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On the Nature of Consciousness

by Robert K. G. Temple

THE PRESENCE OF OTHER WORLDS: THE FINDINGS OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

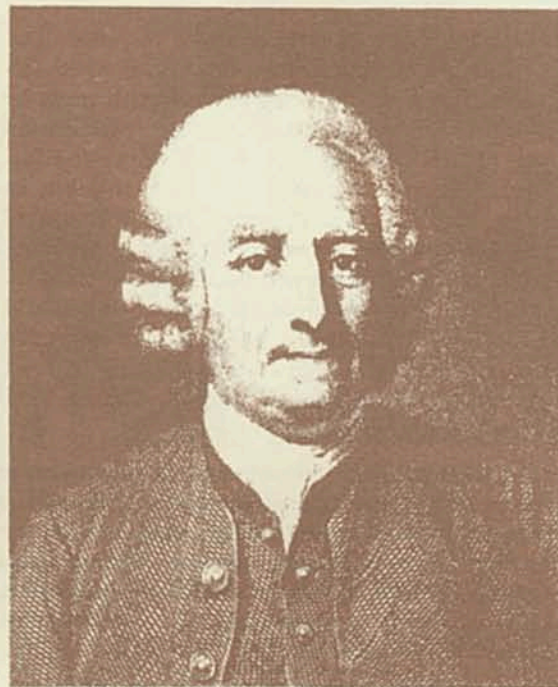
by Wilson van Dusen
Wildwood House, London, 1975

Note: This is the second in a series of retrospective reviews of important books which have not been newly published. Robert K. G. Temple is senior editor of Second Look and author of The Sirius Mystery.

The author is a clinical psychologist who in his work with psychopathic patients came across evidence which he believed to confirm certain theories of the eighteenth century scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg, who had maintained that a hierarchy of spirits continually interact with man. Van Dusen says: "I found that Swedenborg's system not only is an almost perfect fit with patients' experiences, but even more impressively, it accounts for otherwise quite puzzling aspects of hallucinations... An unusually cooperative patient led me to ask if I could talk directly with her hallucinations. I did... the voices were sometimes frightened of me and themselves needed reassurance. They felt that a psychologist might want to kill them, which was, in a sense, true! I struck up a relationship with both the patient and the persons she saw and heard... In this way I could hold long dialogues with a patient's hallucinations and record both my questions and their answers. My method was that of phenomenology."

There is no question that van Dusen's book is easily one of the weirdest "sensible" books in print. It bears a certain relationship to the preceding book under review, by David Foster, for it also suggests that the Sun is alive: "Swedenborg reported that in heaven the Lord appears as a sun. This sun is a high image or representation of the Lord, which radiates as its heat and light divine love and wisdom... Our own sun, which is a representation of heaven, has heat and light as interrelated aspects... as though the unitary divine manifests in this primal duality."

Van Dusen prefers his extraordinary theory, that spirits surround us, to the more usual theory that there are dissociated elements in consciousness, to explain such psychological phenomena as split personalities, speaking in tongues and voices, and assorted hallucinated experiences. What van Dusen does establish is that Swedenborg's elaborate personal accounts of visions and hallucinations deserve profound study by psychologists and may be useful in elaborating theories of dissociated consciousness. Van Dusen describes how he gave separate Rorschach inkblot tests to the patients and their "voices" and got different results, and found that "the lower-order hallucinations appeared to be much sicker than the patient." Van Dusen's clinical work appears to have produced an unusually rich body of material, probably due to his unorthodox approach, and it is genuinely illuminating



Em. Swedenborg.

when he compares his results with statements culled from the writings of Swedenborg, with which he is thoroughly familiar. If one is willing to accept that Swedenborg was perfectly in earnest, which I feel we can, then Swedenborg's quite fantastic accounts of worlds beyond this one are uniquely valuable in some sense, if only as a rich lode for exploration by theoretical psychologists. There has probably never been a mystic who wrote more fully and meticulously of his visions, or one who had more elaborate ones, for that matter! Swedenborg's accounts of his psychic journeys to other planets have been shown by our current knowledge of those planets not to stand up to scrutiny, however.

