INTRODUCTION


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The rediscovery of mesmerism

Fifty years ago, a young American historian, Robert Darnton, who over the following decades would become one of the most eminent specialists in the cultural history of the French Enlightenment, published his first book. It drew attention to a strange fashion, that of animal magnetism, which, like hot air balloons, had acted as a catalyst in France for the curiosity of the public, for the enthusiasms and passionate debates on the eve of the Revolution. Until this publication, the magnetic fluid which, according to theories of Franz Anton Mesmer, occupied the entire universe by relating all bodies, including living beings, to one another, and the practices of animal magnetism aimed at restoring its obstructed or damaged circulation, had really only been of interest to lovers of esotericism and the occasional historian of psychiatry. Darnton, as a historian of the 18th century, on the contrary positioned Mesmer’s ideas in the context of the period, with its passion for scientific knowledge and the rapid rise of "popular science".

Having come from Vienna to settle in Paris in 1778, Mesmer had gathered around him a growing number of patients and disciples. Convinced that he had not only discovered a universal therapeutic procedure, but also that he had made a major discovery in physics, he initially tried to gain support from the official authorities, but in vain. Finally, he turned towards public opinion by creating the Société de l’Harmonie universelle to spread

his doctrine. This was when the government requested the opinion of the learned bodies. In August 1784, two royal commissions, including members of the Paris Faculty of Medicine, the Academy of Science and the Royal Society of Medicine, condemned without appeal a therapeutic procedure which they considered to only exist in the imagination of the patients. This condemnation unleashed passions, giving rise to a lively battle of pamphlets between opponents and supporters of animal magnetism. However, interest rapidly declined and Mesmer himself left France. In 1789, animal magnetism seemed to have already been forgotten.

It was this affair, narrowly limited in time, that Darnton revisited in his book. Identifying mesmerism as a complete historiographical object, he put it back into its place within the pre-revolutionary dynamic. It was in fact the social, cultural and political implications of Mesmer’s doctrines that, in his opinion, endowed such pseudoscientific developments with the dignity of an historic object. If truth be told, the idea of it dated from the period of the Revolution itself: put forward by counter-revolutionary writers, such as the abbé Lefranc, it had been developed during the 19th century by the theoreticians of the doctrine of conspiracy, who saw it as proof of the demonic nature of the Revolution. We also find it in Tocqueville, who ranked the "sectarians of mesmerism" among the secret societies with which Europe was "teeming" before the Revolution, proposing to regenerate society and reform government.

However, Robert Darnton went much further than this general connection. He accurately reconstituted the two paths via which mesmerism, in his opinion, contributed to the revolutionary movement. First of all, mesmerism played an important role in the formation of a pre-revolutionary mentality, by making available a radical political theory popularizing Rousseauist themes. Such political implications would only have concerned a small section of the mesmerist movement, but it was indeed this portion on which Darnton focused practically all his attention. He distinguished this group around Bergasse, Duval d’Eprêmesnil and Kornmann, which he designated as the "radical strain in mesmerism", (3) The link between mesmerism and the Revolution is given explicitly in the sub-title of the French translation of the book, published in 1984: Robert DARNTON, La fin des Lumières. Le mesmérisme et la Révolution, Paris, Perrin, 1984. The book has also been translated into German (1983), Japanese (1987), Dutch (1988), Portuguese (1988), Italian (2005) and Chinese (2010).

from "the majority of mesmerists, the abbots and countesses and wealthy merchants whose attachment to Mesmer’s tub indicated only a dread of disease, of boredom, or of missing out on the most fashionable parlor game of the decade".

Animal magnetism – this being the second path connecting mesmerism and Revolution, the one on which Darnton focused – gave these "radicals" an initial opportunity to engage in anti-institutional debate, while at the same time providing a meeting place for the opposition members of the Parlement and the marginal and frustrated men of letters. They would later turn their characteristic polemics against the government, thus contributing to the fall of the Old Regime. After their expulsion from the Société de l’Harmonie, Bergasse, Kornmann and their friends engaged in a series of enterprises, the political nature of which became increasingly obvious: the Gallo-American Society, the debates about the financial policy of Calonne, the defence of the Parlement of Paris, and, finally, the divorce case of Kornmann himself, which Bergasse transformed into an indictment of the corrupt customs of the society of the Old Régime.

In Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment, Darnton merely mentioned these developments. However, as he recalls in the interview published in this issue, they represented a major part of his PhD thesis defended at Oxford in 1964, while the study on mesmerism only formed the first two chapters. The emphasis of the Kornmann group in this first work is perfectly in line with the theme that Darnton was to develop in his following writings: driven by their hatred for the establishment, the aspiring intellectuals and writers, excluded from the academies and frustrated in their thirst for success, made a major contribution to undermining the bases of the Old Regime. The role played by these marginal intellectuals was subsequently called into question, and Darnton himself, at least from the 1990s, partially revised his socio-psychological approach, applying himself to a more general study of the influence of forbidden books.

