

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Hypnosis Reconsidered, Resituated, and Redefined

ADAM CRABTREE

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**Abstract**—The two-hundred-year history of hypnosis and its predecessor, animal magnetism, is replete with stories of unusual phenomena. Perhaps surprisingly, a close reading of that history reveals that investigators and students of hypnosis have been unable to achieve an agreed-upon definition of their subject matter. Because of this failure to describe the essential nature of hypnosis, they resorted to lists of hypnotic phenomena as a means for confirming the presence of a hypnotic state in clinical and experimental situations. However, identification and enumeration of hypnotic phenomena proved to be problematic. The content of these lists varied from era to era and from practitioner to practitioner, and the selection of phenomena seemed to be an arbitrary process. With no agreed-upon definition and no definitive list of phenomena that would apply to hypnosis and hypnosis alone, there was no way to ensure that the “hypnosis” that was being studied in clinical and experimental work was the same entity in all cases. Although hypnosis research in recent decades has yielded important insights, significant difficulties and disagreements remain. It is the contention of this article that this confusing state of affairs came to pass because the discussion of hypnosis in the literature was wrongly situated and that there is a need to step back and gain a new perspective on hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena. The proposed fresh look at hypnosis situates hypnosis as a subspecies of *trance* as defined in a very specific way: a state of profound focus on something accompanied by a diminished awareness of everything else, which evokes appropriate subliminal resources. *Hypnosis* is then defined as an inner-mind trance characterized by rapport. This new approach and its implications are discussed in some detail.

*Keywords:* hypnosis—trance—rapport

#### Brief Historical Sketch of Hypnosis

This history of hypnosis is very brief. It is intended to highlight certain events that will help place in context the issues to be dealt with in what follows. In this section there is no attempt to critically comment on these events. For a fuller history, see Laurence and Perry (1988), Gauld (1992), and Crabtree (1993).

Hypnosis has a venerable history. As a term (in its earliest form *neurohypnotism*), it goes back to 1842, but as a human experience that could be induced at will and studied, it has its beginnings in the ideas and healing practice of Franz Anton Mesmer (Mesmer 1779) and most especially his pupil Armand Marie Jacques de Chastenet, the Marquis de Puységur (Puységur 1784). Mesmer developed a healing technique and accompanying theoretical framework that he called “animal magnetism.” He used “magnetic passes” or sweeping motions of the hands over the body of the ill to apply the healing power of what he called “magnetic fluid,” a vital energy that he believed pervaded the universe.

Puységur, after learning to use animal magnetism from a seminar offered by Mesmer in 1784, soon noticed that something odd seemed to happen to those he magnetized. Many entered into a state with these characteristics: 1) a sleepwalking kind of consciousness, 2) a “rapport” or special connection with the magnetizer, 3) suggestibility with heightened imagination, 4) amnesia in the waking state for events in the magnetized state, 5) ability to read the thoughts of the magnetizer, and 6) a striking change in the personality of the magnetic subject (Crabtree 1993:38–45). The magnetized person seemed to be asleep, but was awake enough to communicate with the magnetizer. Rapport meant that the subject was connected both mentally and, it seemed, physically with the magnetizer. The magnetic subject was ready to follow the suggestions of the magnetizer and experienced a heightened ability to imagine things vividly. Amnesia for events occurring during magnetic somnambulism upon returning to the normal state (which Puységur believed to be a feature present in all cases) led to the notion that everyone possesses a *divided consciousness*, and he regarded the waking and magnetized states as “two different existences” (Puységur 1784:90). Ability to read the magnetizer’s thoughts was augmented over the years of his practice to include other paranormal capacities, such as being able to perceive objects and situations not available to the senses and the ability to exercise a “sixth sense” by which magnetic somnambulists could diagnose their own illnesses or those of others and prescribe effective remedies. The magnetic subject’s personality was sometimes altered so radically that he or she seemed to be a different person when magnetized.

Mesmer had previously noted that some of his magnetic subjects went into a “swoon” during his ministrations, but he did not consider that state significant and simply had them placed in a separate room where they could recover. Mesmer believed that the fainting was merely part of the natural healing process. When he began to use animal magnetism, Puységur immediately saw the importance of this state, which he called “magnetic sleep” or “magnetic somnambulism,” and made a careful study

of it for the rest of his life. As it turned out, Puységur's discovery was to have momentous consequences for the subsequent history of psychology and psychological healing (Crabtree 2003, Ellenberger 1970). Puységur believed that magnetic somnambulism was the same thing as natural somnambulism or sleepwalking, with the important difference being that the magnetic subject was in a state of rapport with the magnetizer, whereas the sleepwalker was in rapport with no one (Puységur 1811). Puységur considered that the somnambulistic state had a healing virtue and that remedies for the illness being treated, which were suggested by magnetic somnambulists, were effective when applied.

In the decades following Puységur's initial findings, animal magnetic healing split into two streams, one continuing along the lines of Mesmer's practice and the other emphasizing the psychological dimensions demonstrated by Puységur. Puységur spoke only well of Mesmer and accepted the reality of magnetic fluid, but it was not central to his magnetic work. Over time Puységur's approach dominated magnetic healing practices and opened previously unimagined doors to the inner psyche.

Animal magnetism survived the negative findings of two French commissions set up to investigate the phenomenon in 1784. The commissions' investigations centered on whether or not there was such a thing as "magnetic fluid," and, except for one dissenting report, found against it. Nevertheless, the number of practitioners using animal magnetism as a healing approach continued to grow, and spread from Paris to the rest of Europe, to England, and eventually to the United States.

In the fifty years after Puységur's discovery, practitioners of animal magnetism used their own experiences to add to his list of six somnambulistic phenomena. They wrote about analgesia and anesthesia, "travelling clairvoyance" (which involved leaving the body and finding oneself at another location), precognition, magnetizing at a distance, discernment of the magnetic fluid, and ecstasy. Other phenomena related to the state of rapport and included being responsive to the magnetizer's mental commands, experiencing the magnetizer's physical sensations, and being influenced by the magnetizer's movements (Crabtree 1993:41).

Beyond the explanations offered by Mesmer and Puységur, a number of explanatory schemes were developed to account for the phenomena of animal magnetism. Spiritistic schools believed that the phenomena were produced through the intervention of spirits. Others believe they could be explained as the result of "sympathy" (a notion derived largely from Renaissance medicine) combined with the belief in a universal world-spirit that connects all things. Still others held that the efficacy of animal magnetism derived from the power of suggestion. One theory claimed the

phenomena were due to an accumulation of electrical fluid in the body, particularly the brain and stomach area (Crabtree 1993:113–127).

This was the state of affairs when a new understanding of magnetic somnambulism arose in England in the 1840s. Although animal magnetism had made some inroads in England in earlier times, it only became well-established there around 1830 through promotional demonstrations given in London by the well-known French magnetizer the baron Jules Du Potet. Then in 1842, Manchester physician James Braid attended a stage demonstration of animal magnetism given by Charles Lafontaine and immediately became interested in magnetic phenomena. At the demonstration he saw the deaf cured, paralytics given the ability to move, and sight restored to the blind. A skeptic at first, Braid soon came to believe that something real was going on (Braid 1842). However, he did not accept the magnetizer's explanation that the phenomena were produced by magnetic fluid. Instead he developed his own explanation and a new nomenclature (Braid 1843).