The last two chapters of van Dusen's book are very disappointing and the book really fades away while a myriad of possibilities for further research buzz in the reader's head unresolved. But his style is a model of clarity and simplicity so that the book is a pleasure to read even at the end when it ceases to be compulsive. The book is important for the general reader who wishes to explore the further limits of theories of the nature of consciousness. These subjects will be a continuing theme for *Second Look*, in both reviews and articles, for the nature of consciousness is as fundamental for understanding life in the universe, or stars like our Sun, or heavy atoms, or molecules. It is not just the bodies, but the minds, of extraterrestrials which must concern us. And hence we must try to reach the boundaries which define and delimit our own, if indeed there be any. □

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geophysical and meteorological cataclysms.

....these patterns are often associated with stellar fluctuations.

By way of explanation, Persinger, a psychologist specializing in physical mechanisms of the natural sciences, and Ms. Lafreniere, his research assistant, draw connections to sunspot activity and solar flares, whose dense clouds of charged particles, in colliding with the earth's magnetic field, oscillate the field "like the movements of a large, invisible bouncing spring." These solar pulses penetrate our atmosphere in eddy-like currents, upsetting surface equilibria, and producing the unusual Fortean phenomena, including UFO appearances, as "expressions of our earth resonating in response." The evidence is persuasive, but not conclusive.

When massive flare and sunspot activity erupted between August 2 and 7, 1972, huge multicolored fireballs appeared over much of Canada and the United States. A week later the U.S. underwent "one of its largest UFO flaps" in history. Had storm-induced clots of magnetic flux within the solar wind released visible plasma in our atmosphere to account for these sightings?

Some kind of connection between solar activity and seismic disturbances on earth seems apparent. Many Fortean events occur "before the manifestation of a severe jolt of a volcanic explosion." The authors wonder whether unusual Fortean events aren't by nature transient, produced by accumulating stresses that ebb and flow within limited localities.

A high electric field stimulated in the localized stress area would produce a low level of ionization in the air. That might cause rocks to bounce around, or seem to fall from the sky or pop from the ground. Rain could fall on a clear day. Electrical appliances might malfunction, and car engines would stall. Animals, being more sensitive to electrical and magnetic fields than humans, would be the first to react, just as they do before earthquakes and storms.

Human bioelectrical systems, when in contact with such a field, would react by producing in the percipient "dream-like states, episodes of paralysis, or intervals of unconsciousness." The consciousness might be inundated by stored images "that he or she cannot control." Even more subtle modifications of thought are possible. The person could experience stored images in a sort of "walking nightmare" in which everything perceived is shaped by expectations formed by conditioning, at the cinema, or by the peer group. "Each person might perceive the stimulus in different ways. Where one person sees a globular UFO with men inside, another person might see a metallic ship." The individuals would be convinced of the reality of what their memory experienced, which would complicate, perhaps even entirely nullify hypnosis as a method for discriminating the source of the information.

Other psychological and physical reactions of the human system to such a field would include putrid smells, tingling sensations, humming or buzzing noises, the sound of voices, strange feelings of "presence." Should the area be sufficiently ionized to produce a luminous object, paralysis or severe burns would result if the observer ventured

too near. During certain stages this "electric column," as the authors call it, could even be detected on radar, moving along the lines of stress displacement in the earth until it dissolves.

The authors conceive of another possible explanation for UFOs—a space-time overlap caused by solar or other disturbances. Material manifestations might emerge, analogous to a three-dimensional hologram. Like the power of magnetism, while the image could not be destroyed, the act of splitting it into separate images would reduce the total energy in each. The degree of "materialness" of the hologram would depend "upon the severity and degree of the space-time overlap." As the space-time manifold became displaced, the object, or hologram, would appear to be transparent.

"Interaction between large numbers of biological systems and the geomagnetic environment within which they are im-



The Solar Corona.

mersed," the authors write, conceivably results in a metaphysical phenomenon whereby the potential is energized for that interaction to "display behaviours and patterns of its own." Electronic units of human organisms, human brains, when clustered and exposed to a changing magnetic field—especially under stressful or emotional conditions such as political and social turmoil—induce in themselves and others thought images which are indistinguishable from reality, or which become reality. □

Randy Fitzgerald is Second Look senior editor and author of the forthcoming Almanac of Extraterrestrial Visitation Theories published by Macmillan. He lives in suburban Washington, D.C.
