FRANZ ANTON MESMER: THE WIZARD OF VIENNA

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A YOUNG MESMER

• Born May 23, 1734 in Iznag, a Swabian town in the frontier region where Lake Constance divides Switzerland and Germany.

• His parents were Anton Mesmer and Maria Ursula Michel who were devout Catholics.

• Not much is known about his home life but we do know they lived above poverty and had a respectable status.

• During his childhood he was able to mingle with high born aristocrats Johannes Franziskus Schwenk von Stauffenberg and Damian Hugo von Schönborn who taught Mesmer how to conduct himself among royals.

• In 1743 a 9 year old Mesmer entered a monk ran school to prepare him for University and then Priesthood thanks to von Schönborn who agreed with Mesmer’s mother that such a smart child should be a priest.
EDUCATION

• In 1750 Mesmer went from Monastic school to the University of Dillingen in Bavaria where he studied philosophy for 4 years.
• He then went to the University of Ingolstadt in Bavaria to study theology.
• When reading Descartes, Mesmer came across a point that really grabbed his attention: medicine could be turned into an exact science by extending cosmological laws to the physiology of the human body.
• It was during this time Mesmer realized that he had no aptitude or interest to continue with the church so he turned to law school at the University of Vienna in 1759.
• He began medical studies in Vienna which continued for 6 years.
• Mesmer got the best medical education in all of Europe. He completed his course, passed his examinations, and wrote his dissertation called, A Physio-Medical Inquiry Concerning the Influence of the Planets. In later years he referred to it as the, Influence of the Planets on the Human Body.
DR. MESMER’S VIENNA

• As a physician and psychologist he believed in one idea- idée fixe of the cure of psychosomatic illness by animal magnetism.

• Mesmer began observing patients in the clinic taking notes on every ailment possible.

• January 10, 1768 he married Maria Anna von Bosch who was 10 years older than him.

• The Eulenschenks, Bosches, and Mesmers were a very powerful clan with influence through the capital of the Holy Roman Empire.

• 1767-1773 wasn't a significant period in Mesmer’s life. He simply ran his private practice from his home where he had an office, dispensary, and laboratory.

• Mesmer had the reputation as a fashionable Viennese physician with taste for science and music.
FIRST STEPS INTO ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

- Francisa Oesterline was a woman in her 20’s that was a cousin to Frau Mesmer. Franzl, as they called her, could not care for herself because of her hysterical fever.

- Mesmer followed all the traditional treatments for hysteria such as: bleeding, purging, and blistering but nothing seemed to work.

- Maximillian Hell, a professor of astronomy at the University of Vienna, to manufacture a number of magnets in specific shapes.

- July 28, 1774, is the first record of using Mesmer using magnets for treatment.

- This marked an important time for Mesmer: possible cure for hysteria and the beginning of the quarrels, controversies, and feuds that he would deal with for the rest of his life.

- The first marked quarrel being when Mesmer reported to Hell his successes. Hell turned around and wrote an article claiming he was the one to show Mesmer how to treat Franzl.
• Mesmer found many things, even nonmagnetic objects, functioned as conductors and gave the same results. Mesmer concluded that he was in fact an animal magnet.

• Mesmer took to Storeck, head of the Faculty of Medicine and personal physician to the empress of Vienna, to review his work and make a decision on animal magnetism.

• Refusing defeat, Mesmer wrote, Letter to a Foreign Physician on January 5, 1775 to Dr. Johann Unzer. When she rejected his findings, Mesmer had his utter copied and distributed to German Universities and beyond.

• In 1779 the Memoir on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism finished her story to her cure.

• Mesmer performed his technique for the first time for a Dutch physician who was an expert in medical biology (he discovered photosynthesis) and was known for experimenting with magnets.

• Mesmer made an untrue conclusion that he was convinced and a supporter when in fact Ingenhousz warned him NOT to publicize his work due to fear of ridicule.
• What Mesmer really did discover at this point was the power of suggestion and how to put a patient into hypnotic trance.

• Mesmer tried to make work prominent in the medical community with no success so he went to the public.

• Mesmer became so popular that he was requested to treat notable patients and even went on tour from 1775-76 through his Swabian homeland, Bavaria, Switzerland, and Hungary.

