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THE PRE-HISTORY OF MKULTRA

By Martin Cannon

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The concept of mind control strikes most people as either futuristic or fabulous. In fact, human beings have employed effective thought-processing techniques ever since the first oligarches sought to exploit their underlings, ever since the first mystics sought communion with their deities, ever since man first sought to understand his inner self. Mind control, broadly defined, has been with us in one form or another since the beginning of civilization.

The Mushroom Warriors

Arguably, the Russians really were the first brainwashers, just as the propagandists of the 1950s alleged.

4500 years ago, the Koyak and Wiros tribes of the central Russian steppes conducted what may be the first experiments in stimulating violence through the use of drugs. They derived from the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom a drug which reduced the warrior's anxiety and fear while increasing his strength, stamina, mental acuity, and ability to withstand pain. The shamans hit upon a noteworthy method of increasing the drug's potency: The mushroom was first fed to reindeer, and the soldiers would drink the animals' urine on the eve of battle. Viking warriors also depended on chemical stimulants derived from deer urine. (Today's soldiers should ponder this history before complaining about their MREs.) Combatants in India relied on similar drugs, as did Native American tribes of the Southwest. Incan warriors made use of the coca leaf. The tradition continues today: In Vietnam, soldiers sought relief in a veritable pharma-cornucopia, which offered everything from marijuana to heroin. The warring tribes of Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia all routinely partake of the locally-preferred narcotics.

In all ancient cultures, the shaman prepared for healing work by retreating to a cave, or some other quiet, intensely dark environment -- a sensory deprivation chamber, if you will. Magic could occur only after prolonged sessions of

drumming and chanting: rhythmic sound stimulation. The shaman would visualize descent into a lower world, just as a modern hypnotherapist might use "falling" imagery during trance induction. As William Sargant, a British psychiatrist, said of these ancient rituals:

"Some persons can produce a state of trance and dissociation in themselves, or in others, with a decreasing need for strong and repeated emotional stresses, until it may become so much a conditioned pattern of brain activity that it occurs with only minor stresses and difficulties; for example, in the primitive religious context, at the renewed beat of a drum, or the screaming roar of the rhombos... If the trance is accompanied by a state of mental dissociation, the person experiencing it can be profoundly influenced in his subsequent thinking and behavior."

Students of occult history maintain that the heirophants of the ancient Egyptian mystery schools practiced a strikingly-advanced form of hypnosis, in which initiates entered profound trances, triggering what we would today call an out-of-body-experience. Even modern-day, scientifically-oriented hypnotists recognize their debt to the Aesculapian priests of ancient Greece, who practiced a hypnosis-based form of medicine and behavior modification they called "dream healing." The oracles of ancient Greece, through the breathing of certain vapors and the imbibing of certain liquids, dwelt within an altered state, as did, to varying degrees, those who participated in the mysteries. Sargant does not hesitate to use the term "brainwashing" to describe the rites of the Oracle of Triphonius. During these mysteries, the initiate experienced sensory deprivation, sudden confusion techniques, selected auditory and visual stimuli, drugs -- and possibly even the proverbial whack on the skull. Unsurprisingly, vivid hallucinations often resulted. Western civilization, we are told, was founded on the Greek model -- but to what degree was Greek civilization itself founded on mind control? Mystery cults expanded throughout the ancient world, always centering (as Dr. Pierre Janet once noted) in the same types of pastoral locales favored by modern centers of Marian devotion. At Eleusis, as at Lourdes, the pilgrim entered craftily-designed alternate world, set amid grottoes, streams, caves and candlelight rites:

"Initiation ceremonies of secret cults of the mystery-type invariably involve tests, sometimes most severe ones. The effect of certain experiences was a carefully worked program of mind training which is familiar in modern times as that employed by certain totalitarian states to 'condition' or reshape the thinking of the individual. This process produces a state in which the mind is pliant enough to have certain ideas implanted: ideas which resist a great deal of counter-

influence."

The Truth About "Magic"

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, alchemists filled many an obscure text with descriptions of techniques intended to focus the will and alter awareness. These auto-induced trance states probably account for many of the visionary experiences reported in occult lore. In a sense, magic works -- in spite of, not because of, the theory of the magician.

