

AN EVOLUTION OF THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF HYPNOTISM PRIOR TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND SUBCONSCIOUS

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Abstract

While today hypnosis is widely used as an adjunct for many therapeutic purposes, clinical as well as psychological, an embarrassing historical heritage of somewhat esoteric practices has prevented it from becoming mainstream in the fields of medicine and psychology. Today, hypnosis has been scientifically validated as a valuable adjunctive therapy. However, hypnosis has a long history, having passed through three main historical phases and currents of thinking: the ancient religiously based doctrine of the Egyptians and the Greeks as well as the medieval Christian superstitious beliefs that later gave birth to ‘spiritualism’; Mesmer’s ‘fluidism’ founded on physics and nature; and finally the psychologically based ‘suggestionism’, as a premise to the study of the subconscious mind. In this study, I provide a synthesis of the history of magnetism and hypnotism. Copyright © 2007 British Society of Experimental & Clinical Hypnosis. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: hypnotism, history of hypnosis, psychology suggestion, magnetism, mesmerism, trance

Rituals and religion

A very old curative and spiritual practice

The term ‘hypnosis’ was introduced by James Braid in 1843, but its practice under different labels has been known since antiquity. Egyptians used a form of it in their dream temples (Waterfield, 2004). Lockert (2001) refers to a 3000 years old stele discovered by Charles Muses in 1972 depicting a trance induction scene during the reign of Ramses II. In Greece, Socrates and his contemporaries also referred to the power to heal with words (Muses and Young, 1972). In the Bible, a number of situations could be identified as hypnotic experiences (Genesis 2:21, 1 Samuel 26:12, Job 4:13, 33:15, Acts 10:10). In the Talmud, for instance, *Kavanah* is a meditative practice that requires relaxation, concentration and focus. In all parts of the world, druids, gurus, shamans and priests have used a variety of rituals and customs, to induce trancelike states that may be construed as a form of hypnosis. Drums, chanting, dancing, fire and drugs are some of the techniques used to apply trance in ritualistic ways.

Medieval times and negative superstitions

In Europe during the Middle Ages, often perceived as an era of irrationality, superstition and tyranny, trance states were no longer considered healing or spiritually enlightening. Christianity totally rejected trance states as a religious practice. According to this

tradition, the Divine would never bypass the normal conscious mental mechanisms of the human mind. Therefore, trance states must be considered as satanic or demonic states driven by occult forces. These evil spirits had to be expelled through exorcism practised by priests and ministers. However, during the medieval period several people left a mark that was influential on the practice of magnetism and hypnosis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576), a medieval Italian mathematician, in his work *De Subtilitate Rerum*, printed in 1551, described his peculiar trance or ecstatic states and his out of body experiences in which he no longer felt the gout that had made him constantly suffer. This might be considered as the first reported self-hypnosis practice.

The physician Paracelsus (1493–1541) believed that the stars could influence humans through some kind of magnetic force that he called sympathetic magnetism. According to his beliefs, the less a person can resist astral influences, the more they are suggestible and may be made to act at a distance.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) was a German magician, occult writer, astrologer, and alchemist known for his *occulta philosophia* and his interest in the practice of magical and occult arts. The way he would arrange for his arrival and captivate his audience is very similar to the ‘pre-talk’ used by modern stage hypnotists as well as hypnotherapists to convince and put their subjects at ease.

Pre Mesmer period

The first person to propose the theory that a magnetic fluid, from a heavenly origin, might have an influence upon disease and healing was the Swiss alchemist and physician Paracelsus in 1529. Two centuries before Franz Anton Mesmer he introduced the idea of animal magnetism. However, as claimed by Burkhard (2005), the real precursor in the field of modern hypnotherapy was Father Johann Joseph Gassner (1729–1779), who in the 1770s would practise exorcism (*exorcismus probativus*) according to a rite that was widely criticized by the religious community of his time. He would deliberately provoke the symptoms and then cause them to disappear by instructing the patient on how to do so by an exorcism formula. He would then transfer to his subjects the knowledge on how to behave in their day-to-day life to prevent reoccurrence of the symptoms. Apart from the religious context of the time, and a magical-mystical theory of illness, this procedure is very close to the regression techniques used by modern hypnotherapists. Burkhard argues that Gassner, considering his very elaborate and psychologically oriented approach, was, rather than Mesmer, the real predecessor of modern hypnosis.

In fact, Mesmer’s real mentor was a Hungarian-born Jesuit priest, court astronomer and head of the observatory in Vienna, Father Maximilian Hell (or Höll) (1720–1792). He followed a medieval idea introduced by Paracelsus, using lodestones as magnets supposed to have a curative agent. He seemed to have had considerable success in relieving people with pain, which persuaded Mesmer, as a physician, to investigate further. Hell’s astrological theories inspired Mesmer’s thesis dissertation, *De Planetarum Influxu*, defended at the University of Vienna in 1766.

Scientific times: from freemasonic lodges to spiritualism

Mesmer and the scientific era

With Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) comes a new era, the medical one. Anton Mesmer was raised in a Swiss-German family with a very strong Catholic tradition. He was encouraged into the priesthood. At first he entered a Jesuit college, but pretty soon

he became interested in physics, mathematics and astronomy and gave up the Church in favour of medicine. Indeed, he graduated as a Doctor of Medicine at the University of Vienna and according to Lockert (2001) became the first 'psychotherapist' even though his approach had very little in common with the current practice of hypnosis. Strongly influenced by Father Maximillian Hell, he would credit magnetism (mineral, then animal) with the power of healing, and tended to overlook the intersubjective nature of the cures.

