

# Local clinic provides hour of floating

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YELLIN' REBEL

I had already heard of sensory deprivation as a device used to induce a sense of subliminal relaxation.

Beyond Turkish baths and saunas, I must admit I rather held a pessimistic view of these new fads.

I usually rely on the icy cold shower to revive my senses and jolt me back from the utter state of torpor that has engulfed me.

In any event, I was game to try something new, and readily undertook my new assignment. I traveled on down to the clinic, located on Flamingo Road.

I made an appointment with an enthusiastic and cheerful program director who advised me to bring along a bathing suit and a hairbrush. I still wasn't quite sure what to expect. I imagined something resembling a closed jacuzzi or a sauna type cubicle.

Thus, my interest considerably piqued, I showed up at the address, delayed by a few minutes for having forgotten to grab along the piece of paper on which I had scrawled the office number. I had to rely on a rough indication from memory.

Inscribed on a smoked glass door, a sign advertising muscle therapy caught my attention, remotely linking the inscription with whatever therapeutic session I was to submit myself to.

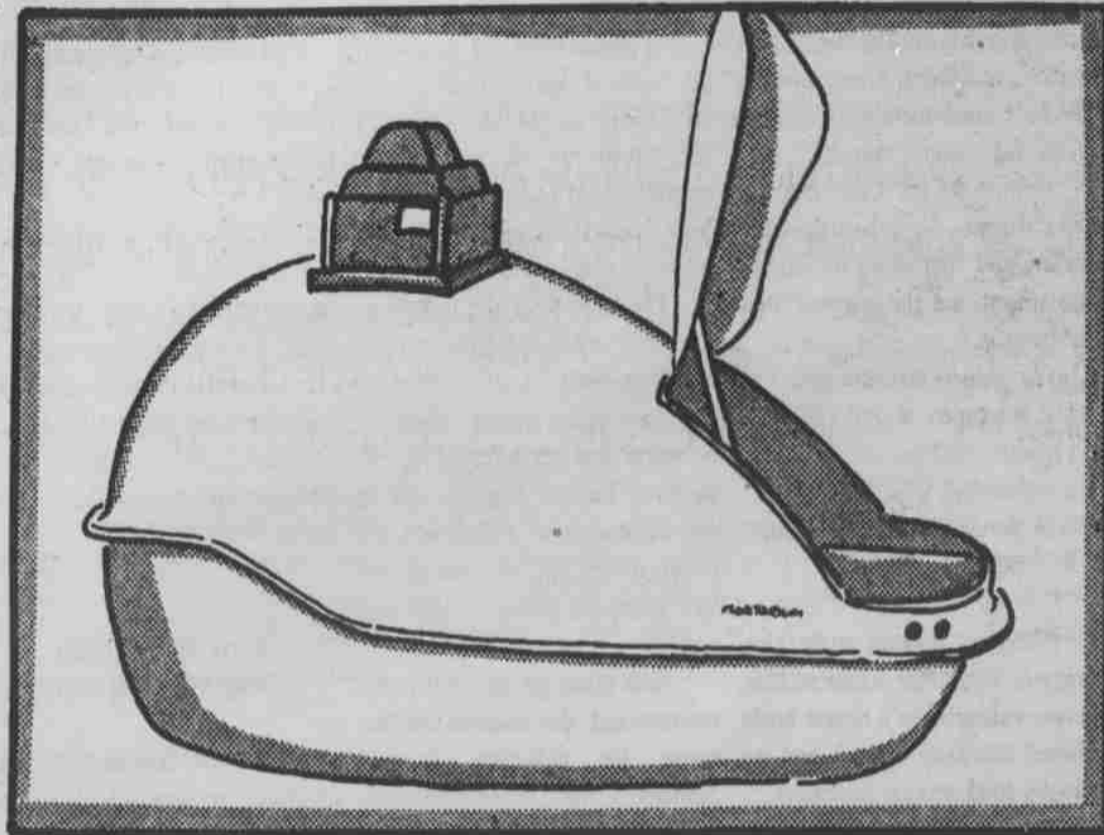


illustration by Jason Bermingham

The door was open, and as I stepped inside, the friendly face of Stan Jeckewicz, the program director, greeted me. At least, it was the right place.

"Let me take you to the room," he said.

I wanted to ask a few questions, but he said he preferred to let the hour-long float session answer some of my questions and resume the meeting afterwards.

As he led the way, the mustiness and bromine odors became

more pronounced, reminding me of the smell of health club locker-rooms. There was a faint scent of an herbal blend, which was quite pleasant.