Braid believed the phenomena he witnessed had a purely physiological cause: When fatigued by a prolonged sensation of some kind, the mind "slips out of gear" producing a state of "somnolency," and "a peculiar state of the brain and mobility of the nervous system, which render the patient liable to be directed so as to manifest the mesmeric phenomena" (Braid 1842:321, Crabtree 1988:450). His theory posited a "new agency," one that he found to be particularly effective in his medical practice. He called this agency "neuro-hypnotism," later shortened to "hypnotism," and the practitioner of neuro-hypnotism a "hypnotist." As he developed his theory over the following years, Braid concentrated on hypnotism as a form of monoideism or focused thought, and gave increasing attention to the role of suggestion in the induction of hypnotism and the effects produced by the hypnotized subject (Crabtree 1988:465)

Hypnotism did not catch on in England during Braid's lifetime. However, the French were impressed by his ideas, particularly his use of suggestion. About 1860, four French physicians, Eugène Azam, Paul Broca, Jean Demarquay, and M. A. Giraud-Teulon, began to experiment with hypnotism as a surgical anaesthetic. Their researches came to the attention of the provincial physician Ambroise Liébeault, who began to use Braid's hypnotism in his general medical practice. He was unusually inventive in his use of hypnotism for healing, and his six books on the subject were instrumental in making hypnotism or "Braidism" known throughout Europe and the United States. One of the people who visited Liébeault's clinic to learn about hypnotism was Hippolyte Bernheim, a physician who practiced at Nancy. He became an adept at hypnotic practice and wrote seven books that further added to the fame of hypnotism. Liébeault and Bernheim founded

what came to be known as the Nancy School of hypnosis (somewhere in the 1880s the term *hypnosis* began to be used as the equivalent of *hypnotism*). Bernheim claimed that hypnosis centers around suggestion. He believed that suggestion was involved in practically all human interaction and that phenomena such as paralyses, anesthetics, sensorial illusions, and hallucinations, as well as automatic obedience, automatic movements, and post-hypnotic hallucinations, could be produced by hypnotic suggestion. He also held that many phenomena could be produced by suggestion even without hypnosis, and that, as a matter of fact, hypnosis did not enhance suggestibility.

The Nancy School found itself in opposition to the school of famed neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, which came to be called the Salpêtrière School of Hypnosis. Charcot's view was that hypnosis was a manifestation of nervous states, each distinguished by a particular symptomology: 1) the cataleptic state, 2) the lethargic state, and 3) the somnambulistic state. He held that these states were organically determined, and not the result of suggestion. For Charcot, hypnosis was an artificially created neurosis essentially identical with hysteria. The Nancy and Salpêtrière schools flourished in the 1880s and 1890s, but by the late 1890s the Nancy School had come to dominate thinking about hypnosis. Bernheim, however, eventually developed serious questions about whether hypnosis was a special state at all.

He was not alone in having doubts. While many acknowledged the usefulness of "induced sleep" in the treatment of illnesses, not all considered that state unique. At the same time, suggestion was treated as a phenomenon in its own right and not related essentially to the hypnotic state. The potency of suggestion was fully acknowledged, but it was considered to be as effective in the normal waking state as in the state of "induced sleep." In the same period, Oskar Vogt offered an intriguing idea (Gauld 1992:370). He believed that hypnosis should be thought of as a sleep-like state with rapport. Since sleep is essentially an inhibition of consciousness, we can think of hypnosis as a state in which consciousness is inhibited except with regard to those ideas associated with the hypnotist.

It was noted by many authors that there were a variety of states not generally called "hypnosis" that were somehow related to it. Alan Gauld (1992:517) describes the characteristics of these states: 1) reduced awareness of the outer world with heightened awareness of the inner, 2) heightened responsiveness to suggestion, 3) enhancement of some psychological or physiological functions and restriction of others, 4) amnesia, complete or partial, upon returning to the normal state from the unusual state, 5) memory of events in the state and past instances of the state. Examples

of such “cognate states” were sleep, spontaneous somnambulism and somniloquism, dual or multiple personality, certain drug- or alcohol-induced states, and mediumistic states. Considerable methodological difficulties were encountered when attempting to develop criteria for distinguishing between these states and hypnosis, and discussion of these issues was inconclusive.

Attempts to deal with these matters and clarify the nature of hypnosis continued up to the beginning of World War I. After the war there was a long fallow period in which there was little progress in the understanding of hypnosis. This time of relatively little exploration ended about 1960, when fresh discussions of theories of hypnosis emerged, and researchers again began to wrestle with the proper methods for its study.

The new wave of research was initiated by a paper written by Harvard professor Robert White, fittingly (as it turns out) entitled “A Preface to the Theory of Hypnotism” (White 1941). He wrote that hypnosis should be thought of as an altered state of consciousness that occurs in an environment characterized by high levels of motivation. He reframed hypnotic behavior as meaningful, goal-directed striving, the goal being to behave like a hypnotized person as continuously defined by the operator and understood by the client. This key idea influenced many experimental researchers in hypnosis, including Martin Orne, T. X. Barber, and Nicholas Spanos.

Martin Orne, long-time editor of the *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, expanded White’s idea and used this perspective in his experimentation with hypnosis. He saw the hypnotic subjects of these experiments as intelligent people who understood a great deal about the situation they were in. Further, he considered that the experimental environment interacted with the personal goals of the subjects—an interaction that was expressed in terms of “demand characteristics” that indicate how the subject is expected to perform (Orne 1962). One of Orne’s conclusions was that hypnosis did not enable subjects to transcend normal limits of human performance. In his experiments he developed the use of the control group as a means of identifying the genuine presence of hypnosis, as opposed to simulation of that condition.

During this same period, T. X. Barber conducted research that indicated to his satisfaction that certain marks of the presence of hypnosis, such as amnesia and arm levitation, could be attained without the aid of hypnosis. As to other phenomena judged more difficult to accept, such as hallucination, age regression, and hypnotic blistering, he was inclined to dismiss them as the result of bad observation and inaccurate reporting (Barber 1969). Unfortunately, this state of affairs seemed to leave hypnosis in a kind of no-man’s land, since the traditional “phenomena of hypnosis” were not specific

to hypnosis alone. Given this state of affairs, the question arose as to how it would be possible to do any meaningful hypnosis research.

Barber was determined to solve this problem, and as the result of carefully designed experiments, he concluded that all the way along the history of hypnosis, researchers had been self-deceived about their methods. They believed they were inducing a distinctly identifiable state called hypnosis, but in fact they were unwittingly creating a situation in which their subjects would respond in certain preordained ways to their instructions through subtle indications of the hypnotist's expectations. Barber insisted that the way to go about it was not, as some had proposed, to first define hypnosis and then study it. What was needed instead was to begin with the phenomena of hypnosis, the data, and attempt to explain them by relating them to their antecedent conditions. This, he insisted, was the first step in any scientific explanation (Barber 1967).

Later Barber notably modified his understanding of hypnosis, introducing a "three-dimensional" theory of hypnosis, which he considered a new paradigm (Barber 1999). He identified the first dimension as associated with a small group of individuals who are prone to fantasizing. The second he associated with a small group of amnesia-prone individuals who tend to forget memorable events in their lives. The third he saw as a larger group of individuals who have strongly positive attitudes, motivations, expectancies, and cognitions toward the hypnotic situation. This three-factor approach was supplemented and made more subtle by the introduction of three more dimensions: the social psychology of the psychological experiment, the dimension of the hypnotist, and the effects of suggestion on hypnotic responsiveness.

Another approach to defining hypnosis was developed by Ernest Hilgard: the "neodissociation" theory (Hilgard 1977, 1992). Like other theories, Hilgard's approach identified hypnosis as that condition that exhibits objective and subjective phenomena of the type found in the hypnotic literature. Hilgard would agree with Barber that it is not possible to arrive at an agreed-upon definition of hypnosis, and so settled for specifying the "domain of hypnosis." That domain is the collection of accepted subjective and objective hypnotic phenomena. As examples, he mentions ideomotor movements, sensory distortion, hallucinations, and post-hypnotic amnesia, so Hilgard's specification of the domain of hypnosis is accomplished by simply drawing up his preferred list of hypnotic phenomena. To explain these phenomena, he introduced the concept of dissociation originally developed by Pierre Janet (Janet 1889). But instead of talking about dissociated subconscious centers of consciousness, as Janet had, Hilgard described a different kind of dissociated element. He said that people are equipped with

hierarchically arranged cognitive subsystems that perform certain important functions in their lives. These constitute parallel streams of consciousness, separated from the main body of consciousness by an amnesic barrier. At any moment some are latent and some active. Even in ordinary situations, conflicts can arise between subsystems, and Hilgard postulated that in order to avoid chaos, there must be a “central control structure” or “executive ego” to look after things. For Hilgard, hypnotic inductions facilitate dissociative experiences. In hypnosis parts of the central control structure are handed over to the hypnotist, and the subject will do what the hypnotist suggests. In this situation, the subject has experiences and performs actions that are not in the control of his executive ego, so that the phenomena of hypnosis are essentially dissociative phenomena. Hilgard’s ideas met with a great deal of criticism (e.g., Spanos 1991) and some spirited, though revisionary, defense (Bowers 1990, 1992, Woody & Sadler 2008).