His ideas were very inspired by esoteric Masonic doctrines. Like Hell, he was a spiritual disciple of Paracelsus, but he soon distanced himself from the religious tradition that had prevailed in the practice of trancelike inductions until then. Indeed, Chertok (1981: 4) stresses the fact that 'before mesmerism the therapeutic relationship was often linked with religious concepts, as with magic and even witchcraft'.

In fact, Mesmer was a man of his time, influenced by the Scientific Revolution then underway. Isaac Newton (1642–1727) had invented the reflecting telescope, and discovered the law of gravity in 1687. In 1777 Antoine Laurent de Lavoisier (1743–1794), the father of modern chemistry, discovered the nature of combustion and alchemy was swept away by his work.

In the period that followed from the new view of the world introduced by the Scientific Revolution, often called the Enlightenment, reason and science were the primary basis of authority. This was opposed to medieval and Renaissance views driven by religion and loyalty to some central organization, namely the Emperor or the King, who was supposed to be a representation of the Divine on earth.

Crabtree (1993) relates that in 1774 Mesmer first discovered animal magnetism when he watched Father Hell apply magnets to the bodies of persons with various symptoms. Mesmer also used magnets made for him by Hell to treat patients with hysterical symptoms, but his success was credited to Hell. Later on, in his 'Letter on Magnetic Treatment' (1775), Mesmer claimed that magnets were not the only elements channelling energy and that the same effects of magnetization could be produced on stones, wood, paper, various metals, material, glass, vegetal substances and even living creatures. After meeting Gassner in Switzerland in 1777 and observing how the priest effected cures without the use of magnets by manipulation alone, Mesmer discarded the sole power of magnets.

However, in 1775, before the Munich Academy of Sciences, Mesmer refuted the religious beliefs behind the exorcisms carried out by Johann Joseph Gassner. Contrary to the latter, Mesmer did not believe that disease was a form of demonic possession. According to him, Gassner's cures were due to the fact that he possessed a high degree of animal magnetism. In fact, Mesmer totally dismissed the supernatural aspect of the phenomena that was, in his mind, entirely grounded in nature.

For him, a universal fluid is present in everything in the universe and more especially affects the nervous systems of humans. This fluid emits magnetic vibrations. According to his theory, ailments are caused by an uneven distribution of this fluid. This would be later known as Mesmer's electro-magnetic theory of 'animal magnetism' (hence the term 'mesmerism'), 'animal' meaning 'animate' as opposed to 'mineral' (not to 'human').

Mesmer married a well-off aristocratic widow whose connections helped him to build a prosperous practice. However, in 1777, he was banned from the Medical Faculty of Vienna and accused of charlatanism after having temporarily improved the condition of Maria Theresa von Paradis, a young woman with congenital blindness (Forrest, 1974). He left for Paris to avoid a scandal once the lady had been removed from his care by force and her blindness had come back for good. Maria Theresa's family had no interest

in seeing too much improvement in her condition. Had she been completely cured, she might have lost the financial support that she was receiving from the Austrian Empress, who happened to be the mother of Marie-Antoinette, the Queen of France.

In 1778, Mesmer arrived in Paris with a letter of introduction from the Austrian minister of external affairs. As reported by Darnton (1968), Mesmer arrived in France at the end of the Enlightenment. At that time, scientific theories like Newton's gravity had been made intelligible by philosophical writers like Voltaire who believed in civil liberties and freedom of religion. Franklin's electricity was very popular and widely demonstrated in Parisian museums. Cavendish discovered hydrogen in 1776 and the Montgolfier brothers made it possible in 1783 to lift Man into the air in hot air balloons. Mesmer's contemporaries were surrounded by invisible forces and the theory of animal magnetism seemed to fit perfectly in this scientific context. Pretty soon Mesmer's reputation and charisma made him a hero among the French aristocratic circles and his office was flooded with people of diverse social backgrounds. For a while, he tried to attract the attention of the Société Royale de Médecine de Paris, seeing his magnetic cure as an alternative to electric shocks. Eventually, most of the Society's members rejected the technique, feeling that Mesmer's demonstrations were not scientifically convincing.

This did not prevent him from staying very popular among the French noble community and to be given a residence where he could practise his healing art. In 1782, after seeing his methods widely attacked, and experiencing the continuing opposition of the medical profession, Mesmer chose another means to promote his ideas and support himself. This was by setting up an organization – the Société de l'Harmonie Universelle – which consisted of a clinic, a teaching establishment and a register of qualified members who had received his training, and who paid for the privilege. In time, there arose a division in this organization also, when other members disagreed with Mesmer.

Mesmer would cure people by inducing convulsive attacks, which were curative crises meant to redistribute the fluids harmoniously. His interest in electricity and magnetism, in vogue among scientific circles of the time, led him to build his famous *baquet*, a device consisting of a large drum filled with bottles of water which he had previously magnetized.

The *baquet* is described thus by Crabtree (1993: 13–14):

[A]n oaken tub specially designed to store and transmit magnetic fluid. The tub, some four or five feet in diameter and one foot in depth, had a lid constructed in two pieces. At the bottom of the tub, arranged in concentric circles, were bottles, some empty and pointing toward the center, some containing magnetized water and pointing out to the circumference. They were several layers of such rows. The tub was filled with water to which iron filings and powdered glass were added. Iron rods emerging through holes in the tub's lid were bent at right angles so that the ends of the rods could be placed against the afflicted areas of the patient's body. A number of patients could use the *baquet* at one time. They were encouraged to augment the magnetic fluid by holding hands, thus creating a circuit.