Example: Ritualists once set great store by a device called "The Triangle of the Art." This was, essentially, a round glass (roughly a foot in diameter) painted black on the reverse and set into a triangular wooden frame, which was painted white and bedecked with esoteric symbols. The magician was to sit in a darkened room facing this glass, flanked on either side by lit candles placed just outside his direct vision. By studying the dark mirror, concentrating on the reflected light dancing on his face, the magician would slip into the spirit realms and commune with forces beyond. Undoubtedly, the device did its job, though the triangular frame and eldritch calligraphy contributed little aside from decoration. As the American military would re-discover in the 20th Century, flickering light can profoundly affect perception and awareness.

The literature of occultism, stripped of its supernatural pretenses, records the long pre-history of Mesmerism. The demons called forth by Prelati and Gilles de Rais, the Colosseum of horrors witnessed by Buonaventura Cellini, the spirits evoked by Edward Kelly and John Dee, the devils who possessed the sisters at Loudon: Mind manipulation may not explain all of these phenomena, but it explains much. The MKULTRA scientists merely mapped lands the alchemists had long ago discovered. As Richard Cavendish points out in his history of The Black Arts:

"There is not much doubt that the procedures of ritual magic are likely to cause hallucinations. The magician prepares himself by abstinence and lack of sleep, or by drink, drugs and sex. He breathes in fumes which may affect his brain and senses. He performs mysterious rites which tug at the deepest, most emotional and unreasoning levels of his mind, and he is further intoxicated by the killing of an animal, the wounding of a human being and in some cases the approach to and the achievement of orgasm. Through all this he concentrates on a mental image of the being he hopes to see. It does not seem at all unlikely that at the high point of the ceremony he may actually see it."

Religion

Similar practices had similar results within the confines of mainstream faith. Teresa of Avila, the 16th century mystic, may be famous for her charming homily "God is to be found in the pots and pans" -- yet she did not receive her visions spontaneously, while going about her daily labors like other women. To the contrary: In order to experience the divine, she required of herself (and of her charges) penances, solitude, strict discipline, chants, and ongoing mental prayer. This continual hypnotic auto-induction resulted in the state of ecstasy -- the state of trance -- depicted in Bernini's famous statue. Her fellow Carmelites, having undergone the same preparation, would experience the same visions, interviewing celestial visitors alongside Teresa.

History's other great mystics -- inspired seers, such as St. John of the Cross, Plotinus, and Meister Eckhart -- usually followed similar recipes for ecstasy.

According to William Sargant, the methodologies of religious conversion "often approximate so closely to modern political techniques of brain-washing and thought control that each throws light on the mechanics of the other." Sargant pays particular attention to the great English revivalist of the mid-18th century, John Wesley. His technique ("used," according to Sargant, "not only in many other successful religions but in modern political warfare") involved an all-out assault on the emotions, primarily the emotion of fear. The preacher would hit this note at the loudest possible volume for the longest possible time, until many in the audience succumbed to hysterical collapse. This approach differs hardly at all from the ultra-emotional "conditioning" sessions conducted by such modern-day evangelists as Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker.

Interestingly, Wesley even recommended a form of electro-convulsive therapy involving Leyden jars. He considered the intentional electrification of human beings both harmless and beneficial, "a thousand medicines in one." John Wesley may thus be the first "programmer" to take a serious interest in the use of electricity to affect mind and body. All religious systems have incorporated practices designed to modify consciousness: the chanting of mantras, focusing of concentration, guided imagery, breathing exercises, group ritual, intense prayer, etc. Mind control, defined broadly, has affected history to the extent that religion has affected history. The wars of faith have rarely been more than the clashes of psychic autocracies.

The Assassins

Perhaps the most innovative thinker in the history of psychological manipulation was the legendary Persian warlord Hasan I Sabbah, otherwise known as "The Old

Man of the Mountains." Reportedly a boyhood friend of the poet Omar Khyam, Hasan was the son of a governor. He was educated in the ways of the Ismailis, a semi-gnostic sect based in Cairo, which used subtle psychological techniques to instill initiates with a fanatic loyalty to the Egyptian caliph.

