CHAPTER 20

> We can, by investigating the subject scientifically and experimentally, endeavor to discover some . . . magnetic battery, which shall enable us to magnetize anyone at pleasure.
>
> —Gregory, 1851, p. 92

By and large, the quest to develop some mechanical device capable of producing "instant" trance has been no less determined than the age-old search for a perpetual-motion machine.

In fact, as Weitzenhoffer (1957) reported, "many a hypnotist has hoped to find some automatic, easy and sure method of inducing hypnosis by using various physical devices . . . (and) a rash of gimmicks and gadgets have been proposed and even marketed, sometimes with rather deceptive descriptions" (p. 292).
A few brief examples should serve to illustrate the point.

One such gadget in use around the turn of the century was the *miroir-rotatif* (rotating mirror) invented by Luys in 1888. It was portrayed as follows by Foveau de Courmelles (in Young, 1899/1928): "The mirror is Dr. Luys' own discovery and made of pieces of wood cut prismatically in which fragments of mirror are encrusted . . . and by means of clock-work, revolve automatically. They are the same as sportsmen use to attract larks . . . the optic organ soon becomes fatigued, and a calming, soothing somnolence ensues" (p. 102).

Oh really? Well, forgive my skepticism, but that's not quite accurate.
To hear Kingsbury (1891/1894) tell it, "Dr. Luys further claims that it never fails, and that its employment is never attended by any unpleasant consequences . . . but having tested it largely, I must say that it is a very unsatisfactory means of inducing hypnosis. It is very uncertain, and I have lately seen it fail in several cases, in Luys' own clinique. More than this, I have known it in some patients produce headache, giddiness, and palpitation" (pp. 24-26).
Another such negative review was provided by Tuckey (1889/1921). As he wrote, "Though Dr. Luys stated that everyone goes to sleep after looking at the mirror for half an hour at the longest, I have seen several patients, who wished to be influenced, gaze at it steadily for nearly an hour without any result except a headache. I have seen it produce most violent palpitation, and altogether should advise caution in the use of the instrument" (p. 364).

Finally, consider Bramwell's (1903) experience with that blasted device. As he described it: "I also procured one of Luys' revolving mirrors, but found it worse than useless. The instrument was driven by clockwork, but could not be stopped until it ran down . . . It made a loud and disagreeable noise, which from time to time became more marked and irregular, and irresitably suggested an infernal machine on the point of exploding!" (p. 49).

All in all, that should have been the end of the matter. Instead, as Weitzenhoffer (1955, pp. 329-330) pointed out, Luys' rotating mirror was followed by a slew of other mechanical/optical devices such as those developed by Lemoine and Joire (1892), Bérillon (1891), Pau de Saint-Martin (1904) and Bellemanière (1902), who used a rotating polished screw with a bright light shining on it. Weitzenhoffer (ibid) further noted how "Filliatre [1908] describes a so-called 'Boule-hypnotique' composed of a hollow glass sphere on a handle. In the center of the sphere was a small polished metal ball which the subject fixated. Later, Hull [933] designed a similar device, giving a rationale for its supposed efficacity" (p. 330). The author (ibid) then went on to report how "in modern times various other devices have been described and even marketed under such names as 'hypnotrons', 'hypnoscopes', and 'hypnodisks'. They have consisted of flashing lights, fixed and moving concentric circles, and whirling spirals" (p. 330).
It almost makes one long for Luys' "revolving mirror".

* * *

Yet another such contraption that should have been carted off to the Smithsonian about five minutes after its inception was the "brain wave synthesizer" (BWS)—an invention

of Sidney Schneider of Skokie, Illinois. As Blythe (1971) related,

> Between August 1957 and October 1958 the BWS was extensively tested on approximately two thousand five hundred subjects . . . And according to the Journal of the American Medical Association dated 21 March, 1959, "The apparatus induced light to deep hypnotic levels in over ninety per cent of the subjects". By October 1958, Schneider felt confident enough to commence production of the BWS, and today it is in use in hospitals, universities, private practice and government institutions in twenty-two countries throughout the world. (p. 45)

Not anymore it isn't though for lo and behold, as Edmonston (1986) pointed out, "For a while, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, a rash of such machines made their appearance . . . The honeymoon of the BWS was short-lived, however . . . (since) it was shown that the BWS was 'incapable of bringing about a trance state without the aid of verbal suggestion' . . . the efficacy of yet another mechanical device had been laid to rest" (p. 253).

Edmonston (ibid, pp. 265-267) then went on to discuss several other developments in this dogged quest for a mechanical solution to induction. "The East Europeans", he noted, "displayed a particular interest in certain electrical gadgets—such as an instrument which Hall [1973] named 'electro-sleep', or what Barabasz [1976] called 'cerebral electrotherapy'. While another such apparatus was known as the 'Faraday-Hand'—a contraption which contained two electrodes for the purpose of transmitting an electric current to the subjects". Edmonston thereupon noted how an investigator named Völgyesi

> stood virtually alone in these middle decades of this century with regard to . . . the Faraday-Hand. Whether his use of an electricity delivery system . . . is a throw-back to the magical rituals of the distant past or an advancement . . . is perhaps less important than the awareness of the reader of the potential dangers to the patient of such devices . . . Völgyesi's only comment on this point was: "The method, even after years of application, has proved to be without danger to the doctor". No doubt his patients were reassured by this observation. (ibid, p. 269)

And no doubt either that they arrived at their appointments with all the enthusiasm of *dental* patients.

Finally, mention was made of how Harry Arons, in his *Prize-Winning Methods of*

Hypnosis (1969), gave a distinctly negative evaluation of a diabolical contraption marketed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. To hear Edmonston tell it,

> This machine, of Japanese manufacture, produced electrical impulses that were directed to the patient's eyeballs and base of the skull through electrodes strapped in place. Patients subjected themselves to these electrical jolts while listening to a tape recorded relaxation induction verbalization . . . the correspondent [Leo P. Gendreau] reported unpleasant aftereffects lasting up to five days after experience with the machine. Gendreau thought this particular machine, with its eye-pulsing jolts of electricity, "a very dangerous tool". (ibid, pp. 270-271)

And that's the *polite* description.

[see ***NOTE 37*** on p. 483]