The session was performed according to a very theatrical ritual, inside a large magnetic salon decorated with large mirrors supposed to reflect invisible fluids, and under the resonance of drums coupled with the eerie sound of the legendary glass harmonica played by an imposing Mesmer wrapped in an esoteric cloak. His silent assistants based in every corner of the room to control convulsing patients looked quite as impressive as their master.

As noticed by Chertok and Saussure (1979) and Chertok (1981), there was no talking during the treatment, so there were no direct verbal injunctions. He would establish 'rapport' through physical contact more than affective, even if he admitted that feelings were important. His style was rather authoritarian or dominating. There was no real place for affective relationship. No verbal dialogue or initiative from the patient was involved. In fact, 'by forbidding the "verbal dialogue", he forced the patient into a deep regression where the "somatic dialogue" was alone permitted' (Chertok and Saussure 1979: 6). In that, he differed from his follower Puységur. For Mesmer somnambulism was just a side effect of animal magnetism.

Little is known about Mesmer's relationship to his female patients but some magnetists following his concepts were suspected of eroticism in the practice of magnetism. This was at the origin of a secret report to the king on the matter, written by Jean Sylvain Bailly in 1784. In this report, released after the French Revolution, he explained to the king his concern that women could easily be under the influence of the magnetizer and compared the observed women's convulsions to orgasmic reactions. He stated that the commissioners observed that women were always much more prone to enter into a trance than men were. This difference is accounted for by the different makeup of the sexes. Women have, as a rule, more responsive nerves. Their imagination is livelier, more excitable, and thus more easily awakened. The great responsiveness of their nerves, which accounts for their having more delicate and more exquisite senses, makes them more susceptible to the impression of a touch (Bailly et al., 1784: 115).

In that same year of 1784, Louis XVI, the King of France commanded that mesmerism should be the subject of two official investigations. Two commissions were appointed and investigated on animal magnetism. The first commission was undertaken jointly by the Académie des Sciences and the Académie de Médecine, with people like the chemists Jean d'Arcet and Antoine Lavoisier, the physician Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, the astronomer Jean Sylvain Bailly and the American ambassador Benjamin Franklin who happened to be the inventor of Mesmer's much-loved glass harmonica, while the second commission was undertaken by the Société Royale, including personalities like the botanist Antoine Laurent de Jussieu. However, as explained by Bjornstrom (1887), Mesmer refused to open his parlors for this investigation. Therefore, the commissioners observed the practice of d'Eslon, one of Mesmer's trainees, to draw their conclusions on animal magnetism.

Both commissions denied the existence of any fluid and attributed the curative effects to touch, imagination and imitation. For Bailly et al. (1784), 'Magnetism has not been altogether unavailing to the philosophy which condemns it: it is an additional fact to record among the errors of the human mind, and a great experiment on the strength of the imagination.' However, the commission did not deny the affective bond existing between magnetist and patient or the cure itself. The conclusions were only on the topic of the existence of an animal magnetism. As noted by Darnton (1968), this report woke up the anger of pure mesmerists, notably a lawyer named Nicolas Bergasse (1750–1832), who perceived it as a 'cabal of self-interested academicians' and who, pamphlet after pamphlet, defended their cause with the argument that 'the commission exposed its bias by refusing to investigate the orthodox doctrine practice by Mesmer' (Darnton, 1968: 64).

Nevertheless, the condemnation of the medical world coupled with the premises of the French revolution put the discredit on mesmerism and marked the end of its golden age. At the age of 54, Mesmer left Paris, retired near Lake Constance and never returned. However, Mesmer's concepts were not forgotten, not only in the pre-romantic sensibility

of some propagators of his ideas like Bergasse, but also by his more rational and scientific medical followers like d'Elson, Puysegur and Deleuze.

Mesmer and his followers (from physics to spiritual psychology)

Mesmer's prime supporter in Paris was a doctor, the physician to the Count d'Artois, Charles Nicholas d'Eslon (1750–1786), who came to him with pain and admired his charismatic personality. However, he soon separated from him to practise independently after being condemned by the faculty for supporting a 'charlatan' in his theories. Armand-Marie-Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puysegur (1751–1825) is probably one of the most famous disciples of Mesmer. He was a French aristocrat who had been introduced to animal magnetism by his brother, Antoine-Hyacinthe, a naval officer, who, through his travels, had been in contact with native populations and voodoo practices. After being trained by Mesmer in Paris, Puysegur returned to his domain in Buzancy, near Soissons, where he started his own practice of animal magnetism. Like Mesmer, he strongly believed in the existence of a universal fluid that could be passed to all kinds of elements and granted them with healing powers. The first thing he did was magnetize a tree that, according to the legend, retained its virtues long after he left his property for Strasbourg. For years, hundred of people would come to touch it, expecting to be cured.

In 1784, at the age of 33 years, the Marquis de Puysegur accidentally discovered a phenomenon that he called 'magnetic sleep' or 'magnetic somnambulism'. He was leading into trance Victor Race, a young peasant of his estate, suffering from congestion of his lungs and a fever. Instead of the convulsing crisis that had been observed in most Mesmerian practices of magnetism, the young man entered a deep state of relaxation, calm crises that resemble the spontaneous somnambulism of certain sleepers. Puysegur compared this state to natural sleep-walking, with the difference that in this case it had been induced by suggestion, using relaxation and calming techniques. Indeed, for Puysegur, violent convulsions were not necessary; words were sufficient. Even touch, one of the main premises of mesmerism, was not really required. Crabtree (1993: 47) explains that for Puysegur 'the gentle magnetic crisis was the true healing crisis'. The most important component was for the subject to be 'subordinated' to the magnetist. He could hear no voice but that of the operator and obey no suggestion but his. He would be totally under his influence. Puysegur emphasized the importance of 'rapport' between the subject and the healer. Intention and attention on the part of the magnetist was a main component of the success of the cure. This way, magnetic power produced in the operator's mind could be transferred to the patient via his fingertips. The subject would respond to and obey the magnetizer only, with revulsion to anyone else.