When the ambitious and ruthless Hasan was exiled from Persia in 1078, he vowed revenge -- and soon achieved it, by perfecting Ismaili mind-control methods. In the words of Marco Polo, Hasan "caused draughts of a soporific nature to be administered to ten or a dozen youths." He would then transport the drugged youths to a beautiful, but inescapable, valley adjacent to his hillside fortress near Kasvin. Every detail of this Persian garden corresponded with the descriptions of paradise found in the Koran -- including a connoisseur's collection of harem girls. "Upon awakening from this state of lethargy their senses were struck by all the delightful objects, and each perceiving himself surrounded by lovely damsels, singing, playing, and attracting his regards by the most fascinating caresses..." The recruits believed that they had literally died and gone to heaven. After a few weeks of beatific bliss, the young fighting men were (much to their disappointment) expelled from paradise and returned to the outside world. Hasan would then send them on missions of what we would now call "unconventional warfare." The promised reward for both success and martyrdom was a revisit to the garden of delights. Thus, Hasan managed to overcome the most serious obstacle to effective soldiering: the innate human will for self-preservation. The troops welcomed death, and maintained their ecstatic vision of the afterlife through the liberal use of hashish -- hence the term hashishim, from which we derive the word "assassin."

Another "recruiting" technique was more direct: Hasan would purchase children from the poor, and raise them from infancy to become absolutely obedient warriors. So great was Hasan's control that he once impressed a visiting dignitary by ordering one of his men to leap off a cliff, an order fulfilled without a second's hesitation.

The hashishim advanced Hasan's interests, established a network of strongholds, and either murdered or intimidated all rival rulers. By 1094 these elite troops, wearing the white tunics and red sashes characteristic of their sect, had made Hasan the most powerful warlord in the area now called the Middle East. Reportedly, King Richard the Lion-hearted once contracted Hasan to have a mind-controlled assassin perform a "hit" against a rival crusader.

Such, at least, is the story. Alas, figures like The Old Man of the Mountains invite much myth, and never leave the sort of paper trail modern-day researchers would

prefer. We know, however, that as the centuries progressed, the hashishim evolved into an extremely widespread cult, which had made its presence known in Russia, China, and even India -- where the ways of the assassins may have inspired the notorious Thugees. Hasan's sect survives to this day throughout the Middle East. In Gujurat state, India, and in Pakistan, they are now known as the Khojas, and owe their allegiance to the Aga Khan, leader of the modern-day Ismailis.

Mesmerism

All sciences of today owe something to the pseudosciences of older times. As we have seen, hypnotism's debt is particularly large. Many history books credit Franz Anton Mesmer (1733-1815) as the founder of the science of hypnotism, yet we should properly classify Mesmer as an occultist, not a scientist, for he never represented the Age of Reason. He reflected older traditions.

Specifically, Mesmer adopted and expanded upon the ideas first proposed by that impressive and irascible 16th Century alchemist, Paracelsus. This fascinating healer, one-quarter empiricist and three-quarters quack (at a time when most medical men approached the 100% mark for charlatanism), made many enemies in his day. His personality may be gauged by the fact that his real name -- Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim -- gave rise to our word "bombast." Paracelsus held that life flows through an invisible and intangible liquid he called "mumia." Alchemists generally refer to this substance as a fluid, although we perhaps ought to think of it as something akin to the aura, or Wilhelm Reich's orgone energy. Supposedly, bodily fluids (including blood, sweat and urine) maintain this life essence for a brief period. Paracelsus favored applying these substances to a diseased body, arguing that healthy mumia could attract diseased mumia, much as a magnet attracts iron. This practice apparently led Paracelsus to use actual magnets on his patients. He cured hysterical disorders in women by placing the positive pole of a magnet on the head and the negative pole of another magnet below. Again, the magic worked, in spite of the theory of the magician.

During the Age of Reason, a few lonely voices continued to propound the notion of animal magnetism, particularly an English doctor named Richard Mead and the Jesuit Professor Maximilian Hehle, of Vienna. In 1774, Hehle used magnets to cure a woman's stomach cramps. After the patient recovered, Hehle happened to mention his success to a fellow Viennese -- the aforementioned Franz Anton Mesmer.

Mesmer was hooked. He felt that Hehle's experiment confirmed his own ideas of

an "etheric fluid" which pervades all space and controls human health -- a concept cribbed, obviously, from Paracelsus' idea of the *mumia*. During the next year, Mesmer used magnets, and eventually his hands, to manipulate this imagined ether. Initial successes with hypochondriacs and hysterics quickly established Mesmer's reputation. It became tarnished just as rapidly, when he attempted to use animal magnetism to cure an attractive young pianist of her blindness. She and a number of pretty female "patients" came to live with Mesmer, creating something of a scandal: The Viennese sensed that "magnetic" treatment could allow the unscrupulous to take advantage of the fairer sex. (This remains a concern in hypnotic practice.)

