Sherry, a woman with curly red hair, very outgoing.

I've made friends with my landlady, who comes from St. Petersburg, Florida. She was divorced twice and her kids live in the West. We drove to the mall together to buy some winter clothes.

Maureen had suggested I read the *Mémoires of Puysegur*, Mesmer's follower. Here is what he said about the magnetized tree:

After attaching a rope to a tree I tried its effectiveness on some sick people. The first patient came







and as soon as he had put the rope around himself, he looked at the tree and said with an air of surprise, which cannot be duplicated: What do I see there? Next his head dropped and he was in a perfect state of somnambulism.<sup>10</sup> Puységur, 1784. pp. 30-31.

In 1784 while treating Victor Race, a peasant on his estate, Puységur discovered an unusual state of consciousness, in which the patient is “awake” while sleeping. He called it “magnetic somnambulism.” Mesmer’s approach was physiological, but what Puységur described was a psychological relationship between magnetizer and patient.

NOVEMBER 17, 2000

Mesmer is in Stockholm delivering a paper. Last Thursday there was a crisis at The New Society.

The lights began to flicker. Through the walls I heard the hushed voices of Maureen and Ben. “The basement generators are malfunctioning. Nothing to worry about,” they told me. I saw a Harmonite in the front office sitting bolt upright with a lost look on his face.

But yesterday I attended a wonderful party in the conference room. With much laughter, hugging and kissing couples were wandering off. It was lunchtime and we were served tomatoes, red pepper, and carrots flavored with sambar curry powder. At the party I met a man. He was handsome and bearded with nice blue eyes. He sat down beside me and we talked for a while. He tried to kiss me. I turned my head: “Not now.”

I continued reading and discovered the work of James Braid. A 19th-century Scottish physician, Braid attended magnetic stage demonstrations while living in Manchester in the 1840s. Disavowing the popular notion of the magical passage of a fluid or other influence from the operator to the patient Braid adopted a physiological view that magnetic sleep is a state induced by fatigue resulting from the intense concentration necessary for staring fixedly at a bright, inanimate object. He coined the term “hypnosis” distancing himself from Mesmer.<sup>11</sup>

“The hypnotic state,” Braid said, is “produced by a peculiar condition of the nervous system induced by fixed attention,” rather than by magnetic fluid. Hypnotism combines the Greek words for nerve (neuron) and sleep (hypnos) to form neuro-hypnotism or nervous sleep.

Resting in a corner of a







That became the cardinal principle of their “School of Nancy.” Put another way, the doctor “suggests” something and you believe it.

DECEMBER 9, 2000

A number of guests went to Buffalo last night to see a rerun of the film *Fahrenheit 451*. I declined and

spent the night reading Bernheim in my motel room.

Bernheim’s ideas on suggestion were provocative. I’ve been thinking about them, but I remain wary. We live in a physical universe. We are animals, physical beings. Can you suggest to a dog: “YOU

THINK THIS” or “YOU THINK THAT?”

Today I found a 19th-century volume called *La Salpêtrière*. An immense book filled with engravings, it describes the history of the so-named Parisian hospital. Located on the lower left bank of the Seine, Salpêtrière was originally an arsenal and powder factory. Renovated by Louis XIV into a general clinic for the poor, it evolved to house exclusively insane and incurable women. Salpêtrière is where G. B. Duchenne du Boulogne, the first neurologist, and Jean-Martin Charcot, his pupil, did their work.

In the 1840s at Salpêtrière, Duchenne demonstrated the relationship between facial expression and emotion by activating the muscles of the face with electricity and then photographing it. From the 1870s through 1890’s when investigating the phenomenon of hypnosis, Charcot and his students experimented with real mineral magnets calling their treatment “metallotherapy.” Like Mesmer, Charcot believed that hypnosis, magnetic

sleep or “somnambulism” were somatic rather than psychological in origin. They were artificially induced pathologies. Bernheim strongly distinguished his views from Charcot and thus a protracted feud ensued between the two institutions: The School of Nancy and the Salpêtrière School.<sup>12</sup>

Now what about Freud? Charcot was Freud’s teacher for a short time in the fall of 1885 at Salpêtrière. The young Freud named his first son after Charcot. They lived together for four months in 1885-86. Freud began his practice of psychotherapy with hypnosis, but soon developed his own method of free association; the beginnings of psychoanalysis. Freud grew closer to the School of Nancy thereby rejecting the theories put forth at Salpêtrière.

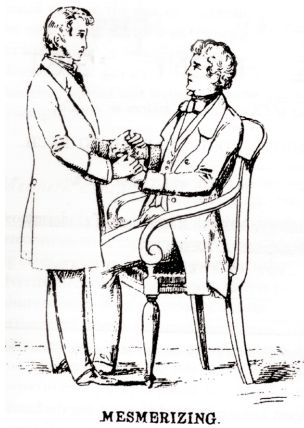




high shelf I discovered volumes on Mesmerism and animal magnetism in America. Widely practiced—many branches—thousands of practitioners. I pulled down from the shelf an edition of Charles Poyen's *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England* (1837). Afterwards I read James Caldwell's *Facts in Mesmerism* (1842). I read John Dod's *The Philosophy of Electrical Psychology* (1850). In 1850 Dod lectured to the US Senate on electro-magnetism. Then there was Caldwell, a practitioner of phreno-magnetism. I read his book, *Facts in Mesmerism* (1842); also Stanley Grimes' *Etherology: The Philosophy of Mesmerism and Phrenology* (1845); and Andrew Jackson Davis's *The Divine Revelations* (undated).

DECEMBER 2, 2000

Nothing happened with the blue-eyed man. I met a woman named Madge who was brought to the New Society by her husband. I saw her in the dining room at lunch poised at the edge of her seat. She was reciting the last verse, chapter four of the Acts of the Apostles:



*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.*

I put my arms on her shoulders. "Greetings" I said.

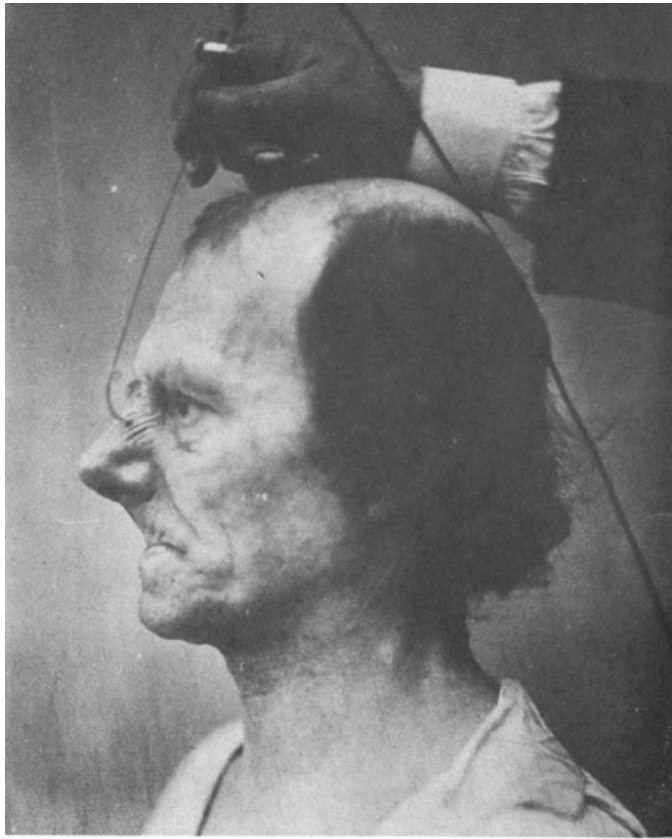
She turned her head towards me; her face brightened.