This could be the premises to the later work of Charcot and then Freud whose ideas on transference and countertransference were very similar to Puysegur's rapport. For Chertok (and Saussure, 1979; 1981) referring to Puysegur's *Du Magnetisme Animal* (1807), the magnetist had to listen to the person seeking relief. Often the client had to re-experience painful feelings. The sessions had to be of regular frequency and duration. The magnetist had to be neutral and patient. Furthermore, while in somnambulist state, different fantasy situations could be suggested to the subject (a technique close to today's guided meditation).

Interestingly, under this type of trance the subject could also experience lack of memory and a sort of divided consciousness that could be related to paranormal phenomena like 'clairvoyance', a form of extra-sensory perception. Moreover, the magnetized patient directed the treatment:

While he was in deep magnetic sleep, [the subject] was asked to establish his own diagnosis . . . and the form of his treatment . . . He was also asked to predict the development of his treatment: when he would recover, when the attacks would occur, etc. Thus was produced a kind of psychodrama in which the patient caused the magnetist to play a part in a series of successive catharses. (Chertok, 1981: 93)

Puységur's views on the nature of the 'magnetic fluid' differed slightly from Mesmer's. He did not deny its existence but, for him, the knowledge of its essence was not relevant as far as healing is concerned: 'I do not know any longer if there is a magnetic fluid, an electric fluid, a luminous fluid, etc. I am only sure and certain that to magnetize well it is absolutely useless to know whether a single fluid exists or not' (Puységur, 1786/1820, quoted by Crabtree 1993: 52).

While Mesmer, who liked astronomy and research of magnetic and electric properties of the matter, had a rather physicalist approach, Puységur, for his part, was more psychological and more subject oriented, closer to the point of view of modern psychotherapy.

Some observers have analyzed the difference in point of view from a socio-historical perspective. On his website the French psychiatrist Serge Delègue (1999) proposed the following analysis:

Mesmer against Puységur, it is the trance of the cities against the trance of the fields. It is the Republican trance against the Royalist trance, it is the Freemasonic trance against the Catholic trance. While Mesmer puts his patients in a big bucket for a collective bath, the Marquis attaches his subjects with ropes to an old oak.

Indeed as noted by Hughes and Rothovius (1996: 14), 'Mesmer was a product of the Enlightenment society and Culture'. He was widely inspired by Diderot, Voltaire and especially Rousseau's 'social contract' by which he attacks the institution of private property and promotes nature and 'universal harmony'. However, according to Darnton (1968), 'the literate French of the late 1780s tended to reject the cold rationalism of the mid-century in favour of a more exotic intellectual diet. They yearned for the suprarational and the scientifically mysterious. They buried Voltaire and flocked to Mesmer' (p. 165).

In these pre-revolutionary times, Mesmer's freemasonic atheist and libertarian ideas were very attuned with the view of man as a creature of science and reason in contrast with the belief in hostile supernatural forces maintained by the despotic institutions of the old order of the *ancien régime*. In the eighteenth century a lot of freemasonic lodges and secret societies had developed in Europe. They had a big influence on the ideology of the end of the *ancien régime* and offered a social matrix for a republican model. Actually, Mesmer's *Société de l'Harmonie Universelle* was first incorporated under French Law with the Masonic sounding title of the Lodge of Associates of Universal Harmony. 'It was Mesmer, with his Masonic associations from Vienna, where he and Mozart had been initiates of the Truth of Freedom Lodge of Freemasons, who insisted on this designation' (Hughes and Rothovius, 1996: 47). For the intellectual elite of the time, the Mesmerian practices were seen as a mirror at the physical level of the social revolution. It was about creating a 'crisis' to remove obstacles and restore natural harmony.

On the other hand, Puységur was a member of the aristocracy. During the Revolutionary reign of Terror he was arrested as a noble and a product of the *ancien régime*. Delègue (1999) claims that Puységur preferred direct suggestion rather than convulsive crises by

the fact it is only through its submissiveness to the master that the subject can recover the bottom of their part of omniscience, their divine part. Besides, most of his subjects being peasants who had served his family for generations, it was probably easier to create a climate of dependence and subordination.

Puységur, unlike Mesmer, did not seek the recognition of the scientific world. He was certainly influenced by Mesmer's freemasonic ideas, but he was also interested in the pre-romantic ideas of the time than would move away from rationalist philosophers to return to some medieval concepts. The 'me' and the 'self' would be more emphasized, in a philosophy principally based on feelings and personal emotions against reason. This might explain the fact that a lot of Puységur's followers became spiritualists rather than purely Mesmerian fluidists. Puységur's success gave birth to numerous societies that were formed in France for the study of the new phenomenon; a renowned one is the school of Strasbourg.

The somnambulistic current ended up dividing itself in two movements. The first, therapeutic, pursued the exploration of the 'patient's knowledge' and 'lucidity', and the quality of the relationship between practitioner and patient. The second kept on a more esoteric path and would attribute supernatural reasons to demonstrations of vision of future or acquirement of self healing techniques by patients in somnambulistic state.

