

The dissemination of mesmerism in Germany (1784–1815): Some patterns of the circulation of knowledge

Claire Gantet 

Département d'histoire, Université de Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland

Correspondence

Claire Gantet, Département d'histoire, Université de Fribourg, Mis. 4129, Av. de l'Europe 20, CH-1700 Fribourg, Switzerland.
Email: claire.gantet@unifr.ch

Abstract

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), a physician who graduated from the University of Vienna, invented a therapy based on the concept of a universal fluid, similar to electricity, that flowed through all living things. By restoring the circulation of this fluid in the nerves of human bodies, he believed he could cure illness without resorting to medication. Few medical theories have enjoyed as great success as Mesmer's, first among French high society and then in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Britain, and the US. Mesmerism was the circulatory phenomenon par excellence. Its success was founded not only on the hypothesis of the circulation of a fluid common to human physiology and the entire universe, but also on the scientific practices of the time—correspondence, translations, and periodicals—and some ardent and highly active supporters who ensured its spread. However, far from functioning along the lines of direct exportation–importation from one country to another, or a centre to the periphery, mesmerism's dissemination was the work of diffuse institutions and individual mobilities influenced by the modalities of communication. In seeking to reconstitute the wellsprings of these circulations, the first sources that come to mind are printed matter: the many pamphlets and especially the articles and reviews that

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appeared in periodicals, as well as the Romantic literature that flourished after 1810. Such documents are foundational for authoritative studies of mesmerism in Germany, which proceed from the thesis of successive “waves” of reception. Such sources, however, are somewhat misleading. Rather than taking them as our starting point, it would be better to reconstitute the channels of information by using many sources, both printed and handwritten. The complexity of the circulation of knowledge generated by mesmerism is implicitly testament to the difficulties arising from the institutionalization of this current.

KEYWORDS

Amand Chastenet de Puységur (1751–1825), animal magnetism, circulation of knowledge, Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), magnetic somnambulism, *Naturphilosophie*

“In general, the term circulation refers to all movement, whether periodic or not, which does not occur in a straight line. One says that *blood circulates, money circulates,*” explains Diderot in the entry on that concept in his *Encyclopédie*.¹ The Enlightenment hinged on the implementation of numerous exchange practices: correspondence, prize questions posed by scientific academies, the development of the press, and especially communications among Freemasons. The conception of the body politic as a hierarchy extending from the king and his officers to the clergy, nobility, and commoners was rivalled above all by forms of circulation—of goods, services and information—that united the body of citizens. In opposition to a narrowly political historiography of the French Revolution and its origins, Colin Jones has emphasized the importance of these economic and social circulations that moulded public opinion even before 1789, as well as mesmerism’s contribution to that current.²

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), a physician who graduated from the University of Vienna, invented a therapy based on the concept of a universal fluid, similar to electricity, that flowed through all living things. By restoring the circulation of this fluid in the nerves of human bodies, he believed he could cure illness without resorting to medication. In 1968, Robert Darnton rescued Mesmer’s work from the opprobrium into which it had been cast and established it as an academic field of study. His focus was mesmerism’s spread among French elites around 1780 and its role in the formation of a radical fringe that embraced the Revolution. Nicolas Bergasse, who championed Mesmer until 1785, went so far as to reformulate Rousseau’s Social Contract in terms of fluidity and universal harmony.³

Few medical theories have enjoyed as great success as Mesmer’s, first among French high society and then in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Britain, and the US. Mesmerism was the circulatory phenomenon par excellence. Its success was founded not only on the hypothesis of the circulation of a fluid common to human physiology and the entire universe, but also the scientific practices of the time—correspondence, translations, and periodicals—and some ardent and highly active supporters who ensured its spread. In 1843, the Scottish surgeon James Braid labelled magnetic somnambulism as *neurypnology* or hypnosis, after Hypnos, the Greek god of

¹[Diderot] (1753).

²Jones (1996); Armando & Belhoste (2018).

³Darnton (1968).

sleep. It was to become a foundational concept for medical practice, notably for Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud.

In 1985, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner theorized the concept of cultural transfer to draw attention to the constructed character of the so-called national literatures that arose in the 19th century. Their aim was to go beyond comparative studies, which they critiqued as closed and static, and examine the semantic transformations undergone by all cultural productions as they flow from one country to another, sometimes via a third country, as well as the actors involved in and the practices engendered by these transformations.⁴ While the concept of cultural transfer has proved to be fecund, stimulating a great deal of research, it has proven to be too mechanistic to explain 18th-century scholarly exchanges, due to the as-yet hazy character of national attributions, the complexity of borders (especially political and linguistic), the mobility of the actors, and the variety of their motives.⁵ The vaguer term “circulation” seems more appropriate to probing exchanges situated in complex space-time matrices and involving different kinds of knowledge and communication. To paraphrase Diderot, circulations imply transformations and ruptures, and can produce unintended consequences. The term “circulation” has gained a paradigmatic use during the last two decades in the social sciences and history, especially for the analysis of knowledge but also in economic history. This article will follow Diderot’s understanding of circulation and its acceptance in the 18th century. But it will also emphasize—in accordance with the cultural-transfer approach and more generally with the “cultural translation” approach—that circulation also means transformation and adaptation through reception. What circulated in Germany, where Mesmer found refuge from the August 1784 condemnation of his doctrine by the Parisian medical establishment until his death in 1815?⁶

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In seeking to reconstitute the wellsprings of these circulations, the first sources that come to mind are printed matter: the many pamphlets and especially the articles and reviews that appeared in periodicals, as well as the Romantic literature that flourished after 1810. Such documents are foundational for authoritative studies of mesmerism in Germany, which proceed from the thesis of successive “waves” of reception.⁷ Such sources, however, are somewhat misleading. Rather than taking them as our starting point, it would be better to reconstitute the channels of information by means of many sources, both printed and handwritten. The complexity of the circulation of knowledge generated by mesmerism is implicitly testament to the difficulties arising from the institutionalization of this current.

1 | THE MOVEMENT AND ITS KEY MOMENTS: A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Mesmer was born on the German side of Lake Constance and was awarded a medical diploma in 1766 by the University of Vienna, the city where he began his practice. He was particularly interested in the experiments on the therapeutic use of magnets being undertaken by the imperial astronomer Maximilian Hell (1720–1792), but his novel approach dispensed with such objects. After his failure to cure a pianist of her blindness and the ensuing scandal, in early 1778 he abruptly left for Paris, where he conceived the *baquet*, a large, oak tub of magnetized water, and achieved remarkable success in the eyes of high society and the general public, if not Parisian medical academia. To garner public opinion and establish an institutional authority for this non-hegemonic knowledge, in Paris in 1783

⁴Espagne & Werner (1985; 1988); Werner (1995); Espagne (2004).