A very different approach, based on the sociocognitive perspective, was built around an analysis of the social and situational environment in which hypnosis takes place. Perhaps the chief spokesperson for this perspective was Nicholas Spanos, who began as a student of Barber and was influenced significantly by his views, although he said that his deepest roots were in the ideas of Robert White. For Spanos, the hypnotized person enacts a “role,” one defined both culturally and by subtly communicated expectations from the experimenter. In the hypnotic situation, the subject’s attempts to fulfill the expectations constitute a feedback to the experimenter. Wittingly or not, the experimenter then gives cues to the subject about how well he or she is performing the role. In this way the situation becomes a complex web of largely unrecognized interactions that create the hypnotic result. In playing the part of the hypnotized person, the subject produces expected hypnotic phenomena. The subject may very well mistakenly believe that these phenomena emerge spontaneously or automatically, but, according to Spanos, the sociocognitively aware observer will realize that this is not the case. The mistaken view arises from misdescription of the hypnotic subject’s private experiences or from deception and/or reinterpretation by the subject (Spanos 1991). Hypnotic subjects are characterized by “their willingness and ability to use their imaginal and other cognitive skills to create the subjective experiences called for by suggestions (Spanos 1996:20).” The keen observer will realize that there is no creation of a “state” of hypnosis, but a subtly choreographed interaction between subject and experimenter that produces the impressive but familiar dramatization that we call hypnosis.

Deeply affected by the change in perspective created chiefly by the work of White, Barber, Spanos, and other sociocognitivists, hypnotic



researchers have in recent times attempted to more fully come to terms with their subject matter. Particularly in the past two decades, increasing attention has been paid to the complexities involved in identifying hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena. André Weitzenhoffer examined these issues for more than forty years and shrewdly formulated crucial questions relating to these matters, attempting

. . . to bring about some kind of sensible order . . . in what otherwise is becoming an increasingly amorphous and chaotic field. (Weitzenhoffer 2000:8)

He wrote that there is an assumption that the old hypnosis of the 19th century and the modern version have the same phenomenology. Although there are common elements, “that there is a full identity is questionable and basically untestable” (p. 3). For Weitzenhoffer, this and many other questions relating to the definition of hypnosis, hypnotic phenomena, experimental methodology, clinical effectiveness, and other significant issues remain unanswered. His exposition of these problems stands as one of the most helpful guides for those who are similarly fascinated and befuddled by the present state of affairs around hypnosis.

### **Order and Disorder**

The attempts of Weitzenhoffer and other researchers “to bring about some kind of sensible order” from the disorder we are confronted with in the field of hypnosis have thus far been only partially successful. In recent years, there have been concerted attempts to provide a framework for understanding what hypnosis is and how to effectively experiment with it. There are several tasks that must be undertaken to establish such a framework. One is to establish what type of data will be acceptable for investigators of hypnosis. There seems to be agreement that the data will consist of observable actions, physiological changes, and self-reports from the hypnotic subject (Kihlstrom 2008). Another is to establish a definition for hypnosis, one that distinguishes hypnosis from other phenomena by a description of its general characteristics. One approach is to distinguish “hypnosis-as-procedure” from “hypnosis-as-product” (Barnier & Nash 2008). In this schema, hypnosis-as-procedure involves making use of suggestions and consists of two steps: an introduction that invites the subject to participate with the experimenter in the production of imaginative experiences, and the application of a suggestion for an imaginative experience, which serves as the actual induction. The resulting state or condition (hypnosis-as-product) will be presumed to be hypnosis when the

subject produces both objective and subjective evidence that meet certain criteria. The objective evidence involves motor responses that have come to be accepted as standard phenomena of hypnosis, such as arm levitation and arm catalepsy. The subjective evidence is the self-report of the subject of the experience of altered sensations of the type generally accepted as standard phenomena of hypnosis, such as visual and auditory hallucinations and amnesia.

Hypnosis thus understood involves two people: the hypnotist and the hypnotic subject. This means that the concept of *self-hypnosis* is in certain ways problematic. Although self-hypnosis and hetero-hypnosis are highly coordinate, questions remain pertaining to what constitutes self-hypnosis and whether it is identical with hetero-hypnosis. One way to think about the matter is to say that in self-hypnosis, the subject takes on both social roles (hypnotist and subject) so that in effect self-hypnosis and hetero-hypnosis turn out to be the same thing (see Kihlstrom 2008:38).

In recent years greater emphasis has been laid upon individual differences that exist in the ability of people to experience hypnosis. This has led to the belief that in analyzing the hypnotic experience, a componential approach is best. This means recognizing that different hypnotic experiences require different components of underlying abilities and that to produce a particular kind of response one or more components may be necessary (McConkey 2008). We see elements of this kind of thinking in Barber's three-dimensional theory of hypnosis (Barber 1999). It is also in evidence in Cardeña's study of the phenomenology of deep hypnosis (Cardeña 2005). Here the author took a multifactorial approach to the phenomenology of physically passive and active hypnosis and found that the results did not indicate the presence of a single hypnotic state, but "various commonly experienced modalities of experiencing" (p. 51).

In virtually all experimental work on hypnosis, standardized scales of hypnotizability are used to determine the hypnotic abilities of subjects. Chief among them are the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scales, Forms A, B, and C, and the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A. These use as criteria certain hypnotic phenomena that have become conventionally accepted as indicative of the hypnotic state.

In my opinion, the principle reason that, according to Weitzenhoffer, hypnosis has become an "increasingly amorphous and chaotic field" (Weitzenhoffer 2000:8) lies in the fact that all approaches to defining hypnosis and determining when an individual is in a hypnotic state use the standard criteria based on a list of "hypnotic phenomena" that have been produced from time to time throughout the history of mesmerism/hypnosis, and which have in recent times become fixed and canonical in the field.

Kirsch and Lynn (1995:846) note that there is an emerging consensus about the basic phenomena of hypnosis. They also point out that there is growing acceptance of a definition of hypnosis-as-procedure as given by the American Psychological Association (APA) Division of Psychological Hypnosis: a procedure wherein changes in sensation, perception, thoughts, feelings, or behavior are suggested. Hypnosis-as-procedure thus understood depends directly on that “emerging consensus” about what the phenomena of hypnosis are, for these constitute the specific suggested “changes “to which the APA definition alludes. Barnier and Nash acknowledge this state of affairs and point out that when hypnosis-as-procedure has been applied in an experimental situation, one cannot necessarily assume that hypnosis-as-product has been elicited (Barnier & Nash 2008:6–10). They say that hypnosis-as-product is a particular state. That state can be said to be present when certain motor responses of a hypnotized subject are publicly measurable (p. 11). What are these responses? They are the hypnotic phenomena about which Kirsch and Lynn say there is an emerging consensus, and which, they say, include those phenomena that Hilgard believed specifies the domain of hypnosis, such as muscular movements, sensory distortions, hallucinations, posthypnotic amnesia, and hypnotic dreams (Kirsch & Lynn 1995:846)

Kirsch and Lynn point out that, despite a great deal of discussion about the nature of hypnosis throughout its history, theorists remain as contentious as ever (p. 847), and they discuss the methodological, sociological, and philosophical context of this contentiousness. I would like to add an additional reason for the present situation: All discussions begin with and are based on the identification of crucial hypnotic phenomena. I believe that lists of conventionally accepted phenomena can never provide an adequate basis for this discussion. I would like to suggest that the resituating and redefining of hypnosis that I propose in this article create a framework for achieving a clarity in the discussion of hypnosis that has for so long eluded researchers.