Méheust (2001) explains that the 'fluidist' current comes directly from Mesmer, with a rather materialistic and physical view on magnetism as a force anchored in nature. With Puységur and his discovery of somnambulism, comes the 'psychofluidist' movement which continues with Fournel, Tardy de Montravel, Chardel, Deleuze, Charpignon, Teste, and Rouxel. For them, the trance state constitutes a sort of sixth sense. They are in phase with the spiritualist doctrine. On the other hand, the spiritualists separate in several branches. Some, like the Chevalier de Barberin, believed that the operator acts directly on the patient's soul through intention and prayer while others, the 'animists', are convinced that somnambulism is the consequence of a contact with angels and entities. In Lyon, groups of magnetizers formed a harmonic society called 'La Concorde' associated with Barberin and his friends in a group called 'Les frères de la Bienfaisance'. In the long run, these groups have played a rather marginal role in the history of hypnotism.

In spite of positive results, magnetism was neglected or forgotten during the French Revolution and the Empire. It stayed in obscurity until Joseph Philippe Francois Deleuze (1753–1835) published, in 1813, his *Histoire Critique du Magnétisme Animal (Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism)*. Deleuze was a highly respected scholar who became an assistant naturalist of the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. Then, he was appointed as librarian to the French Natural History Society. In 1825, he wrote a manual in *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism* in which he explained the magnetizing process step by step, what could be expected and the precautions that needed to be taken. He first introduced what is now called the 'method of suggestion' in producing magnetism. According to him, for the process to be effective, the subject had to forget everything he knew physically and metaphysically, remove all objections from his mind and have a firm belief and confidence in the power of magnetism. He also was the first to implement post-somnambulant (posthypnotic) suggestion, that is, implanted suggestions during trance state that would unconsciously be put into action during the waking state. As noted by Chertok (1979: 18–20), Deleuze was aware that a 'tender attachment' might occur between the magnetizer and the subject and he would make sure that there was always a witness during his sessions. Generally speaking, he would put considerable emphasis on the relationship between the magnetizer and his subject: 'in order to act effectively,

[the magnetizer] must feel attached to the person who seeks his cure, must take an interest in her, and must have the desire and the hope of curing or at least relieving her' (Deleuze, 1825, quoted by Gravitz, 2004: 120).

Another prolific author of the time on the subjects of animal magnetism and somnambulism was Alexandre Jacques François Bertrand (1795–1831). His main books are *Traité du Somnambulisme*, 1823; *Du Magnétisme en France*, 1826; and *de l'Extase*, 1829. At first, Bertrand firmly believed in the existence a magnetic fluid and in thought transferring when people are in a somnambular state, but then his scientific mind took over and pushed him to form his own opinion, recognizing equally the share of the magnetic fluid and that of the imagination. By so doing, he became closer to the ideas of the Abbé Faria who had trained his friend François Noizet.

Indeed, two main characters that happened to have visited Buzancy were to have a very big influence on the practice of modern hypnosis: the Abbé Faria, a Portuguese priest, and a Swiss performer named Charles Lafontaine.

The power of suggestion revealed

Faria and the Imaginationist movement

The Abbé Faria, or Abbé (Abbot) José Custódio de Faria, (1746–1819) was a colourful Indo-Portuguese monk who introduced oriental hypnosis to Paris. He is also well known for taking part in revolutionary movements in France in 1795 and being kept prisoner, for a while, in the infamous Chateau d'If. After he was released, he met Alexandre Dumas, the novelist, who used him as a character – the mad monk – in his novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He also inspired Francois-Auguste-René de Chateaubriand who mentioned him in his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. As far as the arts were concerned, the Restoration period, following the fall of the First Empire was dominated in France by a Romanticist wave. Passion, imagination and aesthetics had taken over the rational beliefs of the previous century. In 1811, Faria was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University de Nîmes in France, and was elected member of the Société Médicale de Marseille. However, he was very interested in Mesmer's and Puysegur's work and he moved to Paris to study the phenomena better. In 1813, at the end of the reign of Napoleon, the Abbé Faria offered a paying course in magnetism that was open to the public at large. Unlike his precursors, he did not believe that trance is mediated by some sort of animal magnetism and he was the first to affect a breach in the theory of the 'magnetic fluid'. For him the *baquet*, the transfer of energy, the crises, the fluid, all was an illusion and he was surprised that people would look for external means to attain a state that tends to occur naturally in the human species. The magnetizer's will does not intervene and does not act on the patient, with or without a special fluid. For him, trance was the product of two factors: the fascination felt by the subject towards the operator and the degree of persuasion that had been previously established. He applied what has since been known as 'conditioning.' He emphasized the power of suggestion and demonstrated the existence of autosuggestion. He also established that nervous sleep can be explained as a natural phenomenon. He introduced the notion of 'lucid sleep'. In 1819, he published his famous book *De la Cause du Sommeil Lucide* in which he explains his technique for inducing lucid sleep:

I seat them comfortably and energetically pronounce the word 'sleep' or I show them my open hand, at some distance, and have them fix it with their gaze, not turning their eyes aside or not resisting the urge to blink. In the first case, I tell them to close their eyes, and I always say that when I forcibly pronounce the command to sleep they will

feel a trembling all over and will fall asleep. (Faria 1819, quoted by Crabtree 1993: 123).

Faria remains as the founder of what is known as the 'imaginationist' movement with Baron d'Hénin de Cuvillers, Alexandre Bertrand, and Général François Noizet. The latter would explain the phenomena of trance on psychological grounds and attributed it to applied suggestion. In that, the imaginationists placed themselves in opposition to both the 'psychofluidists' and the 'spiritualists'. Furthermore, Faria can be considered as the precursor of the stage hypnotists who continue to use his techniques nowadays. Indeed, magnetism having been banned by the Medical academies, the only way to promote it was through public performances.