Around 1970, two other books were added to Darnton’s, which also contributed to creating the scientific historiography on animal magnetism


and establishing its paradigmatic interpretation for several decades. In 1971 the anthology of Mesmer’s writings was published, edited by Robert Amadou, an expert in Freemasonry and esoteric culture. It set their standard by offering the first translation into a modern language of Mesmer’s thesis in Latin on the influence of the stars, presented in Vienna in 1766, and by choosing, for the rest of the work, the texts in French from the twenty-year period from 1779-1799 at the expense of the prior and subsequent production, which was in German. The anthology was accompanied by a wealth of commentaries and notes from the editor and from two other experts, Jean Vinchon and Frank A. Pattie. Vinchon had already published a biography of Mesmer, which appeared in 1936 and was re-edited in 1971 in a version shortened of one chapter. Inspired by a romantic vision of Mesmer, this biography represented, along with the one in German by Karl Bittel, published in 1941, the fundamental text on the subject until the late 1960s. As for Pattie, after many years of research, he published the most comprehensive monograph available today on the life of the Viennese doctor in 1994.

Finally, one year before the publication of Amadou’s anthology, Mesmer and animal magnetism occupied a key position within the vast reconstruction of the history of dynamic psychiatry and psychological thought proposed by Henri Ellenberger in his famous *The Discovery of the Unconscious*. In this account by the Swiss psychiatrist, Mesmer’s work marks the break away from the magical and demonological tradition and the emergence of modern dynamic psychiatry. Ellenberger thus very clearly identified a line of development starting with Mesmer, with, rapidly, a first turning point, that of the discovery by his disciple, the Marquis de Puységur, of the phenomena of "artificial somnambulism". From there the 19th century inspiration for hypnotism was to emerge, itself then influenced by spiritualism, and leading, through the schools of Nancy (Bernheim) and Paris (Charcot), to Breuer and the first steps taken by Freud.

(9) Frank A. Pattie, *Mesmer and Animal Magnetism. A Chapter in the History of Medicine*, Hamilton (N.Y.), Edmonston, 1994. Also taking into consideration, from the work of German biographers of Mesmer, the period after the 1780s, amongst other things Pattie re-evaluated, its political dimension.
After Ellenberger, several studies, mainly of a medical and psychological nature, did their best to analyze the elements of continuity and analogy between mesmerism and the various versions of psychoanalysis\(^\text{11}\). Others, conversely, highlighted the distance between Mesmer and Freud, while some, finally, placed the emphasis more on the discoveries of Puységur, by re-evaluating hypnosis as an alternative route to the dominant current of psychoanalysis\(^\text{12}\).

These approaches, which, along with hypnotism, tended to favour the transformations of animal magnetism after 1820, did not always escape the teleological risk that some critics have recently attributed to Ellenberger\(^\text{13}\). It has been necessary to wait until recent years to see the most attentive research in this historical context in order to understand in more depth the place of animal magnetism in 19\(^\text{th}\) century medicine and psychology, as well as the associated social and anthropological dynamics\(^\text{14}\). This interest in animal magnetism extended to other areas of culture, such as literature, philosophy and religion, thus confirming the reflections of Darnton and other writers, such as Viatte, about its influence on the origins of romanticism\(^\text{15}\).

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Still being a phenomenon that drew its roots from the esoteric tradition, mesmerism, based on Ellenberger’s interpretation, also took on the value of a revolutionary event: a "therapeutic revolution", to quote the title of the volume by Franklin Rausky, who reprinted the theme of the political implications of what he defined as a "magnetic counter-culture"16. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that this assertion of the revolutionary role of Mesmer's work in the field of scientific medicine did not, until recent times, feed the debate about its political implications. More generally, we can observe that the research into the first phase of the history of animal magnetism and its presence in French society in the late 18th century remained little developed until recent times. Darnton’s study had demonstrated the importance of the phenomenon, and his thesis had been rapidly reproduced in summary works17 but, at the same time, due to its very richness, it seemed to have said all that there was to say on the subject, to the point of rendering superfluous any new research that might have examined it in more depth.

Mesmerism and Revolution in recent historiography

After Darnton, 18th century mesmerism was occasionally examined in works dedicated to specific aspects of the society and culture of the Old Regime. The points of view adopted were therefore, of necessity, partial. Among the notable exceptions, nonetheless, the thesis of Anneliese Ego and the articles by François Azouvi18 stand out, as well as two studies by Italian historians explicitly dedicated to the link between mesmerism and Revolution. Starting with the biography of two figures who were atypical of the mesmerist movement, for different reasons, Vincenzo Ferrone and Marina Caffiero converged to confirm the importance of the relationship between medicine and politics, although they arrived at very different

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conclusions. The former retraced the route that led the Savoyard doctor, Amédée Doppet, from cautious adhesion to animal magnetism to his rationalist critique, in the name of a "medicine of passions", and finally to a commitment to jacobinism, to the point of directing the siege of Lyon in 1793; Ferrone thus opposes the "lucid rationalism" of Doppet to the supposed mysticism of Mesmer and his disciples, and it was in the former that he recognized the roots of a revolutionary mentality. By showing how, in the context of a wider survey dedicated to revolutionary millenarianism, the mesmerist prophetess Suzette Labrousse went from Paris to the Papal prisons and thence to commitment to the Roman Republic, Caffiero conversely, highlights the subversive value of the prophetic inspiration inherent in radical mesmerism; through its aspiration to a society regenerated physically, morally and politically by means of the restoration of universal harmony, it presented significant analogies with the contemporary theme of a return to the original tenets of Christianity and encouraged the emergence of a new type of female stakeholder.