⁵Gantet & Meumann (2019).

⁶The Holy Roman Empire ceased to exist in 1806 when Francis II gave up his imperial title. In 1806, Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine, made up of the states of western and southern Germany, as a French protectorate. After his final defeat in 1815, the Confederation of the Rhine was dissolved and the German Confederation created. The term Germany will refer in this article to a wider community identity, language, history, and values, and not to a nation state. It embraces, notably, Prussia and Austria, which never combined into a single country in this period.

⁷This is the main theme of Ego (1991) and Artelt (1965).

Mesmer, encouraged by a few patients and pupils, founded the Universal Harmony Society (Société de l'Harmonie universelle; SHU) to train his followers.⁸ The condemnations of mesmerism in August 1784 by the Academy of Sciences, the Royal Medical Society, and the Paris Faculty of Medicine were the last in a series of such academic rejections. The sole exception was the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, which had granted Mesmer membership on 18 November 1775. Now tarnished by scandal, the SHU shut down in 1787, and Mesmer endured a precarious existence alternating between the German and Swiss shores of Lake Constance until his death in 1815 in Meersburg, near his birthplace.⁹

On his estate in Buzancy, the Marquis Amand Chastenet de Puységur (1751–1825), a French infantry officer fascinated by electricity, tried out the Mesmer method on his valet Victor Race in May 1784. To his surprise, the man fell into an artificial lucid sleep, which was called magnetic somnambulism. In this state, patients not only responded to the therapist's questions but also prescribed themselves the necessary treatment. In mid-June of 1784, he moved into a military barracks in Strasbourg and joined a Masonic lodge called La Candeur. Its secretary, Comte Antoine-Joseph de Lutzelbourg (1720–?), asked, in the name of the lodge, to be trained in mesmerism. Puységur announced that he was ready to receive patients every morning for 6 weeks and to teach a seven-lesson course. In May 1785, he founded the Harmonic Society of United Friends (Société harmonique des amis réunis; SHAR) as a branch of the SHU, even as he declared its autonomy. Lutzelbourg was its administrator for life, as well as president of La Candeur and a member of another Masonic lodge, also called United Friends, in Dresden, where he had visited.¹⁰ Two very different sites served as the epicentres of mesmerism's spread from Strasbourg throughout Germany. One was Karlsruhe, for three reasons: its proximity to Strasbourg; because it was the residence of the Margrave of Baden; and owing to the activity of the Swiss pastor and literary figure Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801). The other was the distant, formerly Hanseatic city of Bremen, also because of Lavater's zeal.

1.1 | Strasbourg: Capillary institutional links

From the beginning, the institutionalization of mesmerism sought by its founders took diverse forms. The Paris-based SHU was basically a joint stock company. In Strasbourg, in reaction to the medical establishment's rejection of Mesmer's methods, Puységur rejected any financial conduct that could be seen as compromising. His followers who practised magnetic medicine were not allowed to charge patients a fee, although they were remunerated by the SHAR. He also made sure that the society's statutes limited its scope to medical treatment, excluding any metaphysical speculation. Nevertheless, instead of referring to the "training" of its members, its founding texts used the term "initiation," and forbade them to divulge the details of their therapy. Rather than any doctrinal foundation, the SHAR was based on its founder's charisma.¹¹ Its successes were promoted in publications, while its failures were locked in secret archives. Although the Society claimed to be a medical-philanthropic organization, many of its members, beginning with Lutzelbourg himself, were adepts of esotericism.¹² Its borders with Freemasonry remained blurry; at least 5 of its 31 founding members were active in the Candeur lodge.¹³ Both drew on the same extremely endogamous milieu of military officers and administrators.¹⁴

⁸See Sziede & Zander (2015); Armando & Belhoste (2018).

⁹On mesmerism, see, in particular, Belhoste & Edelman (2015) and the online database curated by Bruno Belhoste and David Armando as part of Centre of Excellence (Labex) Hastec (<https://harmoniauniversalis.univ-paris1.fr/#/>).

¹⁰According to Keller (1985, p. 151); Lévy (1974, pp. 5, 59, n. 194); Meyer (1983, pp. 138, 183). However, this lodge is not listed in Dülmen (1986, pp. 155–165).

¹¹"Délibérations de la Société harmonique des amis réunis de Strasbourg" (1789, pp. iii, vi).

¹²Under the code name Eques a Pino, Lutzelbourg, along with Jean de Turckheim, joined the order of Knights Beneficent of the Holy City led by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, and became vicar-general of the fifth province. He supported Cagliostro during his days in Strasbourg.

¹³Founding members of the SHAR also actively involved in La Candeur activities: Puységur, Comte Lutzelbourg, Baron François-Marie de Landsberg, Baron Jean de Turckheim, Chevalier François-Joseph-Louis de Klinglin d'Essers (1740–after 1792; married to Antoine-Joseph de Luzelbourg's daughter), Baron Philippe-Frédéric de Dietrich (1748–1793). Members of both societies: Bernard Frédéric de Turckheim (1752–1831; Jean's younger brother), Baron Joseph-Ignace-Christophe de Klinglin (1734–1815). For the list of SHAR members, see Hugueny (1890, pp. 28–33); Belhoste & Armando (n.d.-a).

¹⁴For example, Lutzelbourg was married to Marie-Pauline de Klinglin, the Strasbourg royal praetor's daughter. See Aubert de la Chesnaye des Bois (1775, p. 221).

Of the 31 founding members—all men—who participated in the SHAR's administration, only one was a civilian doctor, the obstetrician Isaac Ottmann. Since Strasbourg was a destination on the European Grand Tour traditionally taken by young nobles, and its German-speaking university was attended by princes, it is not surprising that the Society's founders included Graf Philipp Neri von Welsperg zu Primör und Raitenau (1736–1806, a chamberlain and envoy of the Emperor), the prince Wenceslas Paar (1744–1812, a chamberlain of the Emperor), and descendents of the senior line of counts of the Württemberg dynasty, whose children grew up in Montbéliard in contact with the Alsatian nobility.¹⁵ Another founder was the diplomat Johann Heinrich von Krook (1731–1798), who spent a long time in Strasbourg on a mission from the court of Catherine II of Russia. This also explains the presence, among the society's 41 associate-initiates, of Duke Charles Eugene of Württemberg and his wife; Carl Ludwig Eckbrecht von Dürkheim (1740–1789), a Marshal of the Holy Roman Empire in Stuttgart; and the Imperial envoy and diplomat Baron Philipp Franz Knebel von Katzenelnbogen (1733–1816); and among the 64 correspondent-initiates, of Carl Wilhelm von Münzesheim (1734–1812) from the court of the Margrave of Baden.