### **Problems Relating to the Phenomena**

When Barber asked the question of what constitute the phenomena of hypnosis, he answered: They are the phenomena that “have been specified by Bernheim, Moll, Bramwell, Weitzenhoffer, and many other investigators” (Barber 1967:112). He offered as example a list drawn from Weitzenhoffer: suggested age regression, amnesia, analgesia, blindness, catalepsy, color blindness, dreams, hallucinations, hypermnesia, negative hallucination, strength enhancement, and time distortion. At the time Barber was writing, it was generally accepted that hypnotic phenomena had been definitively specified in the 1930s, in connection with work on the development of

hypnotic susceptibility scales carried out at that time (Edmonston 1986:324 ff.). Those researchers chose phenomena from among those mentioned in the mesmeric and hypnotic literature stretching back some 150 years. So for Barber and most researchers after him, the issue of what constituted the phenomena of hypnosis was considered settled, and the first step in their scientific explanation could be taken. But investigators generally ignored the fact that all these lists of phenomena varied and were compiled by picking and choosing from among the mass of phenomena mentioned in the literature. This arbitrariness in selecting crucial phenomena inevitably created problems for hypnosis research.

Since 1960, the conventional list has been narrowed down in practice to a few phenomena that are relatively easy to produce in laboratory settings. Typically they included suggestibility, ideosensory and ideomotor activity, catalepsy, age regression, hypermnesia, post-hypnotic responses, analgesias and anesthetics, time distortion, release of inhibitions, ease of fantasy, literalness, and amnesia. What was not acknowledged about these purported hypnotic phenomena—by the researchers of the 1930s or anyone else—was the arbitrariness of the canonical list. On what basis was the selection made? To some extent it seems that bizarreness was one of the criteria, ease of production another, conventional thinking that a priori excluded paranormal phenomena yet another. We find this difficulty exacerbated by the fact that, in the literature of clinical and experimental hypnotic practice, it is often recognized that it is possible to have instances of hypnosis that lack many of the phenomena of the accepted list. This creates the problem of having no consistent basis for choosing which combination of phenomena is sufficient to indicate that hypnosis is present. At the time Barber was writing about these things, there was no discernible debate about the matter, creating the impression that it was a relief to have established the subject matter of research so scientists could get on with the job; this state of affairs still holds true.

There are still more problems around the phenomena. For one, all of the conventionally listed phenomena are ones that also occur in “non-hypnotic” conditions (Gauld 1992:517–536). To add further to the difficulty, they all occur in some form or other in everyday life. It is possible to identify examples of everything from amnesia and anesthesia to positive and negative hallucination in ordinary human experience. The attempt to determine the object of study of hypnosis on the basis of such phenomena has, in my opinion, been the cause of a great deal of confusion. The confusion has led to endless disputes in clinical and experimental settings as to what positions on hypnosis qualify as legitimate. As a result, an examination of hypnotic literature over the past fifty years brings little clarification to the problem of what hypnosis actually is.

If we were to put ourselves in the place of a late 19th-century theorist who held the “special state” view of hypnosis of the time, how would we attempt to definitively separate hypnosis from other states of consciousness? According to Spanos and Chaves, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the special state view of hypnosis was “sustained by the belief that hypnotic procedures produced *highly unusual behaviors that transcended the capacities of non-hypnotized individuals*” (Spanos & Chaves 1989:10). To illustrate this we might choose some physiologically observable phenomenon that would be strikingly obvious to onlookers. Take, for instance, immunity to pain, such as that described by Esdaile in his accounts of surgical operations (the amputation of limbs, removal of huge tumors, etc.) performed while the subject was in a “mesmeric” state (Esdaile 1846). I have myself witnessed a dentist who, in one session, with the aid of hypnosis alone, pulled six front teeth in the upper jaw of a patient, who experienced no pain, and then stopped the flow of blood with a command. Our hypothesized theorist might say that such feats could only be accomplished while the patient was in a deep state of hypnosis, and that this phenomenon, along with similarly striking phenomena, would serve as infallible indications of the presence of hypnosis. Unfortunately, that would not be the case, for there are many reported incidents of individuals who have not been hypnotized who nevertheless exhibit comparable analgesia. One such was related to me personally. It involved a railway worker who attempted to rescue a co-worker who was in danger of being crushed by a runaway railway car. As he rushed to save his colleague, the car ran over his own foot, severing all his toes. During the incident he felt no pain and had no awareness that his toes had been amputated, until after he had succeeded in pushing his co-worker out of harm’s way. This man had not undergone any mesmeric or hypnotic procedure, yet he exhibited what would, in the special state theory, be one of the phenomena uniquely associated with the hypnotic condition. I believe that bizarreness or extraordinariness of phenomena alone cannot provide a way to indicate the presence of the hypnotic state, since even the most astounding hypnotic phenomena may also occur in normal life. As I will discuss below, the extraordinary phenomena that human beings exhibit under hypnosis are not due to an extraordinary state or condition. Rather, the phenomena of hypnosis are the phenomena of everyday human experience. I would have to say, however, that sociocognitive theorists are also in trouble when dealing with extraordinary or bizarre phenomena of this kind, but on different grounds. The notion that the railway worker was enacting a role suggested to him by his interpersonal environment seems to me to leave common sense far behind.

There is much truth in the sociocognitive view that:

the phenomena of hypnosis that have figured most prominently in the history of hypnosis . . . coalesced into a coherent social role (the role of the hypnotic subject) not because of any intrinsic correlation among these different behaviors, but instead because they were conceptualized as being related in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century special process theories of mesmerism and hypnosis. (Spanos & Chaves 1989:437)

I fully agree that the forms hypnotic phenomena take are conditioned by the socio-interpersonal environment in which they are produced. This situation creates an insuperable problem: There is no basis, no underlying rationale for saying that there is (or could be) some definitive list of hypnotic phenomena which applies to hypnosis and hypnosis alone. However, this is not because there is no identifiable state of hypnosis, as the sociocognitive theorists believe, but because the way of talking about that state has been improperly situated in discussions of hypnotic theory.

### **The Hypnotic Situation**

I would like next to say a few words about what I consider a central issue for preserving the credibility of experimentation in hypnosis. If we recognize, as I believe we must, the crucial role of the social and interpersonal features of hypnosis in both clinical and experimental settings, then there must be some account taken of two aspects of that structure that, to my mind, have not been sufficiently investigated. The first is the fact that the demand characteristics to which the hypnotic subject is responsive are not only those that occur in the laboratory or the consulting room. They are at work forming the individual's expectations long before he or she becomes part of those situations. Subjects are steeped in impressions of the nature of hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena through their encounters with the news media, magazine articles, books on hypnosis, television dramas that involve hypnotic themes, documentaries, opinion programs, conversations with friends and colleagues, etc. The resulting attitudes vary greatly from individual to individual, and no two people can be expected to have the same set of preconceptions.

Clinicians who use hypnosis in their therapeutic work know that they must find out what ideas about hypnosis their hypnotherapy clients bring with them and attempt to correct the usual inevitable fund of false or distorted information they have accumulated. Even when a determined effort is made in that direction by the hypnotherapist, he or she will still find that incorrect notions remain behind and will only be corrected through the client's personal experience over time.

What is true of the clinical setting must be equally true of the experimental.

The notion of “demand characteristics” must be expanded. It seems to me that this state of affairs must be addressed by experimenters, using whatever means might be available to identify these hidden conditionings and either correct them or take them into account in evaluating the results of experiments. Of course experimenters realize that people bring preformed notions of hypnosis and hypnotic responding to the table. But there does not seem to be much evidence that they specifically identify them and make allowance for them in evaluating their findings.