A sector where the rediscovery of mesmerism has played a particularly important role in constructing innovative historiographical frameworks is that of the history of science. The opposition between the supporters of animal magnetism and scientific institutions has in fact been considered to be a crucial moment in the epistemological demarcation between science and pseudoscience. At the heart of the conflict was the famous condemnation declared during summer 1784 by the two commissions appointed by the king of France, where we find leading figures in science and politics, such as Franklin, Bailly and Lavoisier. The reduction of the magnetic fluid to a mere product of the imagination would thus mark the assertion of a "severe science", which, some months later, turned against other imponderable fluids, such as phlogiston, a prelude to the famous "chemical revolution". In a crucial book, published in 1980, science historian Charles Gillispie placed the episode in the more general context of a kind of crusade led by the last Enlightenment intellectuals against the supernatural and in favour of a thorough and professional science based on


experience and calculation\textsuperscript{22}. Other writers, such as Ferrone and Jessica Riskin, nonetheless proposed blurring the opposition between mesmerism and the scientific culture of the Enlightenment, by placing more emphasis on the points of contact with the naturalist and empiricist currents that were developing among the later Enlightenment thinkers\textsuperscript{23}. Doing this, and here we leave behind the history of science \textit{stricto sensu}, poses a major question concerning the definition of radical Enlightenment and the political role of the various currents of modern thought\textsuperscript{24}.

Darnton’s historiographical undertaking, which began with his study on mesmerism, made a decisive contribution to the reconsideration of the question of the intellectual origins of the French Revolution, as it had been formulated in the classic study by Daniel Mornet, and its transformation into the much vaster and more complex one of its cultural origins. After the book’s publication in 1968, the debate was enriched no end with contributions from writers such as Roger Chartier, François Furet, Daniel Roche, Keith Baker, Lynn Hunt and Colin Jones\textsuperscript{25}. With the significant exception of Jones, however, mesmerism was mainly left out of the debate. Darnton himself never returned to it. At the end of the day, it seems that his book on mesmerism has attracted less attention than his later ones\textsuperscript{26}, although its influence sometimes emerges unexpectedly, as in the footnote in which Simon Schama acknowledges that in reading it he was "set [him] thinking many years ago about the sources of revolutionnary truculence"\textsuperscript{27}.

The crisis in the history of mentalities and psycho-history, and then the arrival of the \textit{linguistic turn}, probably contributed to marginalizing a


\textsuperscript{26}Robert DARNTON, "Two Paths in the Social History of Ideas", in Haydn T. MASON, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 251.

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phenomenon whose preponderant influence seemed to lie in the field of emotions, much more so than in that of political culture. The mesmerism episode thus remained outside the historiographical current that was engaged, and drew its inspiration more or less faithfully from Habermas’ categories, in analyzing the process of the formation and role of public opinion. And yet, animal magnetism could have appeared as an emblematic example of the appeal to the court of public opinion, in the same way as the Jansenist controversies or the causes célèbres.

In the letter in which he refused the conditions attached to the lifelong pension that was offered to him by the Queen, Mesmer laid himself open to the judgement of "public opinion", which, in many circumstances, "prevails irresistibly over that of Kings". The choice of relying on the public took shape for the first time with the founding of the Société de l’Harmonie at the end of 1783, and was repeated, on a much greater scale, with the outbreak of the pamphlet war that followed condemnation by the royal commissions in summer 1784. In the first case, Mesmer, divided between the desire to defend and assert his doctrine and the fear of losing control of it, called on the mediation of a restricted elite. In the second one, it was the much wider public of readers who were asked to judge a controversy that called into question the authority of scientific institutions and the powers that upheld them.

Although studies of the public arena barely considered the case of mesmerism, it has, however, received some attention from the historians who examined the transformations of political culture and language at the end of the Old Regime, a theme that has been developed greatly over the last few decades. In this respect, Michel Delon has noted two contributions from mesmerism. On the one hand, with its cathartic therapy, in which the convulsions of the patient’s body marked the elimination of obstacles to the free circulation of the fluid, which were the cause of the illness, mesmerism "brought the term crisis into fashion to refer to the concentration of energy..."
that causes a homeopathic enhancement of the illness and the cure.”

It thus participated in the politicization – in parallel with that of other terms from the language of medicine and science such as fermentation and energy – of a concept which, from the time of Rousseau, was associated with that of revolution. On the other hand, mesmerism, especially as expressed by Puységur, proposed a theorization of the energetic version of willpower and provided it with a field of application. Willpower thus represented a "force for social change and historic destiny" and it took on a revolutionary value by turning against the prevailing social structures.

For his part, Colin Jones emphasized the contribution of mesmerism in the assertion of the principle of free circulation – of forces, goods, services and information – whose field of application extended from medicine to economics and politics, thus encompassing the concept of a public sphere, but giving it roots in the social and economic world, contrary to the tendency of the "revisionist" historiography of the Revolution to focus on political discourse.