Charles Lafontaine (1803–1892), a Swiss magnetizer, who was touring Europe giving exhibitions, was forbidden by the church in Italy to practice cures that were considered as 'blasphemous imitations of the miracles of Christ'. He was famous for giving three performances of magnetizing a lion at the London Zoological Gardens. He then brought his stage demonstrations in other cities. On November 13, 1841 he performed in Manchester. Among the audience was a Scottish surgeon named James Braid.

The third and the fourth French Commissions: revival and decline of magnetism

Despite a big controversy against magnetism among the medical field, after the French Revolution, experimentation continued. In the 1820s, it was so widely spread in the Parisian community that in 1825, Dr Pierre Foissac, an active magnetizer who was experimenting at the *Hospice de la Charité*, felt that the 1784 commissions appointed by Louis XVI had been unfair to mesmerism. He persuaded the Academy of Medicine to appoint a new commission to investigate the subject. 'The academy should encourage research on magnetism as a very curious branch of psychology and natural history' (Foissac, 1931, p.206, quoted by Crabtree 1993: 186). In December 1825, a committee with Henri Marie Husson, head physician at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital of Paris, as a reporter, made a recommendation to undertake an inquiry on somnambulatory trance. The commissioners commenced their investigation at once but did not present their report before five years after their appointment in 1831. Despite a very positive report by Husson (1847), the Commission concluded that effects of magnetism were due to boredom, monotony and imagination. However, it was agreed that magnetism had a right to be considered as a therapeutic agent as long as it was used by physicians only.

The controversy among the Academy continued to grow and in 1837, as related by Marks (1947: 70), Crabtree (1993: 188) and Hughes and Rothovius (1996: 92), a new commission, called by Dr Berna under the supervision of Commissioner Frédéric Dubois d'Amiens, reported that magnetism did not exist, insensitivity to pain was not proven, that the magnetizer had no control over his subject and that clairvoyance was an illusion. Since mesmerism and somnambulism lost standing in France, it was in other countries like in the Victorian England that it started regaining some consideration.

From surgery to modern hypnosis

The first analgesic uses of magnetism

John Elliotson (1791–1868), was a Professor of Medicine at University College Hospital in London. Besides being one of the first physicians to advocate the employment of the stethoscope, he also studied mesmerism in 1829 with Richard Chenevix, a pupil of the

Abbé Faria (Marks, 1947). In 1837, he met in London with visiting Baron Jean du Potet de Sennevoy who told him about successful cases of mesmeric surgery he had witnessed in France at the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, seventeen years before. Consequently, Elliotson experimented with the use of 'magnetic sleep' as a powerful analgesic during major surgery on many patients. Yet, he aroused a cohort of enemies among the innovators of chloroform and was forbidden to practise at the University Hospital. This did not prevent him from practising. He would hold séances of magnetism in his home and edited a magazine, *The Zoist*, in which the subject was widely discussed. In 1849 he founded a mesmeric hospital. Despite numerous detractors, he continued to give lectures on clairvoyance, phrenology and odylic force until his death in 1868.

However, the person who became the most important advocate of mesmerism in surgery was James Esdaile (1808–1859), a Scottish surgeon, who was a friend and a correspondent of Elliotson's and one of the regular contributors to *The Zoist*. In 1845, in charge of the Native Hospital at Hooghly, in India, he was a pioneer in surgical anaesthesia just before James Young Simpson discovered chloroform. He used mesmeric analgesia successfully in numerous operations and provided his results to the government. A Government Committee reported favourably on his work and, in 1846, Esdaile was given command of a small hospital in Calcutta where he carried out thousands of painless operations and gained the appreciation of the native population. Despite his success, the hospital was closed down by his detractors. A second hospital applying the same methods was established in 1848. In 1851, Esdaile left India and one year later he published his pamphlet entitled '*The Introduction of Mesmerism as an Anaesthetic and Curative Agent into the Hospitals of India*' but, with the expansion of the use of chloroform, he received the same kind of opposition as his predecessors by the medical community as well as by the Church.

Braid: the end of mesmerism and the birth of modern hypnosis

It was James Braid (177–860), a Scottish surgeon, who put a definite end to the era of mesmerism and magnetism by renaming it and reinventing its procedure. He coined the term 'hypnotism', formed from the Greek word meaning 'sleep', and designating 'artificially produced sleep'. Realizing later on that hypnotic states of catalepsy, analgesia, anaesthesia and amnesia could be induced without sleep, he tried to suppress his own term for 'monoideism' but the word 'hypnosis' remained in usage.

Braid witnessed mesmerism twice when it was demonstrated by Lafontaine. At first he was incredulous but the second performance convinced him. James Braid's classic *Neurypnology, or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep* appeared in 1843, greatly inspired by Abbé Faria's work. Through hypnotism, he would produce what he, at first, labelled as 'nervous sleep' which differs from natural sleep. For him, the condition underlying hypnotism was the over-exercising of the eye muscles through the straining of attention. This state can be induced by the fixation of an object. He also experimented with phrenohypnosis by claiming that he could arouse diverse passions in his subjects by pressing on different zones of their skulls. He also noted that during the hypnotic phase, known as catalepsy, the arms, limbs, etc. might be placed in any position and would remain there. He totally rejected the mesmeric concept of magnetic fluid. With hypnosis, there is no direct action of the hypnotist on the hypnotized subject. His new science was also known as 'Braidism' as opposed to mesmerism. He believed that hypnosis should strictly be limited to the medical and dental professions as a powerful adjunct that could cure all kinds of ailments. In 1850, Braid's ideas were introduced into France by Dr Etienne Eugène Azam (1822–1899), a Professor of Medicine in Bordeaux, who published them

in the *Archives de Medicin*. Marks (1947: 81) reports that among the people who widely studied the phenomena was Paul Broca (1824–1880), the pioneer brain specialist and anthropologist, who experimented with Braid's method.