In the archives room I found a folder titled Auguste-Ambrose Lébeault and another titled

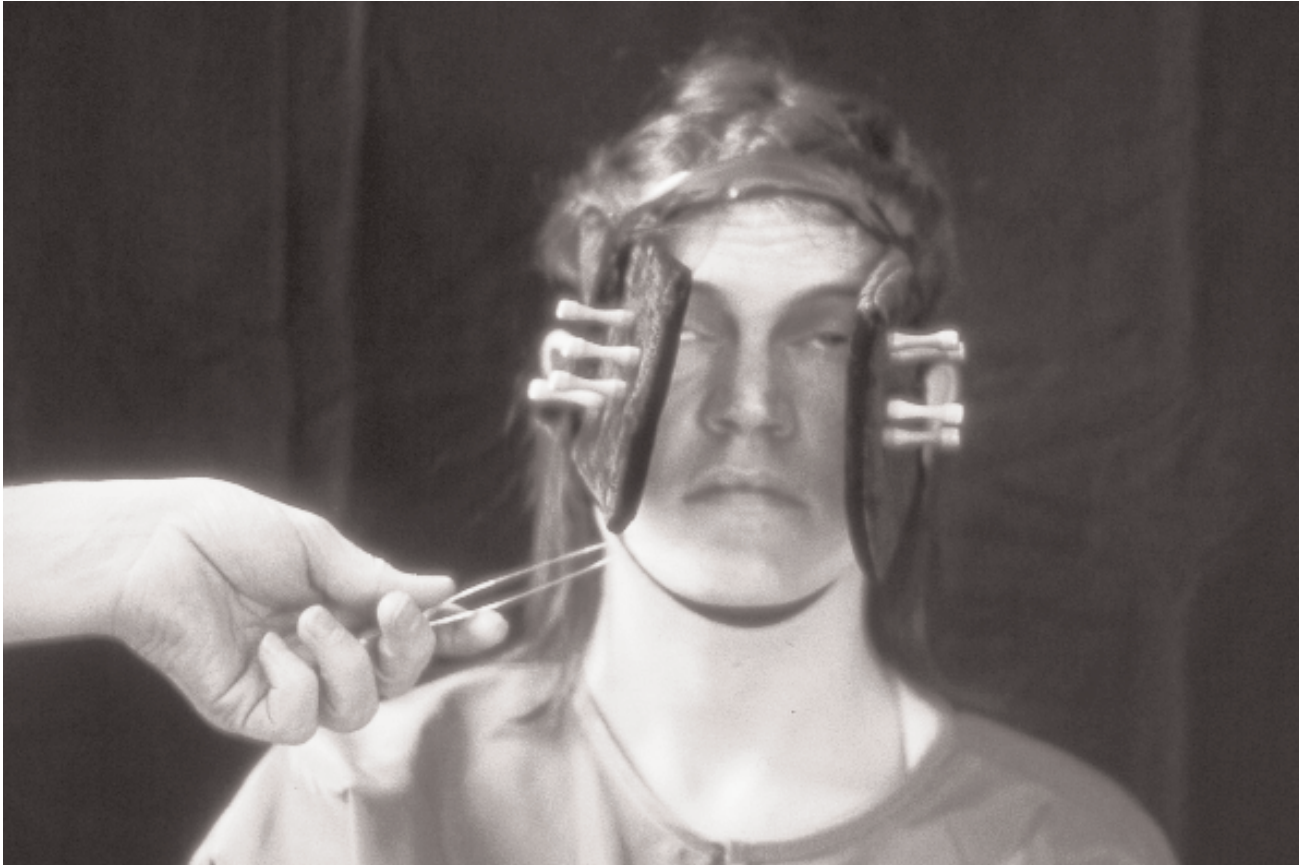


Hippolyte Bernheim. Both men were magnetists and both believed, like Mesmer, that their magnetic cures had a physiological basis. But around 1884 they repudiated animal magnetism for the more psychological concept of "suggestion."

















## MY INTERVIEWS WITH F. A. MESMER

JULY 20, 2001

I had longed to meet Mesmer. How many times had I walked down her corridor thinking I would catch a glimpse only to be disappointed? But then, one summer day there she was. When I approached, to my surprise, she didn't turn away. I mentioned conducting an interview and she said, "yes."

At the appointed hour I knocked on her office door. She responded in a resonant tone, "Come in."

Standing some feet away from her square desk, I stammered, "May I ask you . . ." My voice was faint.

She smiled beneficently and said, "Unseen forces dismay us."

I expanded on what I had told her in the corridor. "I am writing a human-interest story about the New Society. I have a book contract. I would like to interview you. Also, I'm having problems with my orientation. I think it may be the moon."

She said, "Good that you came to see me. A pigeon to eat is worth more than a peacock in the sky."

There was no air conditioning in her office and the window was open. At that moment I could hear from outside the whistle of a woodthrush.

I asked her, perhaps thinking of my own unhappiness, "How do we achieve magnetic rapport?"

She answered, "Love is essential for the healing of souls."

What did that mean? I never mentioned love. I was about to ask her why she established The New Society when she interrupted and said, "The world is full of unharmonious fields and forces. Science can help initiate a utopian order."

The interview was over. She opened the door and motioned me out.

AUGUST 4, 2001

I made an appointment to see Mesmer again at 8:00 P.M. on August 4th.

A few minutes after 8 she emerged from her office wearing a plain white lab coat over a rose-colored dress.

She said, "Shall we take a walk?" We strolled on the grounds while a faint moon rose in the sky. She patiently explained her theories from an astrological and geological perspective. She talked about Newton and Gilbert. From time to time she looked up at the sky and murmured, "From the firmament of heaven to the ephemeral insect, one law."

I wanted to know more about The New Society and why she founded it just a year and a-half ago. I summoned my courage and said, "Why did you re-establish La société de l'harmonie universelle?"

She steered the conversation in another direction. "The theories that I will explain to you originated with Franz Anton Mesmer. They are as true today as when he wrote them."

"But let me first tell you about Resolute Bay." She threw me a conspiratorial glance. As she talked her wide brown eyes grew wider and her reddish hair seemed to bristle with an electromagnetic charge.

"In 1998 as director of the MHD Institute<sup>16</sup> I was working towards a practical application for my universal theory of magnetic reconnection, a universal cure which updated and expanded Mesmer's hypotheses. His own work left him nearly penniless and shunned by the scientific community of which he was once a respected member.<sup>17</sup> To make matters even worse his followers misinterpreted his ideas so that what we know of Franz

Anton Mesmer comes from them, not him.”

Mesmer and I walked into a field and standing side by side watched the satellites streak across the sky. She seemed lost in thought.

I implored, “Tell me more.”