It is true that according to Darnton mesmerism became an acknowledged feature of the pre-revolutionary social landscape. Several historians working on different aspects of the society of the Old Regime thus examined it in passing, contributing to renewing the approach to it, both in terms of the characteristics of the movement and its dissemination and influence. In the context of the historiography on sociability, which received an enormous boost after the work of Maurice Agulhon and Daniel Roche, Antoine Lilti studied the interest aroused by animal magnetism in the world of the Paris salons, and particularly regarding the experiments with hypnosis of the Marquis de Puységur. The enthusiasm aroused by mesmerism, especially in Masonic circles, was also confirmed by several studies, as well as by the publication of Bode’s travel journals. However, above all, what appeared,
after its shutting out from the medical institutions, was a very wide and very diffuse penetration of mesmerist ideas and practices in the world of the healthcare professions. The news and announcements published in the provincial press and the correspondence of the Royal Society of Medicine thus highlight a substantial polarization between followers and opponents of magnetism, especially in the provinces, where doctors and surgeons – but also some priests – made considerable use of these new treatments. In the same vein, Malik Melah has recently returned to the experiments with magnetism on animals taken to Lyon and Paris by mesmerist vets, such as Philibert Chabert and Pierre Flandrin, the latter even planning in 1784 to construct a sheepfold provided with a tub.

We should highlight here the considerable, although somewhat uneven, dissemination of mesmerism among the doctors trained at the University of Montpellier. This phenomenon, to which Elisabeth Williams and Jean-Luc Chappey have drawn attention, was undoubtedly encouraged by common concerns, whether they were "physiological and organicist" principles, or concern with the "connections between body and mind". The adhesion to mesmerism of the doctors at Montpellier should also be considered in the light of the conflicts that opposed them to the University of Paris. The latter, in condemning mesmerism, forced the recantation of those among its members who saw animal magnetism as an interesting therapeutic resource, but also an opportunity to renew the standing of the University, which was threatened by the growing role of the Royal Society of Medicine. As we can see, the debate about animal magnetism reflected and illustrated the tensions that were prevalent in the world of medicine, but also, more generally, in society: Lindsay Wilson thus

(43) Colin Jones, art. cit., p. 34.
recognized in the debate on the convulsions of mesmerism a testimony to the crisis in the corporative and patriarchal model, which went well beyond the intentions of Mesmer and his disciples, and she emphasized a contrario the conservative elements behind their concept of harmony.44

Mesmerism was not the only trend challenging the monopoly of official medicine while rising above the "practice" of the popular healers. Others such as brownism45 and medical electricity46 were playing a similar role. The route taken by the latter and its adherents is also closely linked with that of magnetism and the mesmerists. These aspects, already examined by Geoffrey Sutton47, have been taken up by François Zanetti in this issue, based on certain cases and in particular that of the prize of the Academy of Rouen on the medical application of electricity and magnetism in 1783 which was won by Marat in 1783. The debates raised by the medical applications of these two invisible fluids cannot be reduced, as he demonstrates, to mere opposition between insiders and outsiders: what was at stake was a complex process of redefinition and negotiation of the frontiers of medical knowledge, practices and authority. The entangled outcomes of animal magnetism and medical electricity should not therefore overlook the differences between these different "projects". In the case of medical electricity, which was older, the ups and downs of the 1780s can find an antecedent in mid-century debates. In the same way as animal magnetism, medical electricity was therefore at the centre of the controversies surrounding the expansion of the "medicable". However, during the 1780s, it experienced a process of intellectual and social relegation. It therefore became a medicine of the poor, which contributed to its survival, even during the years of Revolution, while animal magnetism remained suspended between accusations of charlatanism and its persistent "worldly tinge".

(44) Lindsay Wilson, op. cit., p. 125 and 164-165.
Complexity and issues in a pluralist movement

The substantial involvement of the healthcare professions in the mesmerist movement has also led to a reconsideration of its composition. Aside from the aristocrats attracted by the fashion for the tub, the mesmerists proved to be "far more than a bunch of marginalized frustrés and ratés" non-conformists\(^{48}\), and the debates in which they were the protagonists "cannot be reduced to a conflict between insiders and outsiders\(^{49}\). The complexity and pluralist nature of the mesmerist movement have in fact been highlighted in the most recent studies on animal magnetism\(^{50}\), but also as a result of the systematic analysis of the Société de l’Harmonie universelle, which constituted, in various ways, the starting point for this issue of the \textit{AHRF}.

Conceived by Bergasse and Kornmann, it was, at least initially, made up of disciples who had acquired the right to be instructed in his secrets, by paying a subscription of 100 louis to Mesmer. Of all the circles that made up the mesmerist movement – which also included independent and rival magnetizers and schools, not to mention patients and followers of animal magnetism who, like Brissot, did not take part in practising it – the Society seemed to the be most central one and the closest to the founder, and, at the same time, the largest in terms of numbers. Its importance also lies in the possibility of reconstructing its composition in a complete and consistent way thanks to the existence of the register of its members, which was published in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, and a corpus of original membership diplomas, conserved at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris\(^{51}\). This documentation, which constitutes an exceptionally rich sample for study, represents 433 members, most of whom can be identified. As part of the “Harmonia Universalis” project, financed by Labex Hastec, the creation of a prosopography of the members of the Société de l’Harmonie represented the starting point for an investigation that is still in progress, aimed at reconstructing the whole population of participants in the mesmerist movement and the networks of relationships that it spanned\(^{52}\).


\(^{49}\) Lindsay WILSON, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 16 and 117.

\(^{50}\) Bruno BELHOSTE et Nicole DELMAN (dir.), \textit{op. cit}.

\(^{51}\) \textit{Journal du magnétisme}, vol. 11, 1852; Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, CP 4257.