• Mesmer is called a wizard for the first time in print while treating the Baron Hareczky de Hoka of Hungary who suffered from throat spasms.

• When treatments did fail Mesmer claimed it was because not all people are subject to animal magnetism and some even possessed a countervailing force that repelled it.

• Mesmer couldn’t give all of his patients individual attention so he started experimenting with group therapy.

• Mesmer’s pride was still hurt by Hell’s disapproval of his magnetism so he dropped the magnets all together.
THE BLIND PIANIST

• Maria Theresa Paradies was born in 1759 and was a normal and healthy child until the age of 3 when she suddenly woke up blind.

• Mesmer 1st heard of Maria as a young medical student so he knew her condition and what other professionals had tried.

• The Paradies turned to Mesmer in 1777 as a last hope even though they had been warned against it.

• Mesmer's diagnosis was, “It was a complete amaurosis attended by spasms of the eye. As a consequence, she suffered from deep depression and obstruction of the spleen and liver, which caused her to go into transports of delirium bad enough to make her fear she was losing her mind.”

• Mesmer began the treatment by building a rapport with Maria so that there was a bond of trust between them and in hope her emotions would help in the cure.
By the time Mesmer got to treat Maria her eyes were horribly distorted, forced out of alignment, and swollen due to all the past “treatments” from doctors.

Mesmer’s treatments for Maria included: locating centers of sensitivity on her head, cupping his hands above her ears, bring his fingertips in a stroking motion from the occiput to the forehead, and making circular movements with his thumbs around her eyes.

Mesmer convinced her parents that she needed to be seen daily and under close supervision, so Maria moved to Mesmer’s clinic.

Professor Joesph Bart an ophthalmologist, Maria’s previous Dr. and now Mesmer’s rival, believed that since he failed to cure Maria so did Mesmer because she would mislabel items.

Maria refused to leave treatment that was working and she feared her home life. When Maria’s parents came to get her, all hell broke loose.
The scandal of Vienna was born. The Paradieses claimed Maria was held against their will, some said he was performing dangerous experiments, or that he was a wizard doing strange things, and above all what he did with his female patients behind closed doors.

May 2, 1777, the rumors got back to the empress and so Storeck wrote to Mesmer that he had to stop his practice immediately and to return the girl.

Maria’s father regained control of Maria by promising she could return to treatment whenever she needed. Maria never returned and ultimately relapsed.

Maria died in 1824 at the age of 65, she never regained her sight.

The scandal and failure surrounding Maria drove Mesmer out of Vienna. Mesmer’s marriage was strained after 6 years of living different lives.

There were now only 2 categories: those who agreed with him were his friends and those that disagreed or were uncommitted were enemies.

Mesmer would go to the intellectual capital of Europe: Paris to be the Austrian ambassador.
PROBLEMS IN PARIS

- Mesmer arrived in Paris in February 1778 and est. himself in rooms in the Place Vendôme but Vienna had followed him.

- Undaunted Mesmer launched his Paris tour to seek scientific vindication rather than medical acceptance.

- Mesmer felt he belonged in Paris but there was one problem - this was during the age of reason and there was a strong bias against anything mystic.

- The scandals from Vienna had labeled him as an occultist and professionals were already on edge.

- Mesmer started on his journey of scientific recognition at the French Academy of Sciences with president Charles Leroy, a chemist and physician.

- Leroy arranged a meeting at the academy so Mesmer could present his evidence but he never got a chance.

- Ultimately Leroy cut all ties with Mesmer and Mesmerism once he knew he would only accept full backing.
PROBLEMS IN PARIS

- Mesmer went to the Royal Society of Medicine, a new society which he was hoping to be more open to new ideas.

- In the meantime, he was growing out of his apartment so he moved to a house in Créteil, right outside of Paris so he could see more patients.

- Mesmer began communicating with the secretary of the Royal Society.

- Mesmer finally has some good luck when Charles Delson, a private physician to King Louis XVI, ranked very high in the French medical profession and a member of the Paris Faculty of Medicine, became a full Mesmerian.