The propagation of magnetic somnambulism resulted from the diffuse actions of SHAR members in their Alsatian estates and their relations with the courts of Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, and, to a lesser extent, Mannheim.¹⁶ A secondary network was established, with women playing a significant role. Margarethe Tschiffeli (widow of the Bernese agronomist Johann Rudolf Tschiffeli) was magnetized by Krook in 1786. She in turn magnetized, among others, Heilbronn burgomaster Georg Christoph Kornacher (1725–1803), who then entrusted his daughter to Eberhard Gmelin (1751–1809), that city's physician, who played a considerable role in gaining recognition for animal magnetism.

The “mainstream” of the SHAR coexisted with a group of mesmerists who founded a small society, and with some supporters of puysegurism who, through contact with Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, a Lyonnais spiritualist Freemason, practised clairvoyance and divinatory somnambulism. Willermoz, who had maintained regular contacts with Karl Gotthelf, Baron von Hund of Meiningen, could have served as a bridge between the Lyon and Strasbourg mystical magnetic circle and German magnetizers.¹⁷

The SHAR began to languish in 1789 and came to an end in 1792 as French aristocrats emigrated or were imprisoned. Subsequently, personal relations were to play a more influential role. The reality was nothing like the image of a powerful “magnetic wave” that amassed converts before inexplicably receding.

1.2 | Karlsruhe: Fragmentary court networks

Charles Frederic (1738–1771–1811), Margrave of Baden, and his wife Caroline Louise (1723–1783), who wanted to transform Karlsruhe into a literary and intellectual centre, promoted the dissemination of mesmerism in Germany. They had been won over by Lavater, with whom they had been talking and corresponding since the second half of the 1770s. The year 1784 saw the emergence of a “circular correspondence” and reading circle. From his residence in Strasbourg, Lavater would send his drafts to Karlsruhe, where the margrave and his younger son would read and write comments on them before sending them up the Rhine to Mannheim to be annotated by an adviser to the Electoral Palatinate government, Ferdinand Adrian von Lamezan-Salins (1741–1817), and finally returned to Strasbourg.¹⁸

The Zurich-born Lavater was an unconventional Calvinist pastor. Rejecting the primacy of reason advocated by German-speaking flag-bearers of the Enlightenment, he instead sought out miracles and tangible signs of Christ's actions on earth. At the same time, he opposed religious divisions and even extolled a Jesuit reading and

¹⁵Duke William Frederick Philip of Württemberg and his brother Louis Frederick were founding members of the SHAR. Their father Frederick II Eugene and his wife Sophia Dorothea were associate initiates.

¹⁶See, for example, Marie Éléonore Cécile, Baronne de Reich (born Boecklin von Boecklinsau) in Kientzheim: “Rapport fait à la société des guérisons opérées au traitement de Kiensheim près Colmar” (1787).

¹⁷See Joly (1938/1986, pp. 216–230); Le Forestier (1970/1987); Edelman (1995).

¹⁸See Funck (1890, pp. 12–17).

Mesmerism in the German Press

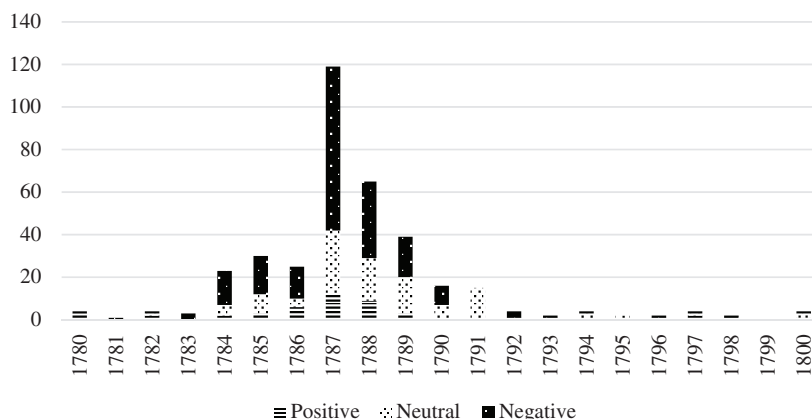


CHART 1 Critical assessments of Mesmerism in the German Press

prayer book.¹⁹ His individualism led him to reject membership in anything, including Freemasonry and the SHAR. What fascinated him was not Mesmer's medical research but Puysegur's magnetic somnambulism, a phenomenon he saw as a manifestation of the soul's healing power.²⁰ His impact as a keen promoter of magnetic somnambulism was matched by the degree to which his overly enthusiastic religiosity irritated his contemporaries.

The Margrave Charles Frederick and his wife invited Lavater to visit them on three occasions. At Lavater's recommendation and his own expense, the margrave sent the Swiss physician Anton Grob, a native of Appenzell, to Strasbourg to study Puysegur's methods, and then appointed him professor of medicine at Rastatt with a salary of 300 florins.²¹ Charles Frederick also despatched Johann Lorenz Böckmann (1741–1802), a physics professor at the prestigious Karlsruhe Gymnasium, to Strasbourg to investigate somnambulism. Although initially sceptical, Böckmann let himself be convinced by the technique's therapeutic success. Grob and Böckmann became the centre of a circle of magnetizers, including most notably the court preacher Johann Leonhard Walz (1748–1817), and the wife of the court secretary Griesbach.

Other members of the court of Baden who joined the SHAR included the Grand Marshal Münzesheim and the hunting master Tettenborn, who in turn initiated Anton von Vieregg (1755–1830, lieutenant-general of Bavaria) and Kesselstatt, Baron von Katzenelnbogen's nephew. Although Böckmann was a member of the Candeur Masonic lodge, he never joined the SHAR. Yet he was the founder and editor of its principal publication, the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus* (1787, three volumes). Disgusted by Lavater's "enthusiasm," he turned to Mesmer, who came to stay in Karlsruhe twice, in 1787 and 1788.

As a court phenomenon, magnetism was hotly contested. The margrave and his younger son Frederick supported the practice of the magnetizers while never submitting to the treatment themselves. In 1788, Karlsruhe's five leading doctors sent the margrave a report condemning magnetism and Böckmann's adherence to it.²²

In reviewing a large sample of the very lively German press of the time—92 periodicals with very diverse content and readerships—it becomes apparent that interest in mesmerism peaked in 1787 (shifted forward by about 3 years compared to France), while by 1791 it fell into oblivion (see Chart 1).²³ That high point was incontestably linked to

¹⁹Sailer (1783).