This time she willingly complied. “In 1999 I was grappling with some especially difficult formulas that combined the Navier-Stokes equations of fluid mechanics with Maxwell’s equations on electromagnetism. My ideas were still unproven. I was in my office one afternoon and I remembered an image from a science book I once owned that showed dotted magnetic field lines sprouting from the earth’s poles. At that moment I made a decision. To confirm my hypotheses I would subject my own body to the earth’s magnetic forces. But not just anywhere.”

“Where then?”

“I was going to the two places on earth where there is no magnetic deviation: Cape Agulhas—The Cape of Needles—at the southernmost tip of Africa and a site that has no name, a short plane ride from Resolute Bay in the Arctic Ocean.”

She looked straight at me.

“The earth’s magnetic field results from a spinning molten metallic core. The concentration of metal in the northern part of the globe means that compass needles will point generally, but not exactly, north. The difference is called magnetic deviation.”

I said, “Interesting, I never knew there was a difference. But where is the true magnetic pole?”

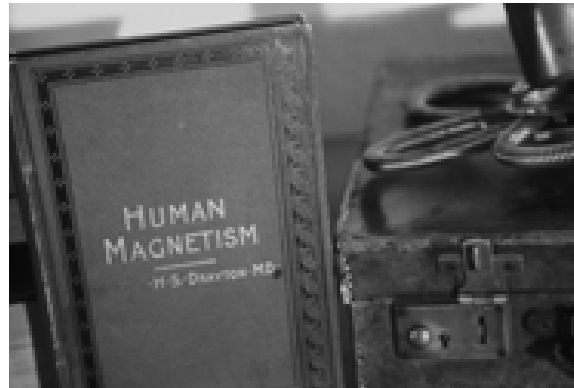
“The true magnetic pole in the Northern Hemisphere presently lies in the Northwest Territories in Canada, about 112.6 degrees south of the geographic North Pole and about 104.3 degrees west longitude; the nearest town is Resolute Bay.

In May I flew to Resolute Bay in a twin otter from Edmonton and stayed for a week, making day trips to the Pole. The tee shirt at the local motel said ‘Resolute is not the end of the world, but you can see it from here.’

My pilot told me, ‘We always do this kind of work in May. We need frozen conditions so that we can land an airplane anywhere on ice or snow, but not so cold that it is impossible to work outdoors. You’re not the only one; tourists do occasionally visit despite our remote location. Last time I flew some folks here they said they wanted to have a baby. They set up a tent because they thought the region-nurtured fertility.’

But my experience was different. At the Pole I was completely overcome. I could barely breathe. My heart pounded violently. I sensed magnetic shifts in my electron’s spin. They were all pointing toward the pole, billions of them. That’s how magnetism effects our bodies, it’s through the electrons.”

Mesmer raised her eyebrows. “Afterwards I had an important dream; A staircase went into an arc in the distance and then it broke off. I could see my sister wrapped up in a cloth. She was upside down. Her head was pointing north. Then I saw an enormous cloud



hovering overhead. When I awoke I immediately opened my copy of Aristotle's *On Divination through Sleep*, chapter I.

'The dreams may be signs.' Aristotle wrote, 'For they may presage illnesses or other imminent bodily conditions. Early intimations of these would be more noticeable in sleep.'

It is true, then, that some dreams are causes, while others are signs, for example, of what is happening in the body. Even medical experts say that one should pay extremely close attention to dreams. For movements occurring in the daytime, unless they are very big and powerful, pass unnoticed alongside those of the waking state, which are bigger. But during sleep the opposite happens. For then even slight movements seem to be big. People think it is lightning and thundering when faint echoes are sounding in the ears, or that they are enjoying honey and sweet flavors when a tiny drop of phlegm is running down the throat, or that they are walking through fire and feeling extremely hot when a slight warmth is affecting certain parts of the body. But as they wake up it is obvious to them that those things have the above character. Seeing that the beginnings of all things are small, so too, clearly are those signs of illnesses and other affections immanent in our bodies. Plainly then, these must be more evident during periods of sleep than in the waking state."<sup>18</sup>

We walked in silence for a long time. Mesmer suddenly said, "Aristotle convinced me that the dream

was a sign."

Another long silence.

She gestured with her hands, "The staircase was a field line. My sister was a magnet. The cloud was a vapor of electrons. A voice inside me said, 'Go back to Athol Springs and establish your own institute, an institute for universal harmony based on Franz Anton Mesmer's magnetic theories and your own.'"

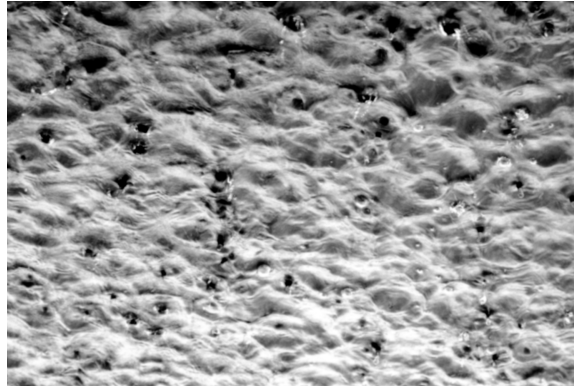
I said, "so that is when you decided. . . ."

She interrupted me. "Now I understood the role of the electrons completely; but there were still some astrological puzzles that had to be sorted out."

Mesmer had the look of a highly intelligent person talking to an eager child. I gave a smile, but did not reply.

"My next trip was to the Cape," she said. "I wanted to fly there directly from Edmonton, but complications in my personal life distracted me. By the time I arrived at Cape Agulhas it was already July. The Cape is the southernmost point of Africa, the only place on earth where all compasses point true north without deviation. Portuguese navigators discovered this fact in the 1480s. The Cape is an extremely wild and windy place where needle-sharp cliffs overlook the sea. For two nights I stayed in nearby Arniston, a small fishing village. The white cottage of the Arniston Lodge is not very inviting, but I visited the massive 19th-century lighthouse."

It was getting dark; one-by-one the stars were coming out. Mesmer hooked her arm in mine and led us quickly toward the main building. "I'm late," she



said. "Another time. We'll talk again"

AUGUST 15, 2001

Two weeks passed. Mesmer agreed to see me for a third time—on August 15 at 9:00 P.M.

We sat on a bench in the warm night air; our bodies nearly touched.

She remembered exactly where we had left off. "Last time we talked about Cape Agulhas."

I nodded, "Yes."

"At the Cape, in that old lighthouse, I saw the geomagnetic storm of Saturday, July 10, 1999. It was very windy that day, like a gale. The sea turned turgid and gray. The white sky almost blinded me. I stayed in the lighthouse until the storm died down. Afterwards I was determined to replicate that experience in the controlled environment of Athol Springs."

"Perhaps now you understand how the observations I made during my trips directly propelled me to established The New Society."

"As I told you I was after a practical application for my Universal Theory — basic science applied to human psychology. Magnetic forces surround us. They emanate from the sun and the moon and from the earth's core."

I said, "What an incredible coincidence. My third visit to Athol Springs took place a little over a year later, during the electromagnetic storm on July 16, 2000."

"But I still don't understand the theory."

Mesmer continued, "The geomagnetic storm relates to my Universal Reconnection Theory. Reconnection begins in the high chaparral of space where magnetic fields drive huge storms, heating the atmosphere of the sun. Here turbulent electrically charged gases of space, called plasmas, stick to magnetic fields. For decades we have been trying to understand how this happens."