\(^{52}\) Cf. David ARMANDO and Bruno BELHOSTE, "Per una prosopografia del movimento mesmerista. Il progetto “Harmonia Universalis’’, \textit{Laboratorio dell’ISPF}, XII, 2015; pending transfer
A quick look through the information in the register is sufficient to establish that the society was something more structured than a mere phenomenon of elite sociability. Of the 288 names for which the status or profession is stated, around seventy come from the nobility of the sword, most of them with responsibilities at court, in diplomacy and especially in the army. Among them were also the only women on the list, three in number. Approximately thirty members belonged, on the other hand, to an elite of magistrates, lawyers, members of Parliament and high-ranking civil servants, to which another fifteen or so members can be added who belonged to the world of finance and commerce. The presence of thirty-three members of the clergy, half of them regular, may seem somewhat unexpected; yet this is in line with the declarations of Mesmer and his collaborators, who recognized in the clergy, in particular those in the countryside, a preferred vector for the dissemination of animal magnetism. However, the largest socio-professional group was that of the health care professions. There were forty-nine doctors of medicine. If we add to them the twenty-five surgeons and obstetricians, two apothecaries and one veterinarian, as a whole they form over one quarter of the members for whom the register gives a profession. This confirms the penetration of mesmerism into the world of medicine, on a scale which had escaped Darnton’s analysis.

We find a considerable change in the composition of the society, before and after the division of May 1785 that led to the expulsion of Bergasse, Kornmann and d’Eprémesnil. In the first phase, when the members were students of Mesmer, who had paid the subscription and signed a contract with him to follow lessons in magnetism, the portion of doctors was much higher than in the second one, during which, by contrast, we find an increased presence of aristocrats, and also of men of letters, scholars and artists, merchants and especially members of the clergy. This was only one aspect of the extraordinarily complex and dynamic nature of this Society, illustrated by the very different paths taken by two future deputies at the Estates General, Pierre Victor Malouet and Louis-Henri de Gouy d’Arcy, whose mesmerist commitment is described by David Armando opening his contribution to this issue.

to the University of Paris 1, the database of participants in the mesmerist movement can be consulted at https://harmoniauniversalis.univ-paris1.fr (doi: 10.19267/hubd01).

(54) This brief sketch, based on the indications offered by the register, is confirmed by the analysis in progress based on the prosopographical details of all members.
The fracture within the Société de l’Harmonie was itself the outcome of a series of difficulties, after the condemnation of animal magnetism by the royal commissions and the pamphlet war that took place in autumn 1784. The explanations that could have been given for the division, mainly based on the account given by Bergasse himself, have so far favoured the opposition between disciples and a master, accused of wishing to profit in an exaggerated manner from his discovery, in violation of his undertakings and at the expense of the good of humanity. On both sides the debate would thus mobilize arguments concerned with the culture of Enlightenment thinkers, the philanthropical ideal claimed by Bergasse opposing Mesmer’s wish to conserve the intellectual property of his discovery, and his suspicion regarding its indiscriminate dissemination. This conflict has also been interpreted as being related to the distinction between a small group of members interested in the social and political implications of animal magnetism, and the rest of the movement, including Mesmer, which was more conservative. It is possible, nonetheless to reconstitute its dynamics in a more complex way, by also taking account of the surrounding social context.

The contribution from Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire thus highlights a particularly important aspect of the history of the Société de l’Harmonie and mesmerism in general: the Masonic dimension. While it is not very likely that Mesmer himself was a member, the Société de l’Harmonie, on the other hand, as demonstrated by Robert Amadou at the end of a painstaking analysis of its articles of association and its regulations, was of a nature that, while certainly not completely "masonic", was nonetheless "masonoid", "paramasonic" and "masonizing". The Society in fact followed the model of the Masonic lodges, borrowing its symbols and sharing its horizons. A large part of its membership was also integrated into various branches of Masonic sociability: from the military lodges to the more worldly ones of the capital; from the traditional lodges to the world of the "upper grades"; from the lodges more impregnated with Enlightenment culture, such as the Neuf Sœurs, to the esoteric groups, such as the Philalèthes. Although all sectors were represented, the Scottish rite occupied a particularly notable place. This feature, which was even more marked in the provincial societies, for example in the Société de l’Harmonie of Guyenne in Bordeaux and the

Société Harmonique des Amis Réunis at Strasbourg, illustrates the weight of the esoteric tendencies within the mesmerist movement.

The history of the Société de l’Harmonie is, in fact, closely linked to the dynamics of this shifting world. This is why it is essential to take into consideration the rapid renewal of the forms of masonic sociability during the 1780s. The contribution from Beaurepaire, focused on the system of the Philalèthes within the Amis Réunis lodge and on its founder, Savalette de Langes, is particularly enlightening from this point of view. The presence of Savalette and his men in the society, a presence further reinforced at the time of the separation of spring 1785, is a sign of interest in occult knowledge within the mesmerist movement. However, it was also, for Savalette, an instrument of promotion in the competition for supremacy within esoteric Freemasonry that then had brought him into conflict with Jean-Baptiste Willermoz from Lyon. By founding the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte, the latter set himself targets, in a programme inspired by the Catholic Aufklärung, that in many respects were similar to those of Savalette and the Philalèthes. The interest of Willermoz in animal magnetism played a major role in this programme, which took the form, outside the mesmerist movement, of experiences around visionary mystics, such as Marie-Louise de Monspey (alias "the unknown Agent")\(^{(57)}\). To push his advantage against Willermoz, Savalette was therefore able to make the most of his central position within the Société de l’Harmonie. Their respective relations with mesmerism basically reflected their differences from a social point of view: for one thing, Savalette, was fully integrated into the elite of the kingdom in a much more organic way than Willermoz, who appeared, from this point of view, to be an outsider. From the point of view of the dynamics specific to the mesmerist movement, we should not therefore under-estimate, regarding what separated the two experiences, the mainly secular and worldly nature of the ideal of Masonic philanthropy, as conceived by Savalette, a characteristic that we find in the Société de l’Harmonie.