²⁰Milt (1953, p. 53).

²¹Belhoste & Armando (n.d.-b).

²²Funck (1894, pp. 37–45).

²³According to information from Ego (1991, p. 212; list on pp. 470–474). Ego's corpus includes German-speaking supraregional journals that are not specialized according to subject matter contain up and medical journals. The selected articles include not only those with the words "animal magnetism" or "mesmerism" in their titles, but also all those dealing with animal magnetism.

magnetism's introduction in Bremen, with much less influence from the publication of the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus* or Mesmer's first stay in Karlsruhe.

1.3 | Bremen: “Enthusiasm” and polemics

The movement took hold in Bremen in 1786, following Lavater's brief visit from June 28 to July 6 of that year. He converted the physician Arnold Wienholt (1749–1804), who began to magnetize and recruited two other doctors, Heinrich Wilhelm Olbers (1758–1840) and Georg Bicker (1754–1823). Denied institutional support and controversial from the start, mesmerism dominated public discussions.

All evidence points to the conclusion that Lavater's dissemination of magnetism had a strongly religious dimension. For instance, at the beginning of his therapeutic session with Lavater's somnambulant patient, Wienholt asked him for “the little poem or little prayer” he would recite just before the magnetization.²⁴

To understand the diffusion of magnetism in Bremen, we have to see it in the local religious context and retrace the networks of the actors involved. The city's elite was Calvinist, but the majority of the population was Lutheran. Religious life was divided between the Saint Martin Calvinist church (with its two pastors, Stolz and Tiling), to which Wienholt belonged, and the Lutheran community that inhabited, in part, the Lesum neighbourhood, led by pastor Samuel Christian Lappenberg, as well as the cathedral where pastor Johann David Nicolai presided. Tiling and Wienholt studied in Gottingen at the same time, from 1769 to 1770. There they became friends with Gustav Wilhelm Dreyer, who was elevated to the city council in 1787.

Wienholt shared Lavater's ecumenical aspirations. He married the daughter of a Lutheran jurist from Hamburg, and the wedding took place in the Lesum church. His first somnambulist patient, Sophie Albers, was the daughter of a Lutheran merchant. His success in this case led him to consider magnetizing the Lutheran merchant Hinrich Haase, who was married to a Calvinist.

The Lutheran pastor Nicolai spurred on the media campaign against mesmerism and Lavater's “enthusiasm” in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (*Berlin Monthly Journal*), while mesmerism's partisans tried to defend themselves in the pages of the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus*. They even launched a revue to bring together all their published articles.²⁵ Nicolai's offensive found opposition within his own parish from the cathedral's cantor, who used poems and his music to carry out magnetic therapy. Apart from the issues involved—magnetism, confessional indifference, and later Pietism and the figure of Lavater himself—Nicolai's target was the city's Calvinist elite. The diffusion of magnetism had been permitted by what Mesmer and Puységur opposed, the hijacking of a scientific principle by religious beliefs.²⁶

Returning to the definition of circulation, mesmerism is problematic in this regard. Movements are defined by a fixed reference.²⁷ Yet mesmerism's diffusion in Germany blurs the lines. True, the term “Mesmerismus” began to be used in 1787 as a synonym for “Magnetismus,” but these words were used in a vague and polemical fashion.²⁸

What defined the mesmerist movement as such? Puységur's terminology was inconsistent. The term “magnetic” was used to describe the crisis induced by the magnetizer, and “complete” or “perfect” somnambulism referred to

²⁴“Das kleine Gedicht oder Gebet ... das Sie mir versprochen haben, das kurz vor dem Magnetisieren anzuwenden ist.” Wienholt to Lavater, 1786, July 5. Quoted from Hannemann (2017, p. 223). On the preliminary prayer to magnetic therapy, see Hannemann (2015, pp. 117–118); Hannemann (2017, pp. 211–212).

²⁵The *Magnetisches Magazin für Niederdeutschland*, published from 1787–1789, never provided a forum for discussion on Mesmerism.

²⁶Nevertheless, Mesmer charged Puységur with having caused the religious shift of animal magnetism. See Mesmer (1799, pp. v–xiii).

²⁷“On convient donc que le mouvement est le transport d'un corps d'un lieu en un autre. ... Il est très-difficile de décider si le mouvement d'un corps est absolu ou relatif, parce qu'il seroit nécessaire d'avoir un corps que l'on sût certainement être en repos, & qui serviroit de point fixe pour connoître & juger de la quantité du mouvement des autres corps. M. Newton donne pourtant, ou plutôt indique quelques moyens généraux pour cela dans le scholie qui est à la tête de ses principes mathématiques.” Formey & D'Alembert (1765, p. 831).

²⁸“Desorganisation und Manipulieren” (1787, p. 590); “Mesmerianer nehmen ab” (1785); Weikards (1787). The term “Mesmeriaden” was also used in Forster (1789, p. 563). Even in the 19th century, a clear distinction was not made between Mesmerismus and Magnetismus. Hufeland attempted to distinguish Magnetismus (the facts) from Mesmerismus (the theory); Hufeland (1817, p. 90). See Ego (1991, p. 202).

the personality changes undergone by the mesmerized patient. Apparently Puységur's disciple Montravel was the first to systematically employ the concept of “magnetic somnambulism” in late 1785, in Strasbourg.²⁹ The expression “artificial somnambulism” (*künstlicher Somnambulismus, somnambulisme artificiel*) that became current in the 19th century is not to be found in the early texts on the subject, revealing a debate about the nature of the phenomenon itself.³⁰

At the end of 1786, the doctor named Bicker from Bremen published the first two reports about this practice in Bremen, employing the expressions “ecstatic state of the soul” (*ekstatischer Zustand der Seele*) and “divinatory faculty” (*Divinationsvermögen*).³¹ The Berlin media campaign that painted Lavater as an almost delirious “enthusiast” widened to disparage mesmerism in general.³² The publisher who reprinted Bicker's reports in the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus* tried to erase any religious connotation by applying a strictly medical terminology.³³ In 1787, Wienholt himself avoided any use of the terms “disorganization,” “crisis,” “rapture,” “ecstasy,” and even “somnambulism,” preferring the expression “magnetic sleep.”³⁴ It was not until 1799, in a series of public lectures, that he first spoke of “somnambulism,” distinguishing between the “natural” and “artificial” varieties.³⁵ Doctor Gmelin, a partisan of a scientific approach, carefully avoided any use of compromised terminology and instead spoke simply of “anthropological material.”³⁶ Initially, the new science lacked any consensual terminological core.