Also, in discussion of the interactions between experimenter and subject, there is much said about the effects of the experimenter on the ideas and expectations of the subject, but little about the effect of the subject on the experimenter. The experimental situation is a living human interaction, and human interactions always go both ways. Freud recognized this fact in his concept of countertransference, and Jung was famous for insisting that the psychotherapist is as much affected by the client as the client is by the therapist. Today the intersubjective school of psychoanalysis explores these two-way effects routinely, and clinicians from other schools of thought are becoming more and more aware of the cogency of this view. Also, it is increasingly acknowledged that these exchanges occur as much on subconscious levels of communication as conscious. If awareness of these factors is part of the routine concerns of experimenters in hypnosis today, I have not come across information to that effect, but I would be relieved to know that this dynamic is routinely taken into account in the laboratory.

### **Resituating Hypnosis: A Fresh Start**

The reason the discussion of hypnosis has reached its present inconclusiveness is that it has taken place within a framework riddled with too many hidden assumptions and unexplored contradictions. What is needed, I believe, is to back up a step and establish a new perspective.

What I am proposing in this article is a fresh start. It is my intention to resituate and redefine hypnosis. The new approach I am suggesting both applies to *all* the phenomena of hypnosis found in its 200-year history and situates hypnosis in the broad context of human experience. I believe that it makes possible a way to discuss and explore hypnosis freed of much of the disorder that has so far prevailed. Barnier and Nash correctly remark about hypnosis that “almost everything flows from definition” (2008:6), and that is where I will start.

The approach I suggest involves seeing hypnosis as a subspecies of *trance* as defined in a very specific way. My definition of *trance* is: a state of intense focus on something, accompanied by a diminished awareness of everything else, which evokes appropriate subliminal resources. My

definition of *hypnosis* is: an inner-mind trance characterized by rapport. Both of these definitions require explication.

*Trance* is an old word, used with a variety of meanings over the centuries. One of its original meanings is a state that involves absorption in something and abstraction from, or obliviousness to, other things. It is a version of this meaning of trance that I employ in this discussion.

Trance involves *intense focus on or absorption in something*. That thing constitutes the center of the mind's attention. The object of focus may be a person, place, thing, situation, idea, feeling, etc.—anything that a person may direct his or her attention to. The focus may be brief or prolonged. Attention may shift from focus to focus in a fluid way or remain fixed for some period of time. This is the first constitutive element of trance.

Of its very nature, focus on something entails a corresponding *diminished awareness of everything else*. The more intense the focus (the more complete the absorption) on something, the more awareness of other things decreases. This is the second constitutive element of trance.

There is a direct relationship between degree of focus and diminishment of attention elsewhere, and the depth of the trance. In the deepest trance, awareness of things not part of the focus approaches the vanishing point.

There is no extinguishment of consciousness in the trance state; in fact, awareness of the object of focus remains constant and can be very vivid. The mistaken notion that consciousness is diminished or disappears in trance states is largely due to the fact that sometimes memory of the trance experience is lost with the change in the object of focus.

Trances are not mysterious, misty, or transcendent states of mind. They are characterized not by diminished but by heightened awareness, at least in the area of concentration.

Trances do not turn people into automatons. In trances individuals do not lose their ability to make their own judgments, although the narrowed awareness of trances may significantly affect those judgments.

The third phase of the trance state, *evocation of appropriate subliminal resources*, occurs automatically. Once the focus is established, the organism immediately responds with the resources that the focus requires. Focus on something calls for action with regard to that thing. Our mental/emotional/biological apparatus is constructed in such a way that input stimuli evoke an action or a response of some kind, and the response may be mental or physiological. In trance, whatever is needed for the action is made available. This is the third constitutive element of trance.

The response to the object of focus is *appropriate*, in the sense of fitting. Appropriateness is determined by the responsive mechanisms of the individual. To the onlooker the response may seem inappropriate, but



for the entranced individual considered as a whole organism the response will be the one that is judged appropriate. The judgment is made on many levels, and the process of making that determination is to a great extent unavailable to consciousness. The response draws upon the individual's physical/biological/emotional/mental resources. These resources have their roots in evolutionary biology, cultural influence, and personal experience and learning. In the manifestations of the resources, the subconscious mind and unconsciously embedded dispositions play a significant role.

Trances are part of everyday life. By this I mean that the notion of trance I am proposing provides a perspective on the entire range of human experience. Everyone is susceptible to trance, except for individuals whose mental state, temporarily or long term, precludes focusing. In the conduct of our affairs, we are constantly shifting from one center of focus to another as we move from one activity to another or one concern to another. Here the state-dependent property of memory comes into play, and we might find it difficult to clearly recall our experience of one state of trance after we have moved on to another.

There are many kinds of trances, depending on the type of object being focused on. For the sake of convenience I have divided trance into four categories: situational trance, interpersonal trance, inner-mind trance, and group-mind trance. Each has a different kind of object of focus, as will be explained. For the moment, I want to call attention to the inner-mind trance. The focus of this trance is the inner world of the mind with its thoughts, ideas, feelings, memories, symbols, impressions, intentions, subconscious dynamics, etc. There are many subcategories of inner-mind trance. The one I want to concentrate on now is hypnosis—which I define as *an inner-mind trance characterized by rapport*.

Hypnosis is in its very nature an interpersonal thing. It involves a hypnotist or trance inducer and a subject. The hypnotist plays a central role. Throughout the duration of the hypnotic state, the subject is aware of the hypnotist. As a matter of fact, the hypnotist is incorporated as an inseparable part of the focus of the subject, and is in this way introduced into the inner world of the subject. This is what is called *hypnotic rapport*—a unique connection between hypnotist and hypnotized. In this role, the hypnotist serves as trance inducer and guide for as long as the person persists in the hypnotic state. To understand the nature of hypnosis it is crucial to identify the role of *rapport* in the hypnotic situation. Rapport is both the means by which suggestion enters into the situation and the reason suggestion in hypnosis is so effective. The incorporation of the person of the hypnotist into the subject's hypnotic focus means that the subject experiences the suggestions of the hypnotist as coming from him or herself. This gives

those suggestions an aura of trustworthiness that opens the subject to those suggestions in a uniquely effective way.

In this schema, there is no need for lists of the “phenomena of hypnosis” to establish the presence of hypnosis. In fact, the notion of “phenomena of hypnosis” as conventionally understood is misleading, for the phenomena of hypnosis actually consist of all phenomena that can occur in human experience. We find in the literature of hypnosis, ancient and modern, the broad recognition of the fact that any and all of the phenomena that occur in hypnosis also can be found in normal human life. The approach proposed here not only allows for this state of affairs, but actually requires it.

I would like to clarify the use of the term *state* in my definition of *trance* in general and *hypnosis* in particular. *State* has come to be used in two different senses: the strong sense, in which causal properties are attributed to the altered condition of mind, and the weak sense in which no causal properties are attributed to it as such. I use the term in the latter sense.

The state of hypnosis is specifically identifiable, not because it manifests conventionally agreed-upon phenomena, but because it exhibits a state of focus, the object of which is the subject’s inner mental world, which temporarily includes the hypnotist, accompanied by a diminished awareness of everything else. The resources evoked for the subject are those that pertain to that inner world and allow interacting with it in a way that the subject consciously or unconsciously determines to be useful.

What the subject judges useful may very well be compliance with the expectations of the hypnotist or hypnotic situation. This judgment may escape awareness, but it will be the determinant of what “hypnotic phenomena” occur.

Responses in the state of hypnosis may be experienced as *automatic*, happening without conscious intention. The reason is that the evocation of appropriate resources that occur in this type of trance involves tapping largely unconscious (physiologically based) and subconscious (mentally based) hidden resources. For that reason, the subject does not have access to the source of the judgment that determines what response is called for. The hypnotist, from his or her position of rapport, makes suggestions and the person responds appropriately, but why the response is judged appropriate and what produces the response escapes the subject’s awareness. Hypnosis might rightly be considered the most mysterious of trances precisely because it so obviously draws on inner capacities of which the subject has so little knowledge and over which the subject has so little control. The subconscious mind with its peculiar dynamics is still largely unexplored territory.