The French schools: The Nancy School of Hypnotism versus Charcot and the Salpêtrière

In France, since the advent of the Second Empire, the Romantic Literary movement had totally died to be replaced by sceptical philosophers and entertaining literature. Scientists and physicians were in line with this tendency. As a matter of fact, it was only with Auguste Ambroise Liébeault (1823–1904) and Hippolyte Bernheim (1840–1919) that the history of suggestion came to a new level of notoriety and recognition in the medical field.

Liébeault was a simple country doctor who had heard of Husson's report in 1831 and of Broca's hypnotic anaesthesia. Liébeault's interest in hypnosis started when he was a medical intern in 1848, but he was temporally diverted from it by his professors. He waited until 1860, when, as a country physician he decided to use it widely on his patients. He would mainly treat the poor and heal the sick by using regular medicines but also hypnosis. Liébeault believed that the hypnotic state is not provoked by any physical action or a magnetic fluid, but only by verbal suggestion, a concept very close to Faria's theory. Liébeault estimated that 95 per cent of people are hypnotizable. According to Marks (1947: 87), 'in the year 1880, 1014 patients submitted to hypnotization under Liébeault. Of these, only 27 were not influenced'.

At first he was vigorously criticized by the established scientific community. Hippolyte Bernheim (1840–1919) was among his detractors before he finally recognized his action. They participated together in the foundation of the school of Nancy with Liégeois and Beaunis. Unlike Liébeault, Hippolyte Bernheim was a fashionable doctor at the Faculty of Nancy who became interested in Liébeault's work and was not afraid to change his mind and recognize its worth. In 1882, he asked his 59-year-old friend to collaborate with him in what is called the 'School of Nancy'. Bernheim published the first part of his book, *De la Suggestion*, in 1884. The second part, *La Thérapeutique Suggestive*, followed in 1886. He helped establish Liébeault whose own Book, *Du Sommeil et des Etats Analogues Considérés Surtout du Point de Vue de l'Action du Moral sur le Physique*, published twenty years earlier, in 1866, became one of the main reference in the field of hypnosis. For Bernheim, hypnosis can be explained by the power of suggestion alone:

Such is the method of therapeutic suggestion of which M. Liébeault is the founder. He was the first to clearly establish that the cures obtained by the old magnetizer, and even by Braid's hypnotic operations, are not the work either of a mysterious fluid or of physiological modifications due to special manipulations, but the work of suggestion alone. The whole system of magnetic medicine is only the medicine of the imagination; the imagination is put into such a condition by the hypnosis that it cannot escape from the suggestion. (Bernheim, 1889: 207).

In that, Bernheim diverged somewhat from Liébeault's perspective, who believed indeed in suggestion but for whom 'hypnotic sleep' was still a real psychophysical state that could be induced, a deep level of hypnosis in which the subject became like an automaton in the hands of the hypnotist.

The years 1880–1890 constituted the golden age of hypnosis in France. The School of Nancy, in particular, gave the theory of suggestion its letters of nobility and attracted numerous followers. For instance, Émile Coué (1857–1926), the father

of applied conditioning and positive thinking, who developed the theory of autosuggestion as a therapeutic tool, was a graduate from the School of Nancy. Among others, the work of Liébeault and Bernheim also attracted the curiosity of a certain Sigmund Freud.

At about the same time, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), from the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris presented his findings on hypnotism to the French Academy of Sciences. For him hypnosis was an alternate state of consciousness, a pathological state linked to hysteria and could not be considered as a cure. His use of it was mainly experimental and only descriptive. He recognized three distinct stages in hypnosis: lethargy, catalepsy and somnambulism. However, his experimental protocol was scientifically questionable. Instead of inducing light hypnosis through verbal suggestion as was common since Faria's discoveries, he would physically provoke amnesia and convulsion using rubbing of the head, magnets and metal plates, in a very Braidian or even mesmerian way. Marks (1947) denounced Charcot's experiments by claiming that most of his conclusions were based on a restricted sample of three unbalanced patients.

The absurdity of Charcot's experiments is demonstrated by his working conditions, almost all his observations were made from the reactions of three pathological women recruited from the wards of la Salpêtrière. It never seems to have occurred to him to use a control experiment. (Marks, 1947: 86)

Moreover, Hughes and Rothovius (1996: 186) reveal that some of the women studied by Charcot 'became star performers whom he would call on repeatedly because of the accuracy with which they acted the roles he had decreed. That they were in fact acting seems not to have dawned on him'.

Incidentally, most of these errors were pointed out by Alfred Binet and Charles Féré, two of Charcot's devoted pupils, in their book *Animal Magnetism*, published in 1887. According to Hughes and Rothovius (1996: 185) the Belgian physician Joseph Delboeuf (1831–1896), who also witnessed Charcot's public demonstrations for several months in 1885–1886, was very critical of their spectacular style.

The Nancy school opposed Charcot's conclusion of hysteria, and won acceptance of hypnosis as a consequence of suggestion. Charcot's findings on hypnosis would have probably sunk into oblivion if it had not been for his renowned pupils Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud who later used hypnosis as a tool to treat hysteria.

Janet, Freud and the unconscious mind

Charcot, as well as Bernheim, had many students. Among them was Pierre Janet (1859–1947) who focused his work on automatism and dissociation in hysteric patients. He also pioneered the study of the subconscious mind. For him hysterical symptoms were the result of subconscious beliefs. He listed four kinds of unconscious acts: '(1) Those deriving from post-hypnotic suggestion, (2) those produced by anaesthesia, (3) those that occur during distraction, and (4) spontaneous unconscious acts. In the last category are acts performed by individuals suffering from hysteria' (Janet 1888, pp. 239–40, quoted by Crabtree, 1993: 308). About his first teachers in hypnotism, he kept his distance and wrote:

Entirely independent of these various schools, I set about criticizing these works. I proved in particular the very curious and historical relationship between the teachings of Charcot or Bernheim and those of the hypnotists whom they pretended to ignore and scorn but who nevertheless influenced them (Janet, 1930: 170).