The Parisian Société de l’Harmonie, which after 1785 bore the title Société de l’Harmonie de France, constituted the centre of the mesmerist movement. As confirmed by its archives, it experienced a dizzying expansion between 1784 and 1785. The presence, in the register of the society, of a considerable minority of members who did not live in Paris

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(with a particularly strong concentration in Bordeaux and Lyon) is merely one aspect of an influence substantially endorsed by the correspondence of the Royal Society of Medicine\(^{(58)}\). The expansion began at the end of 1783, when two of Mesmer’s first students, the bailliff des Barres and his doctor Jean-Marie Esprit Amic, introduced animal magnetism at Malta\(^{(59)}\). Six months later there were reports of the first treatments in Bordeaux, Amiens, Lyon and Versailles, then in Beaubourg and Bourbonne, to which we can add those of the Puységur brothers in Buzancy and Bayonne\(^{(60)}\). At the same time, a network of sociétés de l’Harmonie began to be formed in the provinces. In a pamphlet from 1784, Bergasse mentioned those of Lyon, Bordeaux, Grenoble, Amiens, Chartres and Saint-Etienne. According to Darnton, subsidiaries were created in over twenty towns and cities, among which he cites, apart from those already mentioned, Strasbourg, Montpellier, Nantes, Bayonne, Dijon, Marseille, Castres, Douai and Nîmes, but we should also add at least Bergerac, Aix-en-Provence and Montauban\(^{(61)}\). This is a phenomenon of dissemination that still remains to be specified, both in its forms and in its periodization. What seemed to emerge, however, was a strong concentration in the south of France, particularly in the south west, in an area equally characterized by a strong Masonic sociability, then, later, by the development of a revolutionary political sociability\(^{(62)}\). Added to the Sociétés of Malta and Saint-Domingue outside the kingdom were that of Ostend, which seems to have been short-lived, while in Turin the magnetic treatment inaugurated by a disciple of Mesmer, Sebastiano Giraud, was quickly closed down by the authorities\(^{(63)}\). Alongside sound and active institutions, which published the results of their experiences and a list of their members, such as that of Guyenne, smaller groups coexisted, gathered

\(^{(58)}\) Lindsay Wilson, op. cit., p. 116-122.
\(^{(60)}\) Histoire du Magnétisme en France, de son régime et de son influence. Pour servir à développer l’idée qu’on doit avoir de la Médecine universelle, in Vienna and also in Paris, Boyez, 1784, p. 28-29; Nicolas Bergasse, Considérations sur le magnétisme animal ou sur la théorie du monde et des êtres organisés d’après les principes de M. Mesmer, La Haye, s.n., 1784, p. 135.
\(^{(61)}\) Ibid., p. 136; Robert Darnton, Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France, op. cit., p.52.
around a central figure, such as the Présidente du Bourg in Toulouse and Pierre Victor Malouet in Toulon.64

Sometimes the local societies involved a special variant of mesmerism: this was the case in Strasbourg, where the Société Harmonique des Amis Réunis and that of the Metz regiment, both founded by the Marquis de Puységur, carried out their experiments on magnetic somnambulism in contradiction with Mesmer’s orientation, which the Parisian society wished to impose upon them. The differences were even clearer in Lyon, where, alongside magnetizers who claimed mesmerist orthodoxy, a mystical current developed independently, gathered around the Société de la Concorde, which joined the network of mesmerist societies at the end of 1784 only to break away from it the following February.65

The correspondence between the centre and the local societies suffered the effects of crises, in particular from the schism of spring 1785, which left the disciples in the provinces disoriented.66 Mesmer himself then began a tour of the south of France to reinforce the connections.67 Finally, the Parisian society attempted to stabilize an "ongoing correspondence" with the provincial societies in March 1786, leading on this occasion to irritated reactions about what was perceived as a mark of superiority.68 The main prerogative attributed by the regulations to the centre in Paris was the exclusive right "to found new societies in the provinces of the Kingdom".69 For the French colonies in America, the same privilege of foundation was granted to the society set up in Cap-Français by one of the two younger brothers of the Marquis de Puységur in June 1784. This society had twenty-five members in 1786.70 Besides, we find a significant presence of colonists from Saint-Domingue colonists in the Paris Society, which also had a number of members who were involved in colonial trade.