Weitzenhoffer wrote:

Too little is known regarding the hypnotic state to allow one to devise induction of hypnosis procedures from scratch with any certainty that they will work. For this reason, the general practice has reasonably been to use procedures that have been known to be most often associated with the production of hypnotic effects. (Weitzenhoffer 2000:13)

It is my belief that induction has been thought of as a chancy matter at least to some degree because the hypnotist did not know precisely what an induction was supposed to do. Using my proposed definition of trance, induction of trance becomes a straightforward matter. Any person, thing, thought, or situation that can create a focus can produce a trance. This simple approach helps clarify the fundamental nature of the induction of hypnotic trance. The destination is focus and diminished awareness, accompanied by the evocation of subliminal resources. The focus of *hypnotic* trance is the inner world, and the induction must provide a way to direct attention there. The possible paths to this destination are limited only by the ingenuity of the hypnotist. The induction process is facilitated by keeping in mind a principle often reiterated by the most ingenious trance inducer of the 20th century, Milton Erickson. It is called his “utilization principle”: Make creative use of whatever behavioral patterns or emotional concerns are presented by the individual hypnotic subject. The subject himself or herself will show what will be the most effective focus. This approach to hypnosis induction makes obsolete those often-cited verbal induction patterns that are aimed at the “average” hypnotic subject (Edmonston 1986). It also suggests a reevaluation of those schematized approaches to hypnotic induction used in experimentation with hypnosis.

How might one look at experimentation in hypnosis working within this new definition? The *induction* to be used in the experimentation is very straightforward, built right into the definition: Anything that brings about the state of hypnosis as defined is a valid induction. Establishing that the induction has succeeded and that the subject is in a state of hypnosis involves noting: 1) indications that the subject is in a focused state with diminished awareness of everything but the object of focus; 2) indications that the focus of the subject is his or her inner world; 3) indications that the subject has incorporated the hypnotizer into that focus (is in a state of rapport). Depth of hypnosis depends on the degree of focus on the inner world and corresponding diminution of awareness of everything else.

One of the principal tasks of the experimenter should be to explore the nature and extent of the inner resources that are evoked in the hypnotic state. As already pointed out, those resources will be evoked which the subject consciously or unconsciously finds useful. The particular manifestation of

the resource is a “phenomenon of hypnosis.” If the experimenter (consciously or unconsciously) cues the subject about what is expected, that subject may very well comply. So if the experimenter is looking for phenomena found on one of the traditional lists, that is what he is likely to find. On the other hand, if the experimenter wants to clearly direct the experiment toward the production of a specifically chosen phenomenon of interest, he will be able to do so. In the absence of such direction, spontaneous phenomena will occur, such as a memory, a symbol, a feeling, a perspective, or one or the other traditionally occurring phenomena, possibly including “paranormal” phenomena.

To sum up, the concept of *trance* offers a specific perspective on all the phenomena of human experience; the concept of *hypnosis* applies that perspective to a particular kind of trance—an inner-mind trance with rapport. Hypnosis has come to be seen by many as mysterious, even undefinable. The reason is that trance states, including hypnosis, can tap the full, incredibly rich spectrum of inner resources available to all human beings. So if there is a mystery here, it lies not in the trance state itself, but in the unfathomable depth of human capacity that is revealed in the trance.

#### Four Categories of Trance

Over the years, to clarify things for myself, I have devised four categories of trance (Crabtree 1997). The choice of these categories is my own, and I do not claim that they constitute the best possible way to distinguish the various types of trance. The division is not based on theoretical grounds, but empirical and practical ones. Categories are assigned in terms of *the various kinds of objects of focus*. It could well be that there should be more categories than four, or that distinctions between them should run along different lines. I include these categories in this article principally to provide an opportunity to present examples of what I mean by trance states in everyday life.

**Situational Trance:** Here the focus is some situation, activity, project, or action. Reading a book, threading a needle, acting in a play, and teaching a class are examples of this kind of trance. The famous Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, considered by some the best of the 20th century, wrote that when he performed he was in a trance (Nijinsky 1937:49). Pablo Picasso described his state when concentrating on painting as a trance. Speaking about painting in the illumination of a spotlight at night, he said, “There must be darkness everywhere except on the canvas, so that the painter becomes hypnotized by his own work and paints almost as though he were in a trance” (Gilot & Lake 1964:116–117). Athletes performing in the “zone”

are in a state of focus that well exemplifies situational trance. Our daily lives are interweaving tapestries of situational trances. From making coffee in the morning to planning a home renovation in the evening, from writing a paper to correcting an exam, situational trances continually manifest. We are evolutionarily equipped to flow with relative ease from one situational focus to another.

**Interpersonal Trance:** Interpersonal trances involve relationships between persons. All personal relationships are trances insofar as they entail mutual concentration and focus. The focus is on the other person, things connected to that person, and the interpersonal interaction that occurs. The interpersonal trance is experienced intermittently as the persons involved interact with each other. Intensity of relating varies and so interpersonal trances vary in depth. The most absorbing and the most meaningful relationships establish deep trances, while passing relationships involve light trances. From the relatively light trance of a trivial conversation with a friend to the deep trance of lovemaking, interpersonal trances are found everywhere in ordinary human interactions.

**Group-Mind Trance:** Group-mind trances involve focus on the social dynamics of experience. A group mind is what results when many individuals gather together and focus on one idea or activity. It embodies the ideas, emotions, intentions, and values that characterize the group. Once constituted, it exerts an influence over its members that is to some extent consciously identifiable, but to a greater extent exercised through subconscious interactions. The influence is on both the thinking and acting of the members. Sometimes that influence induces thoughts and actions out of character for the individual members when separate from the group. Striving to maintain one's own thinking and values in a group context can be very difficult. Group-mind trances involve individuals becoming absorbed in the group thinking and attitudes, and experiencing a diminished awareness of their thinking and attitudes in other contexts. Examples of more enduring group-mind trance situations are the family, the church, the staff, the corporation, and, in the broadest manifestation, the culture at large. Examples of temporary group-mind trances are rock concert audiences, soccer crowds, and lynch mobs.

**Inner-Mind Trance:** The inner world is where you go when you close your eyes and think about or imagine something. This trance provides access to a broad variety of inner experiences. The inner world is always available and its exploration always a possibility. An inner-mind trance involves focus on the arena of inner mental and emotional richness, and diminished awareness of the outer environment. Inner-mind trances take up a great deal of space in our everyday lives, and appear in the form of everything from

worry to meditation, from reverie to dreaming. Hypnosis is a special kind of inner-mind trance, for it involves not only focus on the inner world, but also rapport, a special connection that incorporates the hypnotist into the focus. An inner-mind trance *without* rapport should not be called hypnosis at all. For that reason, the notion of *self-hypnosis* makes sense only if the incorporation of the hypnotist into the inner world that occurred in previous hypnotic sessions stays with the person in memory with sufficient strength that it can be reestablished in the imagination when the person attempts hypnosis alone. This would amount to the establishment of rapport with an absent person. This concept was already developed in the writing of the Marquis de Puységur in his therapeutic work with his young client Alexandre (Crabtree 1993:79–82). Rapport with an absent person may also be used as a model for understanding neurotic attachments.

### **Evocation of Appropriate Subliminal Resources**

Key to my proposal about hypnosis is the notion that in trance states there is an automatic evocation of resources that the individual possesses but that lie latent within until focus on the trance object mobilizes them. I use the word “subliminal” in the sense intended by Frederic Myers (*sub-limen*—below the threshold of consciousness) in his discussion of the “subliminal self” (Kelly, Kelly, Crabtree, Gauld, Grosso, & Greyson 2007:577–607). The evoked resources are appropriate to deal with the object of the trance focus. This state of affairs holds for all trances, including the trance of hypnosis. Evoked responses arise infallibly and immediately once a focus is achieved.

