

THE LANDSCAPE OF HYPNOSIS IN FRANCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*

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Abstract

The author – a psychologist, psychotherapist and poetess – traces the history of hypnosis in France, the cradle of hypnosis. At the outset there were two conflicting schools, one originating with Charcot, a neurologist, who ended viewing hypnosis as a pathologic phenomenon associated with hysteria; the other with therapeutic goals originating with Bernheim and viewing hypnosis as a physiological state involving suggestion. From 1900 psychoanalysis dominated until the mid-century when Chertok and later Michaux struggled to stimulate a revival. In 1980 they founded the Groupement d'Etudes pour les Applications Médicales de l'Hypnose (GEAMH) for research and training purposes, which continues to host conferences to the present day. In 1983 Godin and Malarewicz established in Paris the first Milton H. Erickson Institute, and there followed a proliferation of institutes throughout France. From 1991 Roustang wrote prolifically offering an original Eastern and Western synthesis and therapeutic approach. In 1997 Bellet founded the Confédération Francophone d'Hypnose et de Thérapies Brèves (CFHTB) drawing together, by 2007, 21 affiliated organizations with 3000 practitioners in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Québec, and with affiliation with international societies. Copyright © 2008 British Society of Experimental & Clinical Hypnosis. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Introduction

We commemorated 75 years of the Dutch Society of Hypnosis on 28 April 2007. In Holland historically trainings were offered first to physicians then to psychologists, then to other professionals in health care, social workers, psychiatric nurses and dental hygienists. But meanwhile, what has happened in France?

1870–1900, France as the nest of hypnosis: two schools in conflict

In 1900 after 30 years of active development, hypnosis had disappeared from the scene. The School of La Salpêtrière with Jean-Martin Charcot and the School of Nancy with Hippolyte Bernheim had worked in opposite directions: on one hand, hypnosis was seen as a way to learn about the psyche and the functioning of the brain; on the other, hypnosis was a way to help the patient towards better well-being; to cure, to heal the patient. Those 30 years had been very active and many conflicts and attacks occurred between the two schools.

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Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893) had been interested in hypnotic phenomena since 1878. He carried out systematic research, wrote reviews and books and gave the well-known courses at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière. He was following the works of Franz Anton Mesmer on animal magnetism, which had been rejected by The Royal Society of Medicine, with the argument that what cures a patient is not a ‘fluid’ but imagination! This rejection was in fact an opening to consider imagination as a therapeutic resource in a therapeutic setting. Somehow psychotherapy was born!

Jean-Martin Charcot presented a communication to the Academy of Science on 13 February 1882 which gave back some dignity to hypnosis. His description of hypnosis remained ‘classical’: lethargy, catalepsy, somnambulism. Charcot gained recognition as a neurologist describing ‘nervous diseases’ but ended considering hypnosis as a pathologic phenomenon which can be associated with hysteria.

Hippolyte Bernheim, (1840–1919), adopted the methodology of Liébault – who was more interested in clinical applications and healing than in theories about the deepening states of hypnotic sleep – and developed hypnosis and suggestion as tools to help the patient stating that no one can be hypnotized against their will. For him, hypnosis was created by a physiological characteristic of the brain, had nothing to do with a pathologic state, but was a suggestive state that we happen to experience in every day life, such as anesthesia, sensory illusions or hallucinations. He founded the School of Nancy, which was more in favour with physicians, and gained international recognition in Germany, Austria, Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States. Many practitioners received training in hypnosis with interesting results.

In 1886, a scientific journal was created: *Revue de l’Hypnotisme Expérimental et Thérapeutique*, which was to disseminate ideas about hypnosis until 1900. The Hospital of Hôtel-Dieu in Paris then organized and hosted the first International Congress on Experimental and Scientific Hypnotism on 12 August 1889. A second congress was organized in London. But Bernheim was isolated. Charcot died. Hypnosis became progressively rejected.

For a decade, Sigmund Freud was trained by Bernheim; he stayed a few months with Charcot at La Salpêtrière. He used hypnosis but without success and recognized he was unsuccessful in mastering the technique: for him, it took too long for the therapist, not every patient could be hypnotized, and he considered suggestion an ‘abuse of personality’. He gave up hypnosis and developed a derived technique, psychoanalysis. Carl Gustav Jung was astonished by the results he obtained but could not understand what was going on, yet wanted to understand. He eventually abandoned it. Nevertheless Pierre Janet mentioned hypnosis significantly in his writings, notably in *Les Médications Psychologiques* in 1919, and in *La Médecine Psychologique* in 1923, but apparently they are more well known in the Anglo-Saxon world than among French therapists. Pierre Janet evoked a sudden turnaround of the physicians who curiously accused the practice of suggestion through hypnosis of being immoral. Hypnosis became seriously rejected by psychoanalysts and this was to continue for many years.

Hypnosis faded away. ‘A temporary accident in the history of induced somnambulism and in the history of psychotherapy’, Janet was to say. Was hypnosis a phenomenon that was too mysterious? Too impalpable? Too much dependent on patients’ initiative, on their imagination and on their resources? Too much praised or acclaimed by Janet’s ‘officers’, his disciples? Too much in line with animal magnetism? Not scientific enough? Not Cartesian enough? Was hypnosis portrayed as a devil, a demon? As a fascist approach? Psychology in those days was not held in favour. Does it deserve to be studied by physicians, by medical doctors?

Revival and re-emergence of hypnosis

In France psychoanalysis came to dominate the scene. Hypnosis faded away for about seventy years of silence, of absence. Yet it was from psychoanalysis that hypnosis was to come back to life.

Léon Chertok (1911–1991) had an interesting experience with Madeleine, a young woman, 34 years old, who had one child. She had some amnesia and was claiming she was single and 22 years old. The amnesia had started two years before. It was the sign of intense stress. Chertok proceeded by associations, by memories and when he used the tune of Ravel's *Bolero* some memories came back. Continuing to work in this way would have taken years and was overwhelming and exhausting. At the third session, Chertok remembered a time when he had seen one of his masters using hypnosis and reproduced this. He asked Madeleine to