The dissemination of mesmerism in Saint-Domingue has been the subject in recent years of important work by François Regourd and Karol Weaver. They took a particular interest in two aspects of this phenomenon: on the one hand, the role played by the anti-mesmerist debate in the foundation of the Cercle des Philalèthes (which had no connection with Savalette’s lodge of the same name) and in its attempt to constitute a link between colonial society and the metropolitan scientific elite; on the other hand, the supposed welcome given to animal magnetism by black slaves, the protagonists, according to certain sources, of cases of syncretism between Mesmer’s doctrine and voodoo tradition. Bernard Gainot looks back at this history, which, apart from the special features of the colonial context, represents a valuable case study for the social and political dynamics that took place around mesmerism. The basic question, which also runs through other contributions to this dossier, can be summarized by determining the extent to which mesmerism is able to play the role of an indicator for the opposition between the defenders of official institutions and anti-establishment ones. The example of Saint-Domingue suggests that the clear opposition separating the supporters of animal magnetism from their opponents is in fact considerably reduced if we consider the social and cultural origins of the two groups, which appears to be very similar, as were their subsequent political positions. It was therefore, in this case, a confrontation within the very heart of the colonial elite, given that the Philalèthes were more integrated into the system of high-status professions and had closer links with metropolitan academic circles. Even the accusation against mesmerism of breaking down colour barriers highlights the prejudices and rhetorical strategies of the magistrates of Cap-Français and the defenders of the segregationist edifice, rather than the existence of genuine phenomena of syncretism.

While several contributions to this issue invite us to challenge the image of the debates surrounding mesmerism in terms of opposition between insiders and outsiders, and to consider more complex lines of tension to give an account of these conflicts, we can perceive another concern common to the articles gathered together here: that of questioning the dichotomy of the mesmerist movement into a small radical group and a

large apolitical or conservative majority, including Mesmer, which Robert Darnton had advanced in principle in his study. The political impact of animal magnetism would result, in his opinion, from the highlighting by a minority of Mesmer’s disciples of some of its implications, which had so far remained implicit, as well as the anti-institutional content of the debates that followed the ostracism declared by academic bodies against the new doctrine, with the endorsement of the political authorities. However, as it appears from the contributions to this dossier, the question actually seems to be much more complex.

This is true first of all for Mesmer himself. The image of an apolitical doctor that has been imposed by the historiography deserves to be re-examined. To do this, Bruno Belhoste moves the point of observation to some aspects of his biography and his output that have been little examined: the initial period in Vienna and the years of the Revolution. It appears from this that, right from the start, the doctrine of animal magnetism had a political and medical dimension, which highlights Mesmer’s role in the case of Gassner’s exorcisms, in 1775: by giving a purely naturalist interpretation of the phenomena of possession on this occasion, Mesmer contributed to the enterprise of secularization of practices and beliefs carried out by Viennese medicine under the reign of Maria-Theresa. If we now consider the period after 1789, it has to be said that Mesmer demonstrated sympathies with the revolutionaries. He was closely associated with the “Jacobins of Vienna”, who would be accused of conspiring against the Habsburg monarchy. In Paris, following his return in 1798, he expressed clear republican sentiments and went as far as drafting a constitution for the Swiss Republic in 1802. Above all, his texts on morality and politics, published in a German translation in 1814, show a vision of society that combined in an original manner, around the theme of harmony, a theory of interest, in the sensationalist tradition, with the ideas of Rousseau. Although it is difficult to put a date on the time when they were written, Belhoste’s article shows that the vision developed in these texts had already been presented, for the most part, in the lectures that Mesmer gave to the Société de l’Harmonie universelle in 1784. This leads us, ultimately, to firmly place in perspective the role often attributed to Bergasse in relation to the founder of the movement, in terms of the political orientation of mesmerism.

As for the disciples and followers of Mesmer, their presence in the process that led to the start of the Revolution and then in the revolutionary dynamic itself was also revealed as more complex than it might have seemed in the first instance. Several studies, following that of Darnton,
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thus contained important suggestions that we have tried to develop in the pages of this collection of articles, but that would undoubtedly be worth examining in further depth. Daniel Wick has highlighted the presence of the mesmerists in the Society of Thirty, the focal point of the national party on the eve of the Revolution\textsuperscript{72}. While we find in it, as in the Bergasse and Kornmann group, members of the parliamentary opposition, the rest formed a group of a very different nature. In the interpretation that Wick gives, it was not the anger of those excluded from the elite that motivated the Society of Thirty, but rather the resentment of a faction between the nobles of the sword, well settled in their financial positions and in their networks of alliances and patronage, but in disgrace at the court. More specific is the mention of the mesmerists by another American historian, Timothy Tackett, who indicates in passing, in his study on the deputies elected to the Estates General, an unexpected number of former mesmerists\textsuperscript{73}. In developing this adnotation, David Armando highlights in his contribution the presence of a large number of mesmerists in the Constituent Assembly: at least twenty deputies from the Société de l’Harmonie universelle, among whom some leading players stand out, such as Malouet, Gouy d’Arcy and Montesquieu-Fézensac, to be added to Bergasse, d’Eprémesnil, Duport and La Fayette, already indicated by Darnton. The group, mostly composed by Monarchiens and Feuillants, was mainly moderate; however, we do find some more extreme positions on the right, and also on the left. While the career of these deputies bears witness, in several cases, to the pursuit of the practice of magnetism and especially hypnosis during the Revolution, it is more difficult to read a reflection of their mesmerist experience in their discourse. This is nonetheless visible in the use of key concepts such as harmony, circulation and convulsions.