He was particularly interested in the split personality phenomena that he called 'simultaneous psychological existences'. He believed that hysterical symptoms had been

dissociated from consciousness and often forgotten to be converted to fixed ideas. He would use somnambulism as a treatment to replace the hysterical personality with a healthy second one.

However, Charcot's most famous disciple was undoubtedly a 29-year-old Viennese physician who arrived on a fellowship at the Salpêtrière in 1885. His name was Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). He considered Charcot as his mentor and, following his footsteps, became interested in the psychopathology of hysteria. Sigmund Freud also travelled to Nancy in 1889 and studied with Liébeault and Bernheim. He even came to translate Bernheim's *De la Suggestion* into German. Returning to Vienna, he started to practise hypnosis. At the beginning, as mentioned by Gravitz (2004), Freud believed that hypnosis was 'nothing other than ordinary sleep', i.e. a physiological process (Freud, 1889/1953, p. 93, quoted by Gravitz 2004: 122). However, later on, he changed his mind on the nature of hypnosis:

It has long been known, though it has only been established beyond all doubt during the last few decades, that it is possible, by certain gentle means, to put people into a quite peculiar mental state very similar to sleep and on that account described as 'hypnosis' [. . .] The hypnotic state exhibits a great variety of gradations. In its lightest degree the hypnotic subject is aware only of something like a slight insensibility, while the most extreme degree, which is marked by special peculiarities, is known as 'somnambulism', on account of its resemblance to the natural phenomena of sleep-walking. But hypnosis is in no sense a sleep like our nocturnal sleep or like the sleep produced by drugs. Changes occur in it and mental functions are retained during it which are absent in normal sleep. (Freud, 1905: p 295)

Freud collaborated with Josef Breuer (1842–1925) on the use of hypnosis in the treatment of hysteria. They published a famous common paper, *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena* (1893), more fully developed in *Studien über Hysterie* (1937/1895). Freud used hypnosis to help neurotics recall repressed disturbing events, but in fact, he would perform the cathartic method used by Breuer in 1881 with his famous case Anna O. to treat his own patients. The cathartic method is not considered very effective by most current hypnotherapists. He would put his hand on his patient's forehead and, in a very leading way, urge them to remember childhood trauma or abuse. Soon he became frustrated by his own difficulty in inducing hypnotic trance and the fact that he could not hypnotize everybody:

But I soon came to dislike hypnosis, for it was a temperamental and, one might almost say, a mystical ally. When I found that, in spite of all my efforts, I could not succeed in bringing more than a fraction of my patients into a hypnotic state, I determined to give up hypnosis and to make the cathartic procedure independent of it. Since I was not able at will to alter the mental state of the majority of my patients, I set about working with them in their normal state. (Sigmund Freud, 1910, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, quoted by Chertok, 1979: 118–23)

Marks (1947) also explains that Freud felt that hypnosis failed in penetrating repression. On the contrary, he believed that repressed memories tended to be masked by the process of induced catharsis, and that such cures were unreliable and of short duration. For him, hypnosis only treated the symptoms of hysteria for a while, without curing the disease. Besides, he suspected an emotional dependence by the patient on the therapist that stripped them of their defences. In his *Autobiographical Study* written in 1925, Freud gave his reasons for rejecting hypnosis. He explained, among other things, that he completely gave up hypnosis when he discovered the principle of 'positive trans-

ference' with one of his female patients who, awakening from hypnosis, threw her arms around his neck: 'I was modest enough not to attribute the event to my own irresistible personal attraction, and I felt that I had now grasped the nature of the mysterious element that was at work behind hypnotism' (Freud, 1925, quoted by Chertok, 1979: 140).

Consequently, in 1905, he abandoned suggestion for his own 'free association' method that he developed in his psychoanalysis theory.

Coming from such an influential figure, Freud's denouncement of the use of hypnosis, combined with Charcot's death in 1893, had a very negative impact on its later development. In fact, as explained by Chertok (1979), hypnosis was only rediscovered after the First World War.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that there has been a huge historical evolution in the way trance states have been approached. In ancient times, they were seen as a good or sometimes a bad way to connect with the spiritual world. The human aspect of the individual was insignificant, almost erased within the process. Then, with Mesmer's animal magnetism, it was all about harmoniously reconnecting Man with nature. From Faria's concept of suggestion to Freud's transference theory, the stress was put on the hypnotist/subject relationship. Finally, the study of the subconscious mind led directly to the twentieth century where the focus was mainly put on the notion of self: how to behave, how to belong, how to feel happy, safe and healthy; a much more individualistic approach to hypnosis, in which practitioners, all over the world, from Émile Coué to Milton Erickson have been reminding their clients that any type of hypnosis is in fact 'self-hypnosis' and that the hypnotist is just a facilitator in the process.

Today, hypnotherapy is widely recognized by therapists all around the world as a clinical or a behavioural tool to treat psychological problems such as depression, fears and phobias as well as behavioural issues such as addictions or procrastination. It is also used by physicians and dentists as a pain reduction tool and applied in sport and all kinds of coaching. We seem to have finally come to a point beyond all the controversies and mistrust that have marked the history of hypnosis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Wade Pickren for his valuable advice and comments.

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