Mesmer found it expedient to remove himself to Paris. There, he established a fantastically successful salon catering to the aristocracy. Mesmer initiated a form of "group therapy": Patients would enter a large tub filled with water, magnets, and iron filings. They formed a circle, alternating male and female, pressing thighs together (the healing sessions contained an undeniable sexual element), and used their hands to manipulate each other's "ether." Mesmer presided over these ceremonies in flowing robes of light violet, waving a long magnet-wand over his patients and any other object he cared to "magnetize."

Obviously, all this was buncombe. Yet many declared themselves cured, or at least profoundly affected. Mesmer's treatment sent his charges into violent convulsions -- a complete physical collapse known as "the crisis." Some experienced hallucinations, as when certain patients reported seeing flames shooting out of Mesmer's magnets. These fascinating, yet disturbing, reports prompted King Louis XVI to commission an independent study by a respected team of scientists, which included that esteemed visitor from America, Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

They examined Mesmer's claims, most of which did not stand up under close scrutiny. The commissioners observed numerous patients touch a "magnetized" tree to regain health; many mistakenly touched the wrong tree, yet experienced the crisis nonetheless. Franklin and his fellow experts determined that "imagination without magnetism produces convulsions, and that the magnetism without the imagination produces nothing." So much for Mesmer's theory of the all-encompassing etheric fluid. The report concluded "...that the existence of the fluid is absolutely destitute of proof, and that the fluid, having no existence, can consequently have no use."

Mesmer was proven a fraud -- but a fraud who, disconcertingly enough, had obtained impressive results. For the discerning eye, the spectacle of magnetic

healing still provided much to marvel at. If "imagination" alone could produce profound physical effects, then the human mind possessed previously unguessed-at capabilities. Moreover, Mesmer eventually discovered the somnambulistic (as opposed to the convulsive) hypnotic state. This is the form of hypnosis used therapeutically by later, more scientific practitioners. His magic had worked despite his theory; it was up to his followers to straighten out the theory.

That process, alas, took the better part of the next hundred years. Arguably, the process continues today.

Hypnotism

Mesmer's pupil, the Comte de Puysegur, used what he termed magnetic somnambulism to cure a shepherd boy. The experiment's results largely accorded with those achieved by modern hypnotic practitioners; the subject even experienced amnesia covering the trance episode. De Puysegur also used hypnosis (which had not yet attained that label) to conduct experiments -- reportedly successful -- in telepathy.

Two surgeons, Dr. John Elliotson of London and Dr. James Esdaile, who worked in India, performed operations using "mesmeric anaesthesia." The technique even allowed Esdaile to perform painless amputations. Yet the British medical establishment was incensed by Elliotson's dabblings in what they considered the occult; his hospital banned the use of mesmerism in medical practice. Perhaps no other episode better exemplifies the limitations of what we might label the "CSICOP" mentality: The arch-skeptics of Elliotson's day condemned thousands of patients to agonies hypnosis could have averted. Yet scientific skittishness was understandable: Many experimenters were uncredentialed, and many used Mesmer's techniques to explore ESP, always a dangerous topic.

Interestingly, a number of practitioners -- such as Alexandre Bertrand, Dr. J.H.D. Petetin, and Dr. L. Rostan -- reported very positive results in this field. "Magnetized" patients seemed to develop telepathy and other paranormal abilities. An American doctor, Lyman B. Larkin, used animal magnetism to cure a servant girl. When entranced, the girl developed a secondary personality in marked contrast to her natural character. She also reportedly established paranormal powers, and communicated with a "fairy" who appeared to her during magnetized sessions. This case -- with its bizarre combination of hypnosis, multiple personality disorder, ESP experimentation and visual hallucination -- could almost be considered a dry run for MKULTRA.

Scottish physician James Braid invented the term "neuro-hypnosis" in the mid-19th century. He proposed a purely physical explanation of the process. This theory, though totally erroneous, was carefully couched in medical terms and thus did much to carry hypnosis into respectability. (If we compare Elliotson and Braid, we might conclude that respect accrues not to he who produces results, but to he who masters the jargon.) Like his predecessors, Braid found that he could use hypnosis to perform relatively painless surgeries. Many of the most intriguing hypnotic phenomena -- catalepsy, amnesia, analgesia, loss of sight or hearing, release of inhibition -- now received, for the first time, attention from the scientific establishment.

Braid's theories attracted Professor Jean Martin Charcot, the famed Parisian neurologist. He conducted experiments with hypnotism at the Salpêtrière Hospital, eventually aided by a trio of soon-to-be-stellar associates: Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, and Alfred Binet.