"We now think that the field lines brush together, cut each other, and then whip around suddenly in a new configuration, creating a solar flare or eruption of gases into space. This accounts for the magnetic storm I saw in July 1999 and you saw in July 2000. It also explains solar flares."

"I still don't understand," I said meekly. "If the huge storms heat the atmosphere then what about the plasma?" I thought to myself: Mesmer holds the key to my happiness. I need to know. Maybe it's the sun that affecting me and not the moon.

"The magnetic reconnection is the breaking and rearrangement of magnetic field lines in a plasma. Ionized gases are plasma."

I asked, "Are the solar flares composed of plasma?"

"Yes. This is as powerful a force as any in the universe and high energy particles ejected into space effect every living thing on earth. I was affected by those particles at Cape Agulhas. The earth's own magnetic field is constantly perturbed by the impinging field from the sun. This we call the solar wind."

Mesmer continued. Now she was lecturing with a





forcefulness and urgency that I hadn't seen. "My theory is similar to Franz Anton Mesmer's but the imponderable magnetic fluid that Mesmer described we now identify as electromagnetic fields or waves. In deference to Franz Anton Mesmer we still use the term fluids, but know that it can also mean fields and waves.

While there was much he didn't understand about the sun and, of course, plasma physics,<sup>19</sup> Franz Anton Mesmer believed that the moon and the earth effect certain psychological states. He said in 1766, 'Even a common person knows that the madness of maniacs returns in accordance with the revolution of the moon.'

"Write this down," she commanded. "He also talked of harmony: 'One must not think that the influence of the stars on us only has to do with diseases.' He said, 'The harmony established between the astral plan and the human plane ought to be admired as much as the ineffable effect of universal gravitation by which our bodies are harmonized . . . as with a musical instruction furnished with several strings, the exact tone resonates which is in unison with a given tone.' Franz Anton also believed in the possibility of certain psychic phenomena, but only if they could be proved scientifically. He wrote, 'We can thus comprehend how the wills of two persons can communicate with each other through their internal sense organs, an accord, a sort of covenant between two wills, which we can call 'being in rapport.'"

I remembered reading this.

"Lenore," she called me by my name. "Think of

what Mesmer said about the earth: there exist various conditions which owe their birth neither to heat nor cold, neither to dryness nor to humidity, they depend rather upon some secret and inexplicable alteration occurring in the entrails of the earth."

"Listen," she went on. "All together Mesmer's assertions indicate how well he understood the origin of disease. The heavenly bodies impact every one of us. The theory is very plausible. Who can dispute it? Magnetism from the sun, magnetism from the moon, and magnetism from the earth — the effects of the

heavenly bodies and the earth are felt not by one, but by hundreds, thousands, millions, billions of people — simultaneously. Perhaps you can see now how these forces can cause wars, natural disasters, and, of course, personal unhappiness. They impact our politics, our sex lives, and what we eat, everything really. The practitioners at Salpêtrière, Charcot, his students Binet, Féré, Babinski,

they had it right. I am convinced that they understood Mesmer. Bernheim was wrong. We are following in the footsteps of Salpêtrière.

I believe that magnetic rapport or harmonic rapport, that great state of being, 'celadony,' or if you will, love, can be achieved through sensitization to these complex fluids, waves, and fields. One method is to stimulate or massage the poles and the surfaces of the body to relieve obstacles to the wave's flow. Harmony can also result from sensitization to the electromagnetic fields and forces of other human beings.



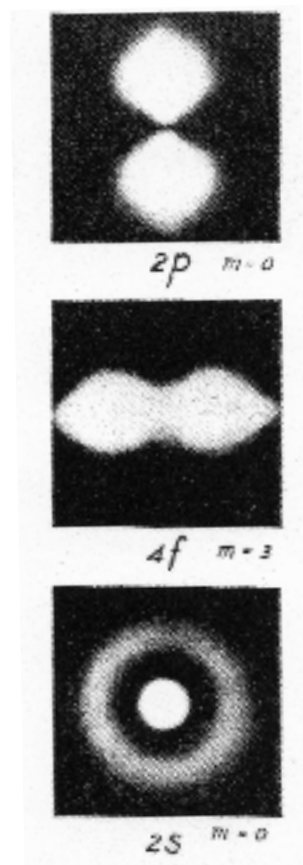
This is a kind of reconnection — field lines brushing together and whipping around suddenly in a new configuration.”<sup>20</sup>

Her voice rose, “I believe what Feuerbach, the post-Hegelian said. ‘Love is the true ontological demonstration of the existence of objects apart from

our head.’ and ‘There is no other proof of being except love or feeling in general.’”<sup>21</sup>

She threw her arms wide. “Through magnetism we can achieve love. It is my goal in life to prove this — *quod erat demonstrandum*.”<sup>22</sup>

Mesmer and I walked quietly back to the main building, the moon high in the sky.

















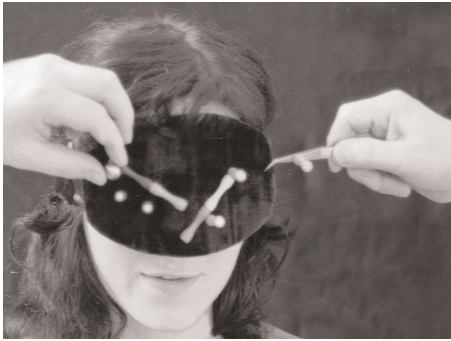
## CASE REPORT I: THE TORNADO

MARCH 20, 2000

*Ms. G. sought out treatment because of her inability to make decisions. She was ambivalent, obsessive and could not imagine her future life. Throughout the interview she talked only in the third person.*

She began, "This story is called The Tornado."

She came from a town in Florida that was devastated by a tornado. Like all tornadoes the storm took a



narrow path veering this way and that way, destroying her house, but leaving the houses on either side intact. Her neighbors were fine; their houses were standing. Her family, though, had died in their bedrooms while she was out shopping for peaches. She grieved

and grieved. In a vain effort to suppress painful memories, she moved to a different town.

On a walk one day she discovered a dog about six years of age injured on the road. Judging from his glazed eyes, shallow breathing, lolling tongue, he looked mortally wounded. Nevertheless she called for help, rescued him and paid for his treatment. He had many fractures, internal injuries and she nursed him for nearly two years. In constant pain, the dog never seemed grateful, but she knew he was. Right before he died he said, "Tell me three wishes. I will grant them

to you." And she said, "Sex first, then Love or Death."

Several years later she met sex. He was a nice looking foreign man. He played the bass. He played with his fingers and thumbs, and the base of his thumb. He strummed and plucked the bass and they made music in the key of D. She played him like an oboe — his instrument in high school — in the key of E. Their music was high, the two instruments coming together and then apart.

The next time sex visited her it was in the form of a goat, who faced her while rearing up on his hind legs. His small, white, fur-covered pate was a blur of constant motion. Coarse white hairs sprouted from his plump belly and balls. His appetite was keen and they played on and on, always together. Their music was symphonic, lasting through many movements.