2 | PUBLIC PRESS AND SECRET SOCIETIES: THE VECTORS OF DISSEMINATION

The term “circulation” seems to presuppose a spatial contiguity. Yet mesmerism, as we have seen, was far more linked to unconventional (but not marginal) personalities like Lavater, who were driven by their own dynamics. The highly intertextual press coverage (the articles tended to borrow from one another) and publicity seemed able to unify a fundamentally discontinuous movement.

After mesmerism's dismissal by the Paris medical establishment in 1784, puységurism was what spread to Germany, even though Mesmer's doctrine attracted attention. The reports from Paris were avidly read and referenced, especially in the authoritative Berlin and Weimar press. A disapproving discourse emerged. The first article that set the tone, in the leading *Teutscher Merkur* (*German Mercury*) in 1784, was particularly long and vindictive, even though its anonymous author, the young doctor Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762–1836), was to become one of the most fervent, although critical, propagandists in favour of mesmerism 20 years later.³⁷ He was not an isolated case. While informed Berlin circles waged an all-out campaign against mesmerism in the mid-1780s, the city fell to mesmerism around 1800. Yet in the end the press failed to unify mesmerism.

In January 1785, writing in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, Johann Erich Biester launched a campaign that was to last until 1788. Condemning Lavater and Jesuitism, he warned against the infiltration of the German lands by an irrational magnetism that had already been unmasked in France. This series of articles culminated in February 1788 with a piece with the French title “La Société magnétique en mascarade” (“The Magnetic Society Farce”). The Berlin carnival parade featured personifications of the SHAR costumed as Madness, followed by Mesmer's magnetizing *Baquet* (tub); the Magnetizing Doctor (“dressed like all Parisian physicians, with a magnetic wand in his hand”); then an abbot, a pilgrim, and a nun (representing Catholicism); two typically-dressed Strasbourg ladies accompanying a

²⁹TDM (1785); Hannemann (2017, pp. 207–210).

³⁰It was mentioned in a letter from doctor Heinrich Matthias Marcard to Lavater (1785, Sept. 27), which was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (1785, p. 444).

³¹Bicker (1787a, col. 43).

³²Kerner (1856a, pp. 96–98).

³³For example, “Somnambulismus” instead of “Nachtwandeln.” Bicker (1787b, p. 301). “Neuere Nachricht vom Magnetismus in Bremen” (1787).

³⁴Wienholt (1787, pp. 20–25); Hannemann (2017, p. 212).

³⁵Wienholt (1805).

³⁶Gmelin (1791).

³⁷[Hufeland] (1784). Hufeland (1863, pp. 125–126) asserted he was inspired by Johann Joachim Christoph Bode and Friedrich Nicolai.

member of the Strasbourg city council (a reference to idle high society women who chose to undergo magnetic somnambulism therapy and sacrificed their virtue to municipal administrators); a Spanish woman (personifying the Jesuits and the Inquisition); a procurator taking note of everything (“with trembling hands”); and a limping Jew (perhaps an allusion to Moses Mendelssohn, whom Lavater had maladroitly tried to convert to Christianity). When Madness reached the royal lodge, his madman’s wand touched the Magnetizing Doctor, and he in turn magnetized the afflicted, who began to dance. The Doctor and the Procurator busily taking down the prophetic words of the magnetized were carrying out the secret orders of an “Unknown Superior.”³⁸ This latter term referred to a degree of strict observance Masonry followed by the Bavarian Illuminati.³⁹ The newspaper denounced the collusion seeping in from France between mesmerism and esoteric Masonic secret societies.

A student of Mesmer and member of the SHU, the Freemason Charles-Pierre Savalette de Langes (1746–1797) was also following the debate in Germany. He had been in touch with the Bavarian Illuminati—a para-Masonic secret society—since 1782 and later their Thüringen counterparts, joining theirs in August 1787. He invited their head, Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1731–1793), to undertake a secret mission to Paris. This gave Bode a chance to study the potential for the Illuminati to set up shop in that city, and discuss the subject of mesmerism with the Freemasons he met there.⁴⁰ Although he was highly critical of divinatory mesmerism and its penchant for miracles, Bode’s diary is strewn with excerpts from Lavater’s writing, as well as notes on magnetism and somnambulism as he had observed them in Strasbourg and then Paris.⁴¹ As he stopped off at Bruchsal he dined with Wucherer, Mesmer’s German translator and a member of the Illuminati, and discussed somnambulism experiments at the court of the Margrave of Baden.⁴² In Strasbourg, he met Lutzelbourg and noted mesmerism’s widespread popularity in Masonic circles.

The Strasbourg bookseller Frédéric-Rodolphe Salzmann—a strict observance Mason and member of Savalette’s lodge who had been won over to divinatory somnambulism and signed a “revers” (non-disclosure agreement) with the Illuminati—was a legation counsellor at the Saxony-Meiningen court with whom Bode was familiar.⁴³ Franz Christian von Dürckheim (1729–1807), a member of the secret council and the court’s intendant, joined the Illuminati and became its head in Meiningen in 1784. He was introduced to magnetism in conformity with the SHAR’s principles by his cousin Carl Ludwig von Dürckheim (1740–1789) on August 25, 1787 in the spa town of Gemünd.⁴⁴ On September 4, 1786, he requested the SHAR’s permission to magnetize in Germany.⁴⁵

The reverberations of the press campaign against Lavater produced a crisis among French Freemasons, torn between a fringe led by Savalette that sought to take over esoteric Masonry and a spiritualist fraction represented by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz.⁴⁶ In Strasbourg, the question of esotericism became such a source of tension that La Candeur ended up dividing into a stable core around Lutzelbourg and François-Marie de Landsperg (1739–1820), both magnetizers, and a “mystic” fringe that also included magnetizers (among others, Salzmann). This tension inundated local circles and threatened to spread from Strasbourg to Germany, where the Illuminati were undergoing a deep crisis of their own.⁴⁷

³⁸“Zur Geschichte des Bremischen Magnetismus” (1788, p. 83). See Ego (1994, p. 209); Klausnitzer (2012, pp. 329–330). Biester might have taken up a Parisian satire on mesmerism.

³⁹See, in particular, Meumann & Simons (2017).

⁴⁰See Beaurepaire (2018).

⁴¹Bode (1787/1994); Diary of Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1788, Feb. 15), D-Q8904, FactGrid Database, Gotha Research Centre, University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany (Retrieved from <https://database.factgrid.de/wiki/D-Q8904>).

⁴²Diary of Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1788, Jun. 15), D-Q8904, FactGrid (Retrieved from <https://database.factgrid.de/wiki/D-Q8904>).