Alas, Charcot founded his work upon flawed assumptions. Like Braid, he considered hypnosis a purely mechanical process; like Mesmer, he felt magnets and metals could set the process into motion. Because he operated primarily on women suffering from hysteria, he concluded that hypnosis could only work on hysterical females. To Charcot, the hypnotic state resulted from a disease of the nervous system; if a patient "went under" easily, that patient was obviously physically ill.

During this period -- which some call the Golden Age of hypnosis -- rivalry developed between the specialists at the Salpêtrière and a somewhat more advanced school of hypnosis at the Nancy Medical Society, led by Drs. Ambrose Liebeault and Hippolyte Bernheim. They saw hypnosis not as a symptom of physiological disorder, but as a psychological process, helpful in healing common neuroses. Bernheim and Liebeault asserted that suggestion alone caused hypnosis. Normal people could be hypnotized, although differing individuals had different levels of hypnotic susceptibility.

Even though Janet and Freud first established themselves at the Salpêtrière, the work done at Nancy intrigued both men. Janet conducted the first serious work into the subject of multiple personality disorder. Secondary personalities, he felt, could be artificially induced by the hypnotist -- an important point, long the subject of dispute. Janet improved upon Charcot's theories considerably when he investigated hypnosis as a process of dissociation -- the separation of one segment of the mind from another. Neurotic patients often had repressed memories of traumatic events in their past; Janet discovered that once the patient

re-awakened the memories, the symptoms of neurotic disorder often abated. Hypnotic age regression provided a key that could unlock the past. In 1889, Freud became Bernheim's pupil, after witnessing a demonstration which made a deep impression:

"A man was placed in a condition of somnambulism, and then made to go through all sorts of hallucinatory experiences. On being wakened, he seemed at first to know nothing at all of what had taken place during his hypnotic sleep. Bernheim then asked him in so many words to tell him what had happened while he was under hypnosis. The man declared that he could not remember anything. Bernheim, however, insisted upon it, pressed him, and assured him that he did know and that he must remember, and lo and behold, the man wavered, began to reflect, and remembered in a shadowy fashion first one of the occurrences that had been suggested to him, then something else, his recollection growing increasingly clear..."

Freud drew a lasting lesson from this experiment: The mind could know something -- yet not KNOW what it knew. The unconscious stored information at differing levels. Note, too, that Bernheim's patient eventually recalled not what actually occurred during the experiment, but the hallucinatory pseudo-memories that Dr. Bernheim had suggested.

After making the intellectual segue between the Saltpetriere and Nancy, Freud eventually became frustrated with hypnosis. The results, he felt, were capricious and impermanent, and not everyone who needed help proved susceptible to trance induction. Freud turned to free association as "the royal road to the unconscious." Thus was born psychoanalysis -- the long, sometimes painful process which exposed the patient's resistances and repressions. Freud saw resistance as a signpost directing the analyst to the root of his patient's problems; hypnosis, by contrast, concealed these resistances. "The hypnotic therapy endeavors to cover up and as it were to whitewash something going on in the mind, the analytic to lay bare and remove something. The first works cosmetically, the second surgically."

Into the Twentieth Century

Freud's discoveries fascinated healers of the mind, and many followed his lead in abandoning hypnotherapy for analysis. For a while, hypnosis settled into the background of intellectual thought -- until military psychologists brought the technique back into action during World War I, along with that unsettling new development, electroshock. Doctors in many armies used both electricity and

trance to treat "combat shock" and other dissociative disorders arising from the strain of battle. According to the respected historian John Toland, one such patient may have been a German corporal named Adolf Hitler.

In 1918, Hitler lay in a Pasewalk military hospital, stricken with a psychosomatic blindness. There, Toland tells us, the future fuehrer was attended by Dr. Edmund Forster, an important hypnosis researcher from Berlin University. Hysterical blindness is precisely the sort of symptom that would have interested a clinician like Forster. He may have opened the corporal's eyes in more ways than one. During this stay at Pasewalk, Hitler experienced a "vision" -- perhaps induced hypnotically -- in which he heard voices entreating him to become the savior of Germany (or so Hitler later claimed).

Toland obliquely suggests a truly remarkable scenario: Adolf Hitler as the first Manchurian Candidate. An unsettling notion, to be sure. Perhaps we should be grateful to Hitler "psychohistorian" Robert G.L. Waite, who has argued persuasively that Forster never treated Hitler.

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