We entered a room that contained a gigantic egg-shaped capsule.

Jeckewicz lifted the lid, upward, the way one would open the trunk hood of a car. It looked odd, this wide domed bathtub filled with water. It was almost womb-like. "It's called a floatarium," Jeckewicz said.

Jeckewicz explained that the water was saturated with Epsom salt designed to achieve the high rate of buoyancy.

"There are 1,300 pounds of Epsom salt in the floatarium tank," he said, "providing more buoyancy than the Dead Sea."

The water has to be in constant motion to prevent it from crystallizing, and is kept at a temperature of 94.4 degrees.

He then gave me a standard briefing on what to expect. Then, before instructing me to change, he offered me a list of musical tapes to select from. Each tape had a self-improvement subject.

The possibilities ranged from "weight loss" to "elephant memory." "I want them all!" I said facetiously.

"I chose elephant memory" in view of my upcoming political science exam. What have I got to lose, I thought, unconvincingly.

I changed, showered and as I entered the floatarium, the density of the salt made the water feel peculiarly thick, almost oily in texture. Following Jeckewicz's directions, I let myself float to the other end while he tested the volume of the tape. He gave me a brief rundown on a number of switches lo-

cated left and right of me.

Reminding me he'd be back in an hour, he shut the door, saying: "Have a nice vacation!"

It felt odd to just float with no limb touching anything. With my head almost completely submerged, I could hear the space-like music. If I lifted my head, I couldn't hear it.

I played with the switches for a while, but I had forgotten which was which. At any rate, I didn't notice anything different.

There was an orange window right above my head; I looked up at it directly.

I felt myself gradually relaxing. Jeckewicz had mentioned that many people actually fall asleep. I never sleep during the day so I didn't expect to slumber. Besides, I wanted to stay awake so I could write about this.

I tried not to concentrate too hard on anything; or rather only on Marx and Engels, wondering, really, if my memory was going to substantially improve once out of this capsule.

I felt myself drifting pleasantly to sleep; I stopped resisting. It was easy not to be too preoccupied because there wasn't much to do but to let oneself float.

Jeckewicz had reassured me that there was no danger of either drowning or flipping over due to the buoyancy level.

One tiny detail bothered me for a bit. I thought, what if he forgets me here? I found out later the door did not lock and in fact opened quite readily to the slightest pressure.

It was rather steamy at one point. One of the switches must have shut the airvent, I concluded. I wasn't the least bit inconvenienced. It felt rather like a steam bath, warm and quiet.

A knock on the door jolted me

awake. The hour of floating was over. I was a bit dazed coming out. I would have liked to remain in there a little longer.

I felt both very regenerated and extremely relaxed, the way one feels after an afternoon siesta.

Jeckewicz said the clinic specializes, among other things, in stress reduction, pain relief, muscle therapy, sports injuries and soft-tissue damage. The floatarium, he said, is effectively used to aid in these recoveries.

Research undertaken on the physiological effects of rest, according to one article, indicates a change in brain activity as well as hormones. Evidence has shown an upsurge in alpha waves, a brain activity that induces relaxation and a reduction in the level of cortisone, a hormone generated by nervous tension.

The complete absence of sound may play, according to some physicians, a significant role in the improvement of many ailments, particularly those associated with muscle strain and headaches.

In an experiment done with two teams of basketball players whereby one team would conduct its regular practice session and the other use the floatarium to visualize making free throws, the result showed that the team which used the floatarium actually did better than the one which practiced an hour a day.

In another example, and according to an article printed on the subject, Rafael Septien, kicker for the Dallas Cowboys, following an undiagnosed hernia, and upon the advice of coach Tom Landry, began to regularly lie in the floatarium to alleviate the pain and "discovered that floating not only relaxed him and helped him relieve the pain, but also increased his ability to concentrate."

Septien went on to perform extremely well and, according to the same article, "at one point kicked 22 out of 24 field goals, capping a spectacular 1981 season by being selected All Pro."

"Clients come to us from all walks of life," said Jeckewicz. Some firms send in their employees. Clients may come before an important meeting to revitalize, to sharpen their senses, or at the end of the day, to simply relax.

Although it is quite popular in California and other parts of the U.S., the Environmental Sensory Stimulation Therapy tank here in Las Vegas is the only one of its kind.

Now, if only Marx could have spent one hour, in what I suspect he might have called "a degenerate capitalist invention", before writing his "Manifesto"...

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