⁴³“Friedrich Rudolph Salzmann” (2021). Bode was made a member of the council by Countess Charitas Emilie von Bernstorff, whom he followed to Weimar. He became her executive secretary in 1779.

⁴⁴Franz Christian Eckbrecht von Dürckheim (1729–1807) was a Privy Counsellor and Lord Chamberlain (*Oberhofmeister*) of Saxony-Meiningen. A co-founder of the lodge Charlotte zu den drei Nelken at Meiningen, he joined the order of the strict observance Masonic system under the code name ab Arcu. He joined the order of the Illuminati under the code name Azo Visconti in 1784. See Schüttler (1991, p. 66, n. 154). The certificates of magnetism are reproduced in Amadou (1997).

⁴⁵Société harmonique des amis réunis, 1786–1789 (Ms. 1432, fols. 77, 94, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, Strasbourg, France).

⁴⁶See Armando & Belhoste (2018, p. 18).

⁴⁷“Ueber das Magnetisieren in Strassburg” (1787).

These tensions did not remain secret. In an extensive excerpt from his travel diary that began to circulate, Bode recounted his experiences with Jacob Armand, a pastor at the Dutch embassy in Paris who was still secretly magnetizing in 1787. The piece appeared in a Weimar society publication.⁴⁸ Moreover, the article on it in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* was immediately refuted by an informed journalist named Wilhelm Ludwig Wekhrin, who denounced it as a farce concocted by the publication's editors.⁴⁹

Were Berlin intellectual circles as hostile to mesmerism as the press coverage would suggest? In 1789, Biester supported mesmerism in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.⁵⁰ He attended the experiments carried out by two military surgeons (Lehmann and Lohmeyer) under the supervision of Christian Gottlieb Selle (1748–1800), a doctor at the Charity Hospital and professor at the medical and surgical Collegium, in the summer and winter of 1789–1790. Selle had been won over by mesmerism after reading Gmelin's books.⁵¹

Previous historians have taken note of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift's* sudden about-face, and explained it by pointing out the changing political context. Frederick II of Prussia died in August 1786. His successor and nephew, Frederick William II (1744–1797, r. 1786–1797), was a sickly king given to esotericism. His minister Woellner issued an edict on July 9, 1788 intensifying religious censorship, while the king himself fell under the influence of the adepts of mesmerism among his favourites.⁵² What made the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* change its tune was not the increased censorship, since Prussian functionaries paid little attention to Woellner's decree.⁵³ Beyond political vicissitudes, certain continuities stand out. Selle became the primary physician of the Prussian kings Frederick William II and Frederick William III (1770–1840, r. 1797–1840), and by the time Hufeland succeeded him after his death, the latter monarch, too, had converted to mesmerism.

3 | PRIVATE AND PERSONAL CHANNELS

The chart of journal articles and reviews suggests that by 1791 the public had lost interest in mesmerism. This decline in media attention could be taken as support for the commonly accepted idea that mesmerism was completely forgotten until its sudden rediscovery in 1809, when Doctor Lorenz Oken came to see Mesmer, followed by the publication of Karl Christian Wolfart's book *Mesmerismus* in 1812, at a time when Mesmer was isolated and financially ruined.

But this last point is easily refuted. Mesmer's will was not that of a penniless man.⁵⁴ While he no longer published, he was not totally forsaken. In Meersburg he was surrounded by family and friends. One nephew, Cajetan Stromeyer, was the city's burgomaster, and another, Franz Xaver Stromeyer, was a doctor—and mesmerist.⁵⁵ Until the end of his life, Mesmer continued to correspond with old friends, notably the Alsatian Georges-Christophe Würtz, a former member of the SHU who at the beginning of the French Revolution moved to Versailles, where he continued to use a tub in his magnetizing practice. Mesmer visited him there in 1798, 1801, and 1802.⁵⁶

But Mesmer did feel very isolated. In a December 22, 1811 letter to Oken, he remarked on what he considered a sudden resurgence of interest in his therapy in Berlin, after 30 years of rejection.⁵⁷ While Wolfart was to write about his own “sudden conversion” to mesmerism in 1818, he had been practicing magnetism since 1797 and found

⁴⁸“Neue Beobachtungen über den Thier-Magnetismus” (1788); Mondot (2003, p. 197).

⁴⁹“Peregrin an Mireleton. Ueber einen Erzspieß” (1788).

⁵⁰Selle (1789); Forster (1789); “Ueber den Magnetismus in der Berlinischen Charité” (1790).

⁵¹These experiments were related by Selle and Biester in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*; see Selle (1789). See Artelt (1965, p. 403); Ego (1991, pp. 189–191); Engstrom (2006, pp. 234–237).

⁵²Artelt (1965, p. 403).

⁵³Ego (1991).

⁵⁴See Wohleb (1939, p. 37).

⁵⁵Wohleb (1939, pp. 73, 88).

⁵⁶See Belhoste & Armando (n.d.-c); Wohleb (1939, p. 91).

⁵⁷“Zur Geschichte des therischen Magnetismus” (1824); Benz (1976, pp. 80–82).

his experiments convincing, even if he did not theorize about it until 1809 in Berlin.⁵⁸ How should these paradoxes be interpreted?

After the lively press battles in 1787, the Bremen actors preferred to retire from the public arena. Only Wienholt continued to practise mesmerism, which he did until his death in 1804. He treated, personally or through others, at least 80 patients without drawing the attention of the press. Wienholt was influential. His most notable student was the doctor Johann Heineken (1761–1851), who pursued this approach for years in Bremen.

A trans-generational socialization was also at work in the rise of mesmerism. A Jewish doctor from Berlin, David Ferdinand Koreff (1783–1851), who later became a confidante of the Prussian Chancellor Hardenberg, was won over to mesmerism early on by his father, Joachim Salomon Koreff (1732–1805), a Wroclaw doctor who had known Mesmer.⁵⁹

The growth of mesmerism came with the studies and the friendships forged around it, especially the adherence of the Freemasons and the Illuminati, even though these links were indeterminate. Bode, the head of the Illuminati, discovered magnetism through his correspondence with a member of that secret society, Bicker, who gave him Wienholt's protocols for somnambulism therapy.