By “appropriate” I mean those resources which, from the subject’s perspective, are needed to deal with the focus at hand. “Appropriate” does not necessarily mean “best.” Others may well believe that what is evoked in the subject is not the best possible response. Whether it is “best” or not is irrelevant to what I mean by appropriate. Appropriateness is determined by the subject’s particular understanding of the unique circumstances of this particular moment, responding from the conditionings that are currently in place. For that reason, a “neurotic” response, for example, may be “appropriate” because as the person is now constituted, consciously and subconsciously, that is what the organism as a whole judges to be fitting. As mentioned, this judgment largely escapes conscious awareness.

What accounts for this phenomenon? Why is it that the appropriate responses are inevitably brought into play? I believe we are constellated in such a way that as soon as we perceive something, we are stirred to action of some sort with regard to that thing. We are built for action; we attend to something and we seek some way to interact with that thing. Versions of

this view are found in the writings of such philosophers as William James (1890) and Henri Bergson (1912).

Responses may be physiological, emotional, or mental. The resources available to be tapped may be placed in six categories: 1) genetically embedded responses, 2) overlearned habits, 3) unconscious connections to surrounding reality, 4) dynamic subconscious mental/emotional resources, 5) preconscious memories, and 6) something that might be called the creative faculty. All six are present in all trances to some degree. As already pointed out, conscious intention has some part to play in deciding which resources are evoked, but the decision occurs mostly outside conscious awareness.

For example, if my focus is on *designing* a wooden bed, my creative imagination supplies me with a series of possible structures to consider, my memory provides information about its optimal dimensions and the stresses to which it will be subjected, and drafting skills, learned long ago and now become habitual, come forward to aid with my sketches. If I subsequently focus on *building* that bed, a different array of responses comes into play. I immediately have access to a variety of overlearned habits relating to using carpentry tools. I retrieve memories of the design I had arrived at. I imagine modifications that need to be made as I fabricate the parts that I will assemble. The more intensely I concentrate on this task, the more efficiently each resource becomes available and the more skilled my work.

Moving from the ordinary to the extraordinary in evoked resources, I would like to mention evoked subliminal resources that relate to anomalous phenomena. From the first instances of magnetic somnambulism to contemporary hypnotic practice, there have been frequent reports of anomalous phenomena occurring in the trance state. I will here limit the present discussion of this type of phenomena to instances of what are called paranormal phenomena: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. The reality of these phenomena is, of course, an empirical question, and their genuineness is demonstrated by applying the same scientific criteria that are used for all investigated phenomena. It is my opinion that the existence of these phenomena has been adequately demonstrated in the abundant relevant literature of the past two hundred years. I will not go into that question in detail here, but would refer the reader to *Irreducible Mind* (Kelly et al. 2007) as a starting point for studying the most relevant research in this area. For the purposes of this article, I am going to accept that anomalous phenomena sometimes occur for individuals in trance states. Given that the phenomena are genuine, it is sufficient to say that they point to a particular type of subliminal resource that may be evoked in a variety of situations. Virtually all these situations involve formal or informal trance

inductions. That trance states may evoke paranormal phenomena follows naturally from the proposed definition, for if paranormal abilities exist, they are going to be experienced in some kind of focused state. However, just how it comes about that the subliminal self possesses this resource and how it is able to mobilize it are yet to be discovered.

There is no question that hypnosis proved a uniquely effective access to certain types of subliminal resources, as the history of animal magnetism and hypnosis testifies. Hypnosis is also a form of access that can be reliably brought about through specifically identifiable means, thereby making those resources available to systematic study. It follows that one of the principal tasks of experimentation with hypnosis is to seek out the psychological, neurological, and biological concomitants to the evocation of these resources.

Here I would simply like to reiterate my belief that the real mystery of hypnosis is not the state or condition or process that may be involved, but how it is that human beings are capable of producing the type of phenomena that have been conventionally associated with hypnosis over the past two centuries. The state or condition or process we call hypnosis does not of itself provide the answer to this question, for these same phenomena—all of them—can be seen to occur in the absence of hypnosis. So, as it turns out, the phenomena of hypnosis are the phenomena of life, and Orne's belief that hypnosis does not enable subjects to transcend normal limits of human performance is true, because normal human performance includes the most extraordinary things.

### **Trances as Universal Experiences**

Weitzenhoffer, describing the field of hypnosis as “chaotic,” said that “part of the problem lies in the ubiquity of the slippery state of hypnosis” (Weitzenhoffer 2000:8). He knew that anyone who defines hypnosis by attempting to specify it in terms of unique phenomena runs into serious problems, for all of the phenomena of hypnosis are found to occur *naturally*. The only way around this, he believed, was to emphasize the *artificial* nature of hypnosis, and make that its defining feature. However, defining artificiality and specifying what that means with regard to hypnosis entails many problems of its own.

The problem identified by Weitzenhoffer is removed by resituating hypnosis as a trance, as I have defined it. As already mentioned, the understanding of trance states I am proposing here has as one of its consequences that trance states are a normal part of life, that they are in play in every type of human experience. This means that all of us are familiar with them in practice, even though we may not have explicitly recognized their



place in our lives. That is why deliberately induced trances, such as hypnosis, are ordinarily not experienced by the subject as particularly alien or strange.

Although trances may manifest in a simple form, in most of life's situations we are involved with *clusters* of trances, each with an identifiable focus, and each focus possessing meaningful relationships to the others—in other words, a cluster is a unified, cohesive grouping of trance states. The sub-foci of a cluster are related to one another by the fact that there is a larger focus, a palpable unity that characterizes the cluster as such and holds together the sub-foci (as illustrated in my bed-building example). These sub-foci each have an important part to play, contributing in their own unique way to the one larger focus. Some trance clusters become stable and difficult to disrupt. Typically clusters come and go, but normally a well-established trance cluster, one that has become habitual, can be fairly easily reconstituted as needed. Nevertheless, most clusters do alter over time. An example of such a cluster is the grouping and flowing interactions of trance states brought to bear in teaching a class on a particular subject.

There are larger groupings of clusters which have their own unity and coherence that tend to persist over time. Such groupings may be called *constellations*—identifiable groups of related members. The most familiar of these constellations is what might be called the baseline normal consciousness of daily life. This is the grouping of all those trances and clusters of trances that habitually come and go in day-to-day living. We are familiar with them and are not surprised when they appear and disappear within our field of consciousness.

This baseline constellation is difficult to disrupt, having become stable through frequent use and the familiarity of its clusters. The reason the same clusters tend to recur is their practical usefulness, embodying, as they do, tried and true ways to get along in the world. There is a definite feeling of dependability about trances within the normal-consciousness constellation, and consequently a certain sense of security when that constellation is in play.

This everyday-life constellation is made up of elements of all four types of trance. These trances are experienced as “ordinary” and “normal.” This judgment is made on the basis of criteria derived from a combination of our culturally formed beliefs about what is normal, and beliefs we arrive at through personal experience. People who live within the same cultural context tend to develop similar everyday-life trance constellations. Because this constellation is by far the most familiar one, and the most stable, it may fittingly be called our *normal* constellation, the one against which we measure all others. An example of another kind of trance constellation is our dream world.

Our normal constellation constitutes the fabric of ordinary life and we thrive within its familiarity and stability. Although we may at times move off into other constellations, we know sooner or later we will find ourselves back at this one. It is the home base to which we inevitably return after trips away. But what about those trips? What about those other groupings of trances and clusters that we occasionally visit? These non-ordinary groupings are what Charles Tart popularized under the name “altered states of consciousness” (see Tart 1969), and in the heady psychedelic days of the 1960s they were indeed referred to as “trips.” They are “altered” states in that these trances and clusters differ from those of the baseline, normal, everyday constellation of trances.