A complex interpretation of the political implications also comes from the last two contributions to this issue, those of Javier Solans and Karine Rance. The ideal of harmony expressed by the mesmerist movement lends itself in fact to various political developments. Its possible counter-revolutionary, and even clearly reactionary, implications were already evident in the trajectories of Bergasse and d’Eprémesnil. This is what confirms, on another level, the subsequent fate of many members of the


\textsuperscript{73} Timothy Tackett, Becoming a Revolutionary. The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790), Princeton, Princeton UP, 1996, p.53.
The Intendant of Paris, Bertier de Sauvigny, represented the first, chronologically, in the series of victims of the Revolution whose names appear in its register. Among the twenty or so former members of the society condemned to death by the revolutionary courts, we find people with a wide variety of political orientations, from the Feuillant deputies, Gouy d’Arcy and Lauzun, to the leader of the reactionary opposition, Duval d’Eprémesnil, as well as the Lyonnais federalists, such as Dominique Bergasse, Nicolas’ brother. In her article, Karine Rance identifies at least fifty-three former members of the society (or around 12% of the total) who emigrated and, in many cases, who enlisted in the counter-revolutionary armies. However, we find, on looking more closely, that there was nothing coherent about this group. It was characterized, on the contrary, by a wide variety of political careers and choices. The overall impression gained from it is ultimately that in total the opposition to the Revolution was rather less radical there than among most of the other émigrés, especially with regard to the general behaviour of the different social classes among them, in particular aristocracy. In the descriptions of treatments in which the mesmerists in exile were protagonists, we also find again the same asymmetries which generally characterized the practice of magnetism, and firstly that of gender. At the same time, in the circumstances of marginality that often accompanied the experience of the counter-revolutionary exiles, animal magnetism revealed its subversive potential and represented a resource capable of overcoming social barriers.

Through figures such as Nicolas Bergasse and Joseph de Maistre, animal magnetism also became a source of inspiration for the doctrine of the Holy Alliance; but the prophetic and religious dimension of mesmerism was capable of declension just as much in a revolutionary sense. In his contribution to this issue, Javier Solans reconstitutes the connections between mesmerism and revolutionary millenarianism by revisiting, thanks to a substantial contribution from new sources, the history of the circle of the Duchess of Bourbon, which was frequented by figures such as Nicolas Bergasse, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and Dom Gerle, as well as prophetesses such as Suzette Labrousse and Catherine Théot. The cross-fertilization of mesmerism with Christian mysticism had been encouraged by the discovery of artificial somnambulism, as well as by the spiritual experiences derived from it, grafted onto the materialist conceptions of Mesmer by integrating a new religious vision into it. In mesmerism as it survived during the Revolution, the influence of its prophetic variant on the constitutional Church, within which, as we know, millenarianist
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...tendencies were strong, is an aspect that has so far been little studied\textsuperscript{74}. By correcting this lack, Solans’ article demonstrates that mesmerism in its Christian version, far from being structurally associated with anti-revolutionary, or even reactionary, political positions, was able to add to a discourse containing the values of the Enlightenment or even a revolutionary discourse. This is what was shown by other examples, such as that of the librarian of the Grands-Augustins, Charles Hervier, one of Mesmer’s first pupils and one of his most passionate defenders, who enthusiastically joined the Revolution and remained, until his death under the Restoration, loyal to his commitment to magnetism. These unexpected developments confirm, if confirmation was needed, the complexity of the issues of mesmerism, at the crossroads between politics and religion. On the one hand, we note the importance of its contribution to the processes of secularization, rarely highlighted by historians, except for those concerned with psychiatry; on the other hand, a spiritual dimension, marked by extraordinary manifestations coming to reinforce the Catholic tradition or to found a new religion, incompatible with the tradition of the Church, which would also eventually condemn the "abuses of magnetism" in 1856\textsuperscript{75}.

In this issue, we mainly wished to demonstrate, by means of a few examples, the influence of mesmerism on society, before and during the French Revolution. Its impact could be studied starting from many other points of view. Who were the patients and what were their motivations? To what extent does the use of mesmeric treatments reveal the concerns and hopes of pre-revolutionary society? What place did women occupy in the movement: were they essentially passive or were there specific spaces for their intervention, as in the cases of the prophetesses and certain female somnambulists?

We have mainly concentrated on socio-political phenomena, but there is still a lot to be said about the contribution of mesmerism to the constitution of a new mental and emotional landscape, as well as to the definition of a new vision of humanity and the world, and the relationships between body and moral, between the individual and the

\textsuperscript{74} Catherine MAIRE, "Les jansénistes et le millénarisme. Du refus à la conversion", Annales HSS, 63, 2008, No. 1, p. 7-36; Marina CAFFIERO, art. cit.

collective. Without wishing to exaggerate the role of mesmerism and its contribution to explaining the revolutionary dynamics, it seems to us, in any case, that its apparently short-lived radiance is worth examining carefully, like that of other major or minor "structuring" events, in order to gain a better understanding of what was at play here between "long-term heritage" and processes of breakdown, capable of engaging "a sustainable dynamic." \footnote{76}

All the more so since, far from disappearing with the departure of Mesmer and the decline of the sociétés de l'Harmonie, animal magnetism returned to play a leading role on the social and cultural scene during the Restoration. The links invisibly connecting the age of Mesmer to that of 19th century magnetism constitute another subject, most of which remains to be studied, starting with the reconstitution of the biographies of the protagonists. The extensions and reworkings of Mesmer’s theory, with the taking into account of hypnotism and other aspects of mental activity that escape awareness, have had an influence in the field of philosophical, medical and psychological ideas. While they constitute in themselves a major chapter in 19th century cultural history, at the same time these developments still form part of the vast repertoire of responses to the rupture caused by the Revolution.

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