Universities and the army were major crucibles. Graf Hanns Moritz von Brühl (1746–1811) studied in 1757 at the royal school in Strasbourg, where his tutor was the older brother of the Colmar poet Gottlieb Pfeffel. Brühl enlisted in the Anhalt French regiment stationed in Neuf-Brisach in 1766, and then served in the Alsatian regiment in Landau. After the Seven Years War he regularly visited the thermal spa at Niederbronn, where he met his future wife, Christine Schleyerweber, the daughter of a lieutenant in the German royal cavalry regiment stationed in Sélestat. (The sons of the Lutzelbourg family had served as that regiment's *Maitres de Camp* since 1716.)⁶⁰ Niederbronn was the Alsatian aristocracy's favourite watering hole, so much so that it was bought by De Dietrich, who was the royal lender from 1789 and then mayor of Strasbourg. According to Brühl's brief autobiographical sketch, which served as a preface to his German translation of Bergasse's *Considérations sur le magnétisme animal* (1784), he actually discovered magnetic somnambulism while visiting his brother, the private tutor of the crown prince of Prussia, in August 1787 in Berlin, where he came across a copy of the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus* in the bookstore Haude and Spener. He found the publication convincing when he found the names of friends he had known for two or more decades among the SHAR members it listed.⁶¹ The Strasbourg circles trained him in magnetism in April and May of 1788, and the next year he began to practise it among members of the entourage of the king of Prussia, as well as in Silesia (1790) and Weimar (1792).⁶² In Wroclaw on August 26, 1790, while in the company of several magnetizers including Brühl, the king questioned the somnambulant R. S. Matthäi about his dropsy. In 1807, Brühl introduced the doctor Karl Alexander Ferdinand Kluge (1782–1844) to animal magnetism. Brühl's son, Karl von Brühl, also became a magnetizer.

While the high society gathering in thermal spas and salons sometimes proved decisive, reading, at a time when it could be an existential experience, also won people over or at least made them open to mesmerism. Hufeland's radical change of opinion emerged both from his younger brother's intervention and the reading of an 1802 book by Wienholt.⁶³

In a century when doctors were considered confidantes—privileged interlocutors who played a role formerly claimed by the clergy—and when religious vocabulary and formulations had not fully disappeared from descriptions of illnesses, the relationship between a physician and his patient could prove decisive.⁶⁴ A patient of Gmelin, Justinus Justinus Kerner, became a magnetizer doctor whose home was frequented by *Naturphilosophie* supporters and other magnetizer doctors such as Johann Karl Passavant.⁶⁵

⁵⁸Wolfart (1818, pp. 90–126). Kerner (1865, pp. 138–151). See Erman (1925, p. 20); Winau (1987); Engstrom (2006, p. 243).

⁵⁹Un médecin étranger [Koreff] to M. Deleuze [Letter] (n.d.; published in 1825), in Deleuze (1846, pp. 393–468).

⁶⁰Corvisier (1970, pp. 144–145).

⁶¹Brühl (1790, pp. xvi–xvii).

⁶²See Krosigk (1910, pp. 131–165).

⁶³His brother was Friedrich Hufeland (1774–1839). See Wienholt (1802); Engstrom (2006, p. 241).

⁶⁴See, in particular, Pilloud (2012).

⁶⁵Artelt (1965, p. 397).

But sometimes the practice of magnetic somnambulism became sporadic. Few references to it are to be found on the shores of Lake Constance, or in Weimar, Gotha, Speyer, Gera, or Göttingen.⁶⁶ Both practitioners and patients tended to travel. Margaretha Tschiffeli, a bailiff's wife from Bern who suffered from "spasms of the hypocondrium," visited Strasbourg in November 1785 to undergo magnetic therapy. She was magnetized in 1786 by Jean-Frédéric Ehrmann and Johann Heinrich von Krook, becoming somnambulant during the course of treatment, so successfully that she was made an associate-initiate of SHAR. Upon her return to Bern, she opened her own office where she treated many patients and reported some 10 cures to the SHAR, which published her accounts in the third volume of its *Annales*. In October 1787, she visited her former Bernese doctor Friedrich August Weber (1753–1806), now living in Heilbronn, and successfully magnetized him, relating this experiment to the *Archiv für Magnetismus und Somnambulismus*.⁶⁷ This might have been the case that persuaded Gmelin. In Heilbronn, Margaretha Tschiffeli treated Johann Georg Uhl (1744–1794), whose niece Lisette Kornacher (1773–1858) became Gmelin's first patient shortly thereafter.

4 | BERLIN: SOMNAMBULISM AND EXILE

From 1775 to 1787, mesmerism inspired the publication of at least 160 lampoons. But from 1810, in northern Germany, it became a major source of *Naturphilosophie*, an approach comprehending nature and mind that left its mark on philosophy and science.⁶⁸ But a kind of silence separates these two dates. This has led specialist historians to conclude that magnetism fell into obscurity between 1790 and Mesmer's death, only to enjoy a sudden revival with the advent of German Romanticism.

Usually this renewed interest in mesmerism is attributed to Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1775–1854) and his theorization of *Naturphilosophie*, along with its resonance among Romantic writers.⁶⁹ But Schelling had never spent time in Berlin. He was a professor in Jena and then most notably Munich. His closest followers, such as Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert (1780–1860), also had no direct association with Berlin.⁷⁰ The Romantics' fascination with mesmerism and their literary success have hidden the real intermediaries. It was the doctor Karl Eberhard Schelling (1783–1854), the younger brother of the philosopher, who set out to apply the tenets of *Naturphilosophie* to medicine. To understand mesmerism's success in Berlin, we need to examine more closely the actors and practices rather than the discourses of the Romantic writers who often frequented the same salons as the physicians. Some mesmerists developed a writing style that the Romantics adopted—for example, Wolfart's aphorism reflected his scepticism regarding medications.⁷¹

Some mesmerist doctors obtained important posts in Berlin. Hufeland was the leading physician; Kluge, ushered in by Brühl and convinced by Hufeland, was the leading surgeon. Even more importantly, these clinicians tried to institutionalize their field by launching medical journals. In 1800, in his periodical, Hufeland published an article by a Hanover doctor who recounted his visit to Bremen and the local practice of magnetism, calling for an impartial and profound study of the subject.⁷² After Prussia's traumatic defeat by Napoleon, mesmerism achieved success in the exiled Prussian court.

Following Prussia's defeat in the battle of Jena and Auerstedt in 1806 and the advance of the Napoleonic armies, it was on the verge of collapse. The court promptly fled to eastern Prussia. After a stay in Grudziądz in 1807, Kluge was put in charge of the crown prince's health. He and Brühl began to magnetize.⁷³ Hufeland, who

⁶⁶Ego (1991, p. 189).

⁶⁷Weber (1787a; 1787b). Weber's further contributions: Weber (1788; 1789).

⁶⁸Gantet (2016).

⁶⁹This was underlined by Montiel (2009).

⁷⁰Schubert held a chair in natural philosophy at the University of Erlangen.

⁷¹Heischkel (1966, pp. 212–213). Anim, Eichendorff, Bretano, and Kleist frequented his house.