In the conduct of normal life, we experience a certain ease and fluidity as we move from focus to focus, from trance to trance, and from cluster to cluster. Why that fluidity is possible is an important question. We find a clue to the answer in the exposition of the concept of focus and fringe in the writing of William James. In James’s view, we become aware of things in such a way that each object of experience has a center of attention, or focus, and a fringe of which we are only dimly conscious. He speaks of that fringe as a “psychic overtone” that gives us a sense of relations that exist beyond the central focus of attention. The concept of “relations” is critical here. In James’s philosophy of radical empiricism, relations between the things we perceive are as real as the things themselves. These relations are not added by the mind, but exist apart from our perception of them. He wrote,

Of most of its [the object’s] relations we are only aware in the penumbral nascent way of a “fringe” of unarticulated affinities about it. (James 1890:l:259)

It is precisely because of this “penumbral nascent” awareness that we can form a sense of *where to go next*, what new focus to move toward, as we live our daily lives. In perceiving the relations attached to the object of our attention, we have a sense of the way it is connected to all other things. This way of perceiving allows us to shift easily and, for the most part, appropriately from one center of attention or focus to the next, all with little or no conscious awareness of why we are making that move.

### **Contributors**

It is a truism that in the evolution of ideas in human culture no “new” idea is really new, and that progress occurs only when previous progress is incorporated into the new. The new is really a new perspective on what is already given. This is certainly true of my proposal about hypnosis.

All of the elements of my proposal can be found in the rich literary tradition of hypnosis. What is new is the combination of those elements and the perspective under which they are viewed. Most significantly, the situation of hypnosis, as I define it, in the broader context of trance, as I define it, is, I believe, new, as is my take on the notion of evocation of appropriate subliminal resources. It also seems to me that the resulting altered view of the “phenomena of hypnosis” and of hypnotic induction offers something new.

I would like to say a word about the influences that have affected my thinking on these matters. First of all, I have been instructed by my psychotherapy clients, with whom I have used hypnosis over the past forty years, as well as by my own personal experience of hypnotherapy.

Beyond these concrete experiences, I have been greatly assisted in my attempts to rationalize hypnosis and hypnotic practice by many researchers in the field. In the early 1990s, when I was looking for a way to talk about hypnosis that overcame the ambiguity and confusion found everywhere in the literature, in desperation I opened *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* and looked under the entry “trance.” It said, among other things, that a trance is a state of *abstraction* or *absorption*. I thought that it would make sense to combine both aspects and see trance as a state of absorption in something and abstraction from everything else.

Shortly after this, I was reading Milton Erickson's account of his hypnotic work with a woman who had come to seek his help with pain. He described speaking intently with her about her pain and focusing her attention more and more on describing that pain in detail, and on his words to her. He got her to sit and notice every aspect of her pain and describe it. He said that he believed that if his secretary would have come into the room and played the drums, the woman would not have noticed. Yet she would notice immediately if he rustled a piece of paper or looked at his watch. She was extremely aware of everything he did and said, but totally unaware of everything else in the environment. Then he said,

As far as I was concerned, as far as the therapeutic situation was concerned, this woman was in an utterly light trance. But in relation to alien reality, to *irrelevant* reality, she was in a very profound trance because she was so completely inattentive to it. (Erickson 1983:111)

Reading this account, I was put in mind of the definition of trance I had worked out—absorption and obliviousness—and I realized that Erickson's notion of trance was exactly that. The only difference was that he concentrated on the inattentiveness or obliviousness of trance, whereas I believed that the

absorption aspect was also part of the meaning of trance. So I would have said that this woman was in a profound trance which had as its focus her attention to her pain and to Erickson's suggestions, and as its obliviousness everything else in the environment. So she was not in *two* trances at once—a light and a deep one—but *one* deep one. This important insight, gained from Erickson's story, solidified my thinking and provided the starting point for my perspective on hypnosis from that time on.

I liked the idea of using *trance* as the key to understanding hypnosis. It allowed discussion of hypnosis to occur relatively free from the baggage that it had acquired over the previous one hundred fifty years. It also provided a broader context in which to situate hypnosis—as a subspecies of trance. I noticed that Erickson had a predilection for the word *trance*, and wondered if perhaps he wanted to use this more venerable term (going back to at least the 15th century) to evoke a more open-ended approach to understanding hypnosis.

Many years before my attempt to resituate hypnosis, I had studied and written about the history of animal magnetism (mesmerism) and early hypnotism (Crabtree 1988, 1993). The work of the Marquis de Puységur had struck me as revolutionary and a development of Mesmer's vision far beyond anything Mesmer ever dreamed of, into the realm of the psychological. Puységur discovered artificial somnambulism, which he called "magnetic sleep," and the development of his original insights eventually led to the psychodynamic understanding of the human psyche that made possible our modern psychotherapy of the subconscious (Crabtree 2003). One of the things Puységur insisted on was paying attention to the insights exhibited by subjects in the somnambulistic state. He believed that somnambulists were able to tap an inner knowledge relating to disease and healing that was totally reliable. This was the first hint in the mesmeric-hypnotic literature of the remarkable inner resources that reside within human beings outside normal awareness, what James called "beyond the margin" of ordinary consciousness (see Crabtree 1993:116–119).

A hundred years after Puységur, Frederic Myers took this concept to its ultimate conclusion in writing, in the 1890s, about the "subliminal self," the region "below the threshold" of consciousness, which is the font of the most remarkable human capacities. Myers's vision (see Kelly et al. 2007:66–97) influenced my thinking in developing the notion of "evoked subliminal resources." In the same period, William James published his *Principles of Psychology*. Among other contributions to my thinking, his ideas about "focus and fringe" in perception helped me to understand the way we effortlessly shift from trance to trance in daily life.

There are a number of modern authors in the literature of hypnosis

who have shaped my thought. T. X. Barber insisted that experiments must begin with the data—the phenomena of hypnosis. He attempted to lay out what these phenomena were in terms of those mentioned in the literature. Thinking about this way of specifying the phenomena, I realized that any such specification was patently arbitrary and put thinking about hypnosis on the wrong footing. I felt that the sociocognitive school of thought came nearer to the truth. The sociocognitive perspective on hypnosis recognized that the forms hypnotic phenomena take are, and always have been, determined by social and interpersonal expectancies, and attempts on the part of hypnotic subjects to fulfill them. This calls into question every list of the “phenomena of hypnosis” from every period of its history. Conventionally accepted lists are made up of phenomena that were expected by the researchers and practitioners of mesmerism and hypnosis of the era, and could not provide a basis for a “definition” of hypnosis. The nature of hypnosis cannot be grasped in terms of such lists.

However, sociocognitive theorists insisted that hypnosis has no “nature” at all, in the sense of being a specified state of the human psyche that could be distinguished from other states. In this, I believe, they were mistaken. I certainly agree that hypnosis is not a “thing,” and that the phenomena of hypnosis are socially molded. Nevertheless there is some recurring reality that can be legitimately named (we have called it hypnosis), that manifests a potential that evolution has embedded in the very constitution of human beings, and that is not a purely socially conditioned complex. Whatever culturally conditioned forms the phenomena may take, they manifest something consistent and enduring. Hypnosis is not an evanescent mist of relations, but something that actually has some substance. It is that substantial reality that intrigues everyone who engages in hypnosis research.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion of hypnosis over the many years of its history has resulted in a state of affairs that has diminished the usefulness of the term. It has become a discussion not of an identifiable state or condition, but of an arbitrarily selected and constantly shifting group of “phenomena” which are said to be associated with an undefinable something, “hypnosis,” which seems to have a kind of phantom existence. What is needed is to bring a new perspective to bear, one that will provide us with a larger context which will allow us to make further progress in exploring hypnosis. That context is, for me, based on an understanding of trance. Trance is susceptible to a practical definition in a way that hypnosis as commonly conceived has not been. In this wider context, a new situating of hypnosis can occur that allows for its meaningful definition and a reinvigorated approach to its study.

In the end, as with all theorizing, the value of my proposal for understanding trance and hypnosis will be determined by the empirical evidence. The best theory is one that is consistent within itself, is not unnecessarily complex, does not contradict well-established principles in related fields of research (in this case, for example, neurology), and applies to the broad spectrum of the data found in the literature. I believe my understanding of trance and hypnosis qualifies and actually fits the data better than approaches previously used.

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