She seemed to be meeting many more animals than humans and finally settled on a rabbit with baby blue, very round eyes and an open inviting mien. His fur was soft and smooth to the touch. He was strong for a short and slight rabbit with a thin frame and narrow chest, but ample muscles in the fore and hindquarters. His member was large and got stiff in a wink. But he was so excited, all of the time, that in pursuing some shoots he got lost in the woods and being bewildered couldn't find his way back..."

*Now all of that it was over. She agonized. Had the time come for the next wish? She didn't know and hence she came to The New Society. And what would that wish be: Love or Death, Love or Death?*

*We recommended a course of magnetic somnambulism, then work on the large machines and a day in the atrium.*



*She would see Mesmer once a week. At the end of her stay, no longer ambivalent she had come to a realization: The answer to her question was — WHATEVER COMES FIRST.*

## CASE REPORT II: THE COLOR WHITE

JULY 17, 2000

*Ms. H. was a 47 year old divorced woman who came to The Society for counseling after the death of her aunt. She was tall, slender and exceeding graceful. She was dressed in a white wool suit and her feet were adorned in white shoes that had small hourglass-shaped heels. Around her neck was a single strand of pearls. Her stockings were white. Her handbag was white. Her fingernails were painted white, transparent at the base of the nail and opaque at the tip. But her fastidiousness, her physical perfection, contrasted with her hair, which was short, of a reddish brown tint, brushed back boldly revealing white roots, as if she were letting it go and proud of it. She spoke profusely, fluently, unhesitantly, without a break, revealing a state of unrelenting excitement.*

*After listening to her for part of an hour it became clear that after her aunt's death she became obsessed with the color white. "White was drawn out of me like a thread," she said. She relayed the details:*

My cousin called to tell me that my aunt had died. The funeral was set for Tuesday at 10:30 AM in Yonkers, near where she lived. I took the 9:15 AM train out of New York City to Spuyten Duyvil, which is closer to my cousin's house. It was a typical November morning, the temperature around 40 degrees, the sky overcast. The train tracks hug the banks of the Hudson River and the station itself, red brick, sits at the bottom of an escarpment. I waited there for him, looking

up at the brown and gray rocks and cliff.

He drove up in an old white Cadillac, a wreck. The license plate hung loose on a wire. The car had a million dents and scratches and the fenders were rusted through. I hadn't seen him since high school, but my cousin had the same long face and bloodshot eyes and when he smiled, big reddish gums. He is a large man, very bent over. How sad. We drove a few blocks to the funeral home, which was white-painted brick and waited there at the entrance for his brother, my other cousin, the shorter, handsome one, the athlete who arrived shortly in his car, a new Jaguar, polished, waxed and white. We walked in together and the director ushered us to a corner room that was empty except for a couple of rows of white plastic chairs. There she was. The white casket was open and from the back of the room all you could see was her white hair, curly and fluffed up, but nothing else.

After a while the room filled up with neighbors, friends and a few other relatives. Then Reverend Bee, quite an eloquent speaker, read a sermon about the seasons to soothe us. "The trees are left naked, grey-black skeletons of Death, prepared now staunchly to wait out a long drab winter. . .

. Weeks pass. The world pierces the barrier of Death and emerges white, pure white, everywhere. The landscape is transformed, graced with an unexpected, undreamed purity. . . ."





*I interrupted her, "Yes, the barrier of death! I understand your grief! Your aunt, you loved her." She was silent for a moment and then she blurted:*

She was my father's sister. I never had a relationship with her. She always seemed so needy and so repressed. So I never really had the courage. I have a lot of courage in other things, but not with her. It was too much, And now she is dead for real. I am so upset. As for my cousins, they're too odd. I'll never see them.

The week after the funeral I went to the dentist to have my teeth whitened. Then I had my toenails and fingernails painted white. I changed my stationary from cream to ivory. The week after that I threw out my underwear and bought everything white. I brought a couch upholstered in Egyptian cotton, a linen rug and a set of white leather chairs. I had my walls repainted the color seed pearl. I've been eating yogurt with bananas, only the insides of baked potatoes, sole, halibut, Chilean sea bass, celery root with mayonnaise and white bread. I drink Sprite and Chardonnay, and for dessert, always coconut ice cream.

*To free her of her obsession I launched into a talking cure. I said, "You are obsessed with the color white." I isolated the letters w-h-i-t-e and repeated aloud three times: W-H-I-T-E, W-H-I-T-E, W-H-I-T-E. I explained the derivation of the word from the old English hwite wheat, kweid to shine, weit becoming and kweit white in Centum languages. Then we analyzed white according to the laws of physics by examining painted squares of red, yellow and blue, together and then each separately. I offered an anecdote about Chekhov hoping to stimulate a healing synesthesia. Not long before he died Chekhov wrote a letter to a friend. "You ask me what life is? It is like asking what a carrot is. A carrot is a carrot, and nothing more is known." We know that specific brain*

*regions process information about different things. Thus there are areas for color, edges, motion, faces, body parts, nouns, verbs and so on. A color area like white may lie next to an area that handles metaphysical concepts. I speculated that if these regions were more strongly connected they might fire simultaneously giving rise to insight.*

*But the talking cure was to no avail. We offered her magnetic color therapy to re-align her poles. In the presence of the full spectrum of colors I grasped her thumbs, one in each hand and held them until I perceived an equal degree of magnetic heat between my thumbs and hers. This treatment was repeated each time she came to the clinic, once a week for a month and then twice monthly. Surprisingly, her condition was unchanged. She still dressed in white and was still obsessed. She came to the clinic less and less frequently and eventually stopped coming altogether. Many months later we received a letter from her. She was living in Acapulco.*

Doctor Mesmer, Greetings from Acapulco. I have been here for two months. I have fallen in love with a Mexican man. His name is Lazarus, pronounced Laa-sa-ro. When he was young he dived off the cliffs for a living; now he works as a tour guide. I met him one evening on the beach. I was wearing my new bathing suit, ultra white. All I saw was his coffee-colored skin and shiny brown hair. I went home with him and he stripped for me while standing on a table. We spent an hour in his Jacuzzi. We kissed and kissed. He said "Give it to me baby, I know you can." He gave me a bruise on my nipple. It turned crimson, then plum, and by the third day it was the color of a Concord grape.

For breakfast on the fourth day I ate some fruit. I broke an egg and fried it. The yellow stood round and firm. I ate that too and afterwards I had some orange juice.

### CASE REPORT III: THE BANDWIDTH BLUES

JULY 22, 2001

*She was a woman lawyer, age thirty three, who was referred to the Society because of difficulty in the sphere of interpersonal relations. The passions in her life were solitary: painting and listening to music. She was pretty, but childish-ly attired, with her hair pulled back and stringing down. I suggested dating on the Internet to ease her loneliness. This was her second session with me.*

Thank you for your suggestion, Doctor. I am now dating on the Internet. I exchanged e-mail with a man named Jeff a couple of times and we decided to meet.

There is a new Indian restaurant in my neighborhood. He came to the bar at five P.M. last Tuesday. I



walked in at 5:15 and there he was seated at a stool near the fish tank. His face was motionless and he spoke softly in

a monotone. He had a short gray beard. He said that he was an artist, but an outsider artist. He liked George Crumb and the Hairy Who. For a living he worked for a tee shirt company. He came from Miami. He told me that he had lots of girlfriends, but I didn't believe him.

He said that he left a wife and child in Miami to come north. Who knows if it's true?

The restaurant was quiet except for the soft sound of the sitar and tabla coming from the speakers overhead. The light was dim. The small lamps on the tables gave the place a ruby glow. My mind wandered. I thought of my trip to Providence last week. I got there late. It was 12:30 A.M. and the road was grayish and icy. I missed my turn off and the street became a highway, going out of town. But the car found its way back to my motel. It drove itself back, safely, effortlessly. You know, I don't know the town and that is not my car, but its owner once lived in Providence.

The music got louder and my daydream was interrupted. Then the fish tank caught my eye. The light opened up. The gravel was insanely multicolored: indigo, iridescent ochre, blood red with fake lilies and fake coleus anchored at the bottom. The plants were waving gently in the water's mini current. It was all very pleasant to look at. The tank's single occupant was a brown-stripped Oscar fish. It had morose inward-looking eyes and fins that moved slowly, back and forth, back and forth. The fins, with their white ribs, looked like a tissue. I had a thought. The man is laconic like the fish. He is just like the fish. The restaurant began filling up. He was still talking to me. The rhythm of his voice was in synch with the motion of the fins I thought: How much time should I give this? I turned to him. And in the same monotone he said to me, "Have you looked at my website?"

How depressing, doctor. He is lonelier than I am. Why is it that the men I meet are always wrong for me? I can never make contact.

*"My dear," I said, "don't you see — the world is enveloped in a darkness that strives for light; the fish tank*



*represents your striving for that light. You've had a breakthrough, but he is not your man. You can't make contact because contact is an aspect of communication and your bandwidth is too narrow. You have the bandwidth blues."*

*I suggested a new therapy, magnetic stimulation of the cerebellar corona radiata with our new PX42 machine, whose functionality is based on the selective absorption of very high frequency radio waves by certain atomic nuclei that are subjected to an appropriately strong stationary magnetic field. She agreed to the treatment. We shocked the associated outflow tracks of her deep cerebellar nuclei at 51 megahertz. We were able to gradually increase the megahertz to 60, then 80. After a number of treatments her bandwidth broadened to 100224 bytes.*

DECEMBER 18, 2001

*No longer shy and withdrawn she now makes contact every time. She curls her hair. She is dating many men. She wears Dolce & Gabbana exclusively. And she gave up piano playing and painting for karaoke.*

#### CASE REPORT IV: X EQUALS Y

FEBRUARY 15, 2001

*Mr. P. was a 35-year-old man of mixed Eastern European and American descent. He was referred to The Society because of disturbances of orientation in time and place, perceptual impairment, and a reeling consciousness. He was of medium height, slim build, with thinning brown hair, a narrow face and a tuft of a beard, which rested neatly at the bottom of a long chin. His clothes were appropriate. His overall demeanor was tense but friendly.*

*His symptoms arose, he told me, after a disturbing experience he had the previous year concerning a young woman he had once known who died in a car accident. They*

*dated for a while and parted. He always regretted their breaking up and she was never replaced. He said to me in a soft voice:*

Our orbits converged for a moment, we were intertwined as if in an embrace and then I went into a free fall. The memory has lingered in my mind like an intense dream.

It was November 1999. I was a tourist in Berlin. One evening I attended the Komische Oper, Row C seat 4 to hear Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Orpheo, Euridice, the shepherds and shepherdesses were all dressed in ordinary clothes; Orfeo had his electric guitar. The set on stage was black and white. A video of ambulances and hospital beds were projected onto a screen. We could hear distant sounds of street noises and sirens on the stage. But the music in the pit and the arias sung were piercingly delicate, high and lovely, expounding on the theme of enduring love.

My ordeal began during Act I, *La sperme in sen ritorna*, when Orpheus calls on *La pontenza di amore* to guide him. Enraptured German faces surrounded me, but I was barely in my chair. I was suddenly bouncing around like a rubber ball, rocketing into the street, all the way to Unter den Linden, bouncing off lintels, door-knobs, street signs, the harder, solid objects. I was spinning and going way up into the dark night. My orbit was  $x^2 + 446y + 3z$ . I could see that gravity kept the



rest of the audience pleasantly down between the arms of their seats, but I was locking in, docking up with her, up there, in her smaller tighter orbit 3 z 2ff 110. She had less mass and was rotating fast. I could see her excited electrons moving swiftly around their atomic nuclei.

I understood that from her icy orbit in the sky she had looked down on Berlin, spotted me and when x 2 446 y 3z approached 3 z 2ff 110, and our electromagnetic fields engaged, she reeled me up like bait on a hook.

We stayed aloft through Acts II and III and during *Torna o bella la tuo consorte*, then suddenly she dropped me and I fell to earth. I heard *Di Pafo il Signor e di Gnido* as I drifted down to my seat.



Other events occurred before. A die with her initial on it fell out of a sock, a stain that wouldn't wash off appeared on a wine glass, I discovered

a book I'd lost, Raymond Rousell's *Locus Solus*, on my desk. It was the one that she had borrowed and never returned. These things really happened. But nothing affected me like that night at the opera. She managed, somehow, to have our electron-magnetic fields engage and I can't disengage.

*After hearing his story I explained to him that all the phenomenon he described could be understood by the law of physics and the fundamental forces of nature that apply to every bit of matter in the universe. Planets orbit stars because of gravity; electrons orbit atomic nuclei because of*

*electromagnetism. It is through the fundamental forces that separate pieces of matter communicate with one another and these forces are subject to great surges across space.*

*What had happened to him, his ascent was caused by such a surge. It was a transient astronomical event. Her body had become charged.*

*I said to him, "We recognize a body as charged when it attracts other objects. Friction between the two invariably leaves both of them charged and even mere contact and separation will usually have the same effect. Most important, the charged condition of one body can be transferred to another. So you see the idea thus arises of some entity which is transferred, distinct from the material of the body itself, and giving it the property of attracting other bodies."*

*I expected this to be a difficult case that would call for intense magnetic therapy, but a few magnetic passes to balance his fluid sufficed to produce some small relief. We scheduled another appointment and just as he was about to leave I said, really thinking out loud, "There is some chance, slight though, that she can be reached telephonically or telegraphically."*

*I said, "Try sending her a telegram."*

*I referred him to the CENTRAL BUREAU FOR ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS (CBAT) which operates at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and is responsible for the dissemination of information on transient astronomical events, distant minor planets and scattered disk objects via the IAU Circulars, a series of postcard sized announcements issued at irregular intervals, as necessary, in both printed and electronic form.*

*Mr. P. said to me, "I'll call them." We never heard from him again, but I felt confident in my treatment of this man.*

## CASE REPORT V: THE BANDWIDTH BLUES



AUGUST 29, 2001

*Ms. D. was 40-year-old woman, currently employed as a housekeeper, who came to the society for treatment of depression and anxiety manifested by severe intractable headaches. She was a woman of obviously high intelligence, tall, striking with a regal bearing. Yet this impression is at odds with her disheveled, indifferent attire, and her unkempt hair. During her initial interview she was oriented and alert, but her manner conveyed great sadness and pain, punctuated by moments of near panic.*

I hurried here because I really wanted to get to this session. I came by bus. I don't know what is happening to me. When I got here and you let me in, I felt just glad that you accepted me. The only thing that is clear is that I am here. Although this seems a little strange with all my problems.

*To our surprise she said she was a botanist and that she worked at the Bronx Botanic Gardens, commuting from her house just west of the Palisades. She was married, but separated and she lived with her daughter.*

We live in a big house with three sweeping terraces. There are rolling hills and orchards, a lot of acres. I have a garden.

*Then, in a rapid clip she enumerated every shrub. She told us about her fruits and flowering plants, the fruit bearing trees and deciduous trees, giant oaks and maples and weeping beech. She grew vegetables: pole beans, cranberry beans, and, winter squash "that grows huge, serrated leaves." She described the annual poppies, "The kind with spindly milk-green stems topped off by pink petals."*

Near the house a wisteria wrapped completely up

and around a tall pine tree. A neighbor told me, "if that tree falls from all that extra weight, so goes your roof." NEVER MIND: — Over time the wisteria wound itself around her house and other vines attached themselves to it. They were covering everything and had to be cut down.

It was an unseasonably cold fall day, the sun shined bright with a deep chill in the air. I began hacking out the wisteria roots one by one.

The roots were huge and knarled and looked like hell. Annie was playing outside with her friends. She had her yellow cart, her toys and by chance she discovered a lost doll on the ground. It was a rubber doll, cracked and pitted, with tufts of dirty yellow hair on its round rubber head. She was transfixed, immobile at the sight of it and then someone grabbed her. I was concentrating so hard on the wisteria I heard her cries too late! She disappeared as if the earth had opened up. I looked down and all I saw in the dirt where she had stood was a tuft of yellow hair. My heart sank.

*I thought to myself "a difficult case" and as she wept, I stroked her hand in a very gentle way.*

SESSION 2 OCTOBER 5

*On sitting down she said despondently:*

I was alone in my grief. I remained unconsolated and knew I would never find a substitute.

Weeks and months passed. The next summer the garden went to pieces. In June the sun blazed so hard, the new shoots burned up. Then it poured and the rain uprooted the old trees and shrubs. The downed trees with their hairy roots looked like tilted ships on a shoal. My husband, a stubborn man who never shows weakness outwardly, said, "She'll be found," and that



was that.

Time moved on. I slept and I dreamed. Cousins flew by. They came on horses. One said to me stiffly, "You know, your daughter was kidnapped by her uncle, your brother, with the blessing of your father." (*Long silence*) I remember the games I played with my brother. He always laid down conditions. (*Barely Audible*) My father is another story. (*Pause*) My brother is aloof, close to nobody. He lives in a valley and veils of fog are always obscuring his house.

Fall came again. Nothing changed. They said, "this is a family matter."

*The prognosis is grim! Her brother kidnapped and probably raped her daughter! A Felony! After some discussion we agreed on the agreeable course: A week in the Baquet, another in the Atrium.*

SESSION 3 OCTOBER 11

*Ms. D. reported that her headaches were less intense.*

It was raining. I came by car today. I felt I left the last session with something important cut off, so I wanted to remember what we had been talking about. (*She continued in this vein for a while, trying to remember.*)

I had a dream.

It was night; I stood near the window. At first the sky seemed black but then I noticed that the stars were out but, there was no moon. The scene shifted. I was standing near a fireplace. In the dream it was summer but the fire was blazing. I felt absolutely well and powerful. It was a sensation I can barely put into words. I cradled a baby in my arms, bent down and thrust him into the fire as if I was searing him, like meat. But my hands stayed cool, and while enveloped by the flames, he was completely unharmed. I was thinking that by

searing him I was protecting him from ever dying. Right then his mother appeared in the room. She panicked, shrieked and hit her thighs with her fists. She reached for the baby, hurling him to the ground. As for me, I awoke in a fright.

*In an agitated state she was brought to the laboratory and clothed in a lilac treatment suit with white ribbons on her sleeves, each sewn to form the letter U. I left for several minutes on an urgent matter and when I returned there was Ms. D. deep in a somnambulist state, eyes open, talking softly.*

This is what really happened. A palace was built for me. It sat on a cliff, like the Palisades but much higher up. It was daybreak. The sky was cloudless. I wore a full-length dark robe that was embroidered at the hem with long ears of corn. (*Pause*) The palace became the apse of a church. I was standing in it and crowds of people were kneeling down and worshipping me.

Suddenly I felt my face cloud up with rage. I took a glass and struck it with my fist, the shards flew apart unleashing floods in the east and wildfires in the west. Submarines collided. The world lamented, and my family suffered too. I was glad. They brought me gifts. My father appeared in a clap of thunder He summoned a messenger to find my daughter and there she was, sitting on a couch in that dank basement with my brother by her side. There they were, my father a large heavy shoul-



dered man, my brother and my lovely daughter. I saw her! She was alive! She was alive! Then the three of us stood in the apse. With his hand at her elbow he pushed her slightly forward and spoke sullenly, "Go to your mother."

But before she could move he called her by name. She turned away and back towards him. He offered her a cliff bar.

I asked her, "Have you eaten it, my darling?" And she said, "Yes." And I said to her in a formal tone, "because you ate that cliff bar, every year, forever, you will return to your uncle's basement in winter. The rest of the time you will live here with me."

The scene shifted. We were together in a field overcome by the heavy smell of summer. The corn was high. My daughter gave birth to a baby girl. I took a new lover and had a baby boy. We were celebrated, worshiped at the altar and in the palace, and we knew we would live like that forever.

*Afterwards, Ms. D. gradually regained her sense of here and now, but her belief in the reality of this event was unshakable. The case was closed.*

MAY 14, 2000

*From various accounts in the press we learned the outcome of this family tragedy. The daughter was abducted by her uncle with the full knowledge of the father, a powerful man. They lived together in a big house, "fit for a king." The daughter was nine years of age, still a little girl. The uncle thought he treated her like a queen. She attended school. She watched television. She had a laptop, a cell phone, the latest DVDs. Her bedroom faced east. She looked out while falling asleep. She made a few friends, girls like herself, who had seen some misfortune. One an adopted child from China, the other a girl with an congenital heart malformation. Her*

*grades were average. She daydreamed. She smiled sadly. The two men, uncle and father mistook her melancholy for grace. She thought, "My mother has forgotten me." They said, "She went to school. She had friends. Nothing bad happened. It was one year in her life." Her uncle snored, his manners were poor. His bushy brows furrowed when he talked. He insisted that she visit him every winter. For the rest of the year he found another passion.*



























## POSTSCRIPT: THE UPRISING

JANUARY 12, 2002

N EARLY TWO YEARS HAD PASSED since I first visited The New Society. In early fall I moved back to New York and submitted the manuscript and photos to my editor. She was pleased. The book was done. I reclaimed my apartment and saw my friends again. Life was going on. Then one day while dodging traffic on a snow-covered street I had an intense longing to return to Athol Springs.

I missed the Springs. I missed its beauty and the feeling of closeness to the universal rhythms of the tides and the stars and all the energies that animate the universe.

My photographs seemed very real but the totality of the experience at Athol Springs was fading and I was afraid would soon to be lost forever. In my mind's eye I could still see the simple one-story building with four wings and central cupola that graced the side of the road. I could still see my motel perched on the hill overlooking the glassy lake, I could almost hear the shrill voice of my ebullient proprietress, Susan, and she described *this* lake or *that* item of clothing. As for the rest, it seemed more and more like a dream.

I resolved to return as soon as possible. Maybe even that day.

I went home and turned on the TV. The forecast was for scattered snow showers, but it would still be good driving weather. I rented a car and drove directly to the Springs I didn't even think of visiting Buffalo. My cousins had no use for The New Society, which they now considered a cult. They had been supportive for a while, but had long since given up on me.

Four hours later, there I was. Happily exhausted from my trip, I knocked on Ben's door.

"It's me, Lenore."

He opened the door. "Lenore!"

He hesitated for a fraction of a second and said,

"Do you know what has happened?"

I shook my head, baffled.

He held me by the shoulders and fixed his eyes on me.

"What? What is it?"

"There was infighting and an uprising right after the September outing to the quarry. That was a bad time. Terrorists had struck New York.

People were very sad and on edge. The basement laboratories were full all day long. The staff worked overtime. Mesmer was away. Two Harmonites, Alan G. and Greta M., seemed especially disturbed.

Alan had always kept back from the group, but Greta got along well. That's why we were surprised by her behavior.

Alan G. has established his own utopian society on the lake and Greta M. is at the airplane hangar waiting for a spaceship to transport her to the Nebula Antares. It's crazy, I know but Alan and Greta have followers! Mesmer is still in Duluth and has established a new branch of the society. Settle in at your motel and then







come back. I'll tell you everything."

I checked into the Lavender Lakeview Motel, put my things away in my pine-paneled bedroom, and looked out over the lake. What Ben had said was true. Instead of seeing canoes floating silently past my window now I saw an entire city with buildings, streets, stop signs, lights, all erected on its frozen surface. There was a roar of activity. Snowmobiles everywhere.

In twenty minutes I was back at The New Society. Ben and I took refuge in his office. He sat me down and began talking.

Ben told me that Alan had a large family endowment. After the trip to the quarry he decided to create his own utopian community, a "true" utopia, a seasonal one, where the regulation of production and property relations is a crucial basis of social order. He quickly obtained the air rights, the necessary variances, and construction began in late November when there was three feet of ice on the lake. He wants to make the community economically viable. That is why there are many rules and regulations on the lake. Ben said, "Alan revolted against F. A. Mesmer's belief in the common good: sister to sister, brother to brother. Rather, he has an absolute belief in inequality and his society rests on the assumption of the natural inequality of people and the notion that these inequalities should flourish, but that there should be no inherited wealth, unearned income or private ownership of land. He wants to reinstate the laws of nature. He holds to Proudhon's idea of property as theft, but with certain exceptions.

His voice rose. "This is a city of constant movement and change. Alan was strongly influenced by Italian futurist writer F. T. Marinetti who said, 'Houses have a shorter life span than we do; every generation will have to build its own city. Life must no longer

hide like solitary worms in the stairwells, but the stairs must be abolished.'" Holding his head in his hands, Ben said, "Alan posits a religion based on worshipping the humble fish."

I shook my head in disbelief.

"Alan has established a society of ice fishermen who sell their fish to the communities around the lake," Ben continued. "The entire economy is based on ice fishing. The outermost belt of the city is occupied by hundreds of tiny ice huts — have you seen them? There, residents fish all day and all night for steelhead, walleye, northern pike, yellow perch, and panfish. The internal economy supports the ice fishing, solving the problem of poverty. Everyone is making tip-ups, ice augers, sonar, sleds, tackle, drills, heaters, rods, reels, bobbers, bait, lures, jigs, chisels, spuds, saws, underwater cameras, line, decoys, gear, traps, fish finders, depth finders. Every spring the huts will be demolished and every fall they will be rebuilt, a schedule dependent on the life cycle of ice.

It's incredible! I talked to a fisherman who said to me 'You're fishing too much when you find yourself tying ribbons in your daughter's hair with a Palomar knot.'

After Ben relayed this story we hugged each other very tightly and had some rose melange tea.

"But there's still more you should know."

He went on to tell me about Greta, who was convinced that she had communicated with sentient beings from a planet near the Nebula Antares.

"How did this happen?" I asked.

"She was conducting experiments with Mesmer. They were scanning the microwave band of the electromagnetic spectrum on one of our basement receivers. Greta noticed that once a week for a number of months a strange wave pattern appeared on the screen of mon-

itor. It seemed to be a code of some sort.”

“At that time she was reading Amir Aczel’s book, *Probability*,<sup>22</sup> and surmised that creatures from a distant nebula had been patiently sending us signals for millennia, hoping that one day our technology would reach the stage at which we could detect those signals and respond. To determine the frequency on which we should respond she studied the early findings of Cocconi and Morrison,<sup>23</sup> who explained that the most abundant element in the universe is hydrogen. They reasoned that when excited, hydrogen atoms broadcast at a frequency of 1,420 megahertz (1,420 cycles per second). This frequency, within the microwave band, is separated from the frequencies where most noise of the background cosmic radiation occurs. She programmed our transmitter to send back messages of her own.

While she knew that they would take maybe tens of thousands of years to be delivered, the messages she received seemed to be telling her that alien beings would visit earth around the year 2000. Now Greta is a very smart woman and presented presumably credible evidence, convincing ten of our members to live in a plane hangar, waiting for the space ship that might arrive any day.”

“They are all preparing for a trip and hope to be converted into pulses and waves themselves. Since everything occurring in the world of matter, including life, may be described as a transformation of energy, they are waiting to be transformed.

They say they will ride on those electromagnetic waves. No, they will be waves. At any rate they are waiting, eager to be contacted and are readying themselves for a trip into space.”

Ben was devastated. I tried to reassure him. “These things happen. Look at Franz Anton Mesmer’s society and how that splintered, too. It’s inevitable.

Mesmer needs you.” I pleaded with him, “Stay here and work for her.”

“But what am I going to do? That is a big question. You know Ben, Mesmer is self-possessed and remote, but blessed with a mental clarity and purity of purpose. Mesmer has seriously considered the nature of a just life and a perfect community. She has her own ideas about the common good, the original state of nature, civic and personal virtue, leisure and labor. She still has her acolytes and is starting branches of the Society in Duluth, Phoenix, Jacksonville, and somewhere in New Jersey.

“Ben,” I paused, “I’ve completed my book about The New Society. Mesmer doesn’t need me any more. Nor do I have any interest in ice fishing, tackle or gear.

The hangar, waiting for the aliens, waiting to escape from our home planet, that interests me. I could still live at the motel and visit the hangar every day, taking photos, researching Greta’s theories. I could wait with them until someday, maybe, we would be transported.

Now I know what to do with my life. I’ll live in the motel and visit the hangar every day. But first I need to get another photo assignment.”

Ben and I took a long walk on the grounds saying little to each other. Returning to his office we sat in silence.

Ben took my hand in his. “No,” he said. “Stay here with me. Much work needs to be done. The Society will thrive. We’ll populate the world with Harmonites.”

I closed my eyes. A few more minutes passed.

And then I looked up at him. I saw his slender face and gray eyes that touched everything with endless curiosity. I said, “Yes, Ben, I will.”