⁷²Lentin (1800, p. 130).

⁷³Artelt (1965, p. 412).

accompanied Queen Louise to Memel and then Königsberg (Kaliningrad), asked Kluge to oversee his magnetic treatments. In the university of Königsberg's anatomical theatre, Hufeland gave lectures that he also published in his journal.⁷⁴ When castigating the “misdeeds” (*Unwesen*) of Mesmer and his followers, he limited his criticisms to Mesmer's Parisian days (1778–1784) and argued that the practice's reception in Germany by “philosopher physicians” such as Gmelin, Wienholt, Heineken, and Schelling had transformed it into a field of study.⁷⁵ Then, in April 1809, also in Königsberg, Hufeland published the first article recounting the Swiss doctor Joseph Anton Zugenbühler's meeting with Mesmer—who, in Prussian circles, was assumed to be dead. The article had a major impact. Lorenz Oken had visited Mesmer while travelling in Switzerland in 1809.⁷⁶ Mesmerism's renaissance—now rendered scientific and Prussian—was a kind of metaphor for the national renewal many dearly hoped for.

The royal court's return to Berlin at the end of 1809, while it was still under the control of French troops, as well as the foundation of that city's university the next year, facilitated the ascension of the magnetizers. Responding to a request from students of Johann Christian Reil (1759–1813), in 1812 King Frederick William III ordered the establishment of a commission on magnetism. The body authorized its practice under the condition that it was supervised by a doctor. In 1813, when the king, now in Wrocław, finally called for battle against Napoleonic forces, Wolfart set up his medical office in a Berlin military hospital, where he kept his tub and induced somnambulism.⁷⁷

It is known that the state chancellor Karl August von Hardenberg (1750–1822) appointed Koreff to be a high counsellor and attended Wolfart's magnetic soirées. In his diary, he noted that he had met the female somnambulist Friedrike Hähnel at one of these evenings, on February 13, 1816. Three years later, while she was still being magnetized by Wolfart, he began a liaison with her that was to have significant political and scientific consequences. Despite powerful resistance, Wolfart was able to acquire a post as professor at the university of Berlin in 1817, and Hardenberg, overriding the authority of the cultural minister Altenstein, had the magnetizer Josef Ennemoser (1787–1854) appointed professor extraordinarius at the new university of Bonn in 1819.⁷⁸

Magnetism's new position, acquired in the context of the existential solidarity of national exile, nevertheless remained precarious. It also remained infused with religiosity and “enthusiasm.” When interior minister Kaspar Friedrich von Schuckmann had to yield the cultural ministry to Altenstein in 1817, he complained to the king about “irreligious libertinism and democratic principles, like the mysticism of the new papists” and “the sleight of hand of the magnetizers who want to turn Christ into a magnetizer and elevate themselves to his status.”⁷⁹

Paradoxically, in the period between the rejection of the Paris medical establishment in 1784 and Mesmer's death in 1815, mesmerism had a strong impact in Germany. Puysegur's practice of magnetic somnambulism spread at least as much, if not more, than Mesmer's doctrine, by means of local and personal constellations. Often, it was moral authority, and later the privileged institutional position of some physicians, that contributed to legitimizing magnetism in private and institutional contexts. Each actor incorporated magnetism into other axioms. Selle, for example, enquired into the natural electricity of human bodies and their mutual communication.⁸⁰ The decade from 1790 to 1800 saw the publication of significant titles about mesmerism, although the discredit stemming from its religious arrogation led them so far as to leave out Mesmer's name. The religious issues had become such an obstacle to defining the practice's identity that it lacked even a common terminology. Bitter and disheartened, Mesmer felt truly isolated. Around 1810, in the context of Prussian existential political exile, magnetism was seen as a kind of metaphor for a revival of the political body. The magnetizer physicians felt a need for a tutelary figure to anchor their discoveries in their ideal of scientificity. At the same time, they tried to institutionalize their field by founding medical

⁷⁴“Ueber den Magnetismus nebst der Geschichte einer merkwürdigen vollkommenen Tageblindheit” (1809).

⁷⁵“Ueber den Magnetismus nebst der Geschichte einer merkwürdigen vollkommenen Tageblindheit” (1809, pp. 3–5).

⁷⁶See O. [Oken] (1810), republished under the title “Zur Geschichte des thierischen Magnetismus. Drei Briefe Mesmers an Oken und Reil”: Kieser (1824); quoted from Artelt (1965, p. 415).

⁷⁷See Sudhoff (1913).

⁷⁸See Stamm-Kuhlmann (1993).

⁷⁹“der irreligiösen Freigeisterei und demokratischen Grundsätzen, wie dem Mystizismus der neueren Pöbster”; “Gaukeleien der Magnetisierer, die Christus zum Magnetiseur und sich zu seinesgleichen machen möchten, fest entgegen getreten.” Quoted by Stamm-Kuhlmann (1993, p. 234).

⁸⁰Selle (1783).

journals. Certain elements begin to stand out amid this protean reception around 1815; without renouncing the use of the tub, the focus of investigation shifted to somnambulists, sleep, and dreams.⁸¹

Owing to the diffuse character of ways mesmerism was disseminated, there is still little known about the role of the public (patients and readers) in legitimizing ideas and practices of magnetism. Since the circulation of mesmerism took place at the margin of the institutions of knowledge, few women could participate in the collective practice of mesmerism. A further study could examine the gender aspect of somnambulism and the collaborations within the households (between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, and so on).

The diffusion of magnetism in Germany illustrates the importance of intellectual circulations—as social and cultural phenomena and interactions of actors and networks—during the years between 1780 and 1815, and at the same time contradicts many paradigms: the diffusionist theses (import–export, centre–periphery) and the sociological analogy (according to which reception takes place among those fields where the actors share structurally analogous positions).⁸² Instead, mesmerism spread through sequences inscribed in broader circulations interconnected by local constellations able to mobilize actors, practices, and documents (texts, images) that set into motion a specific dynamic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is a continuation of the presentations and discussions in the workshop *Du mouvement mesmérrien à l'internationale magnétiste: Présentation de l'opération Harmonia Universalis*, led by David Armando, Bruno Belhoste, and Jean-Luc Chappey and held in Paris on October 9, 2020. My particular thanks go to them and to the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the manuscript and their many insightful comments.

ORCID

Claire Gantet  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0553-0735>

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⁸¹See Gantet (2021).

⁸²Bourdieu (2002).

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How to cite this article: Gantet, C. (2021). The dissemination of mesmerism in Germany (1784–1815): Some patterns of the circulation of knowledge. *Centaurus*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1600-0498.12396>