- Mesmer backed into a corner and not knowing what to do, he published his Mémoire with 27 propositions for his Theory of Animal Magnetism.

- 1778-85 a number of notable people came to Mesmer’s clinic: Princess de Lamballe cured of an ulcer, Contessa de la Malmaison cured of paralysis from the waist down, and Dutchesse de Chaulnes cured of her anxiety.
A LETTER TO MARIE ANTOINETTE

• Charles Delson was everything Mesmer could’ve hoped for in a disciple: hard-working, true believer, and a pleasing personality.

• Delson’s book persuaded The Faculty of Medicine, for the first time, to hold a conference with Mesmer on Sept. 18, 1780.

• After another failure, Mesmer and Delson thought that if they could approach The Court of Versailles that maybe Louis XVI might appoint a royal commissioner and settle the issue.

• Mesmer feeling Paris was a repeat of Vienna-threatened to leave and find recognition elsewhere.

• Marie Antoinette wouldn’t act directly on the matter because her mother had died in 1780 and she was still in mourning.
A LETTER TO MARIE ANTOINETTE

• March 28, 1781, Mesmer and Delson arrived in Maurepas' office who had license to offer: an annual pension of 20,000 livres, 10,000 livres for rent of a building to open a school of animal magnetism, and to accept into his school pupils chose by the monarchy.

• Mesmer feared that if pupils were forced upon him that they might take over his discovery and his rights as the discoverer. He refused to leave his fate in Maurepas' hands so he wrote to the queen to explain his behavior.

• Not surprisingly Marie Antoinette did nothing with his request.
Mesmer made good of his threat and left Paris but he only went as far as Spa near Liège in the Belgian Ardennes.

During his first visit to Spa he wrote *A Short History of Animal Magnetism*. The best thing he ever wrote.

Despite everything, Mesmer returned to Paris because if he found success it would be universal European success and he had disciples waiting for him.

Delson wouldn't play pupil to Mesmer forever being as he had mastered both the doctrine and the technique.

Mesmer returned to Spa and set up a clinic there where Delson stayed in Paris now presenting himself a Master of Mesmerism.

In 1781 Mesmer cured Nicholas Bergasse, a lawyer and believer of Rousseau’s “nature”.
Mesmer made pupils sign a contract but it contradicted a clause in the Bergasse-Korman plan. The Society would fall apart within 2 years of its foundation date, March 10, 1783.

Layfayette was a big name because he had just help win the Revolutionary war and was a devote Mesmerian.
Mesmerism was ruined by a shock of event in 1784.

Delson won the king’s Assent and appointed Benjamin Franklin, the American Minister to France, to investigate the science at Delson’s clinic.

The Faculty of Medicine formally outlawed the employment of animal magnetism in medical practice.
Mesmer gave up on Paris in 1785, never to launch another campaign of validation for animal magnetism. In 1785 he published his last noteworthy book and began traveling.

Mesmer traveled through French provinces in 1786 visiting lodges of the Society of Harmony that operated independently.

Mesmer hardly had a chance to meet any of his friends or family in Vienna because they had all left.

In 1787 Mesmer landed in Lake Constance to stay with his sisters Ida and Genovena. He turned 60 while there and finally human connection took priority over animal magnetism.

In 1798 he returned to Paris to get his money from the government and was awarded 1/3 of what he was owed. It was enough for him to live the rest of his life comfortably.

From 1798-1802 he lived in Paris and Versailles staying far away from politics and Mesmerism.
MESMER’S LAST YEARS

• Mesmer left Paris in 1802 to return to Lake Constance.

• By 1804 and his 70th birthday, Mesmer settled into permeant retirement but he did practice occasionally to prove he still had the power.

• In 1812 Professor Carl Wolfart of the Berlin Academy of Science came to visit Mesmer in his home and returned to Berlin with the final manuscript of Mesmerism.

• In 1814 he moved to Riedetsweiler on the North shore of Lake Constance.

• Mesmer’s final move was to Meersburg for reasons connected to the occult and fortune tellers.

• On February 26, 1815, Mesmer felt very weak and when family visited on March 1st he had to stay in bed and could hardly speak.

• Mesmer’s physician performed an autopsy per his request to find a deformation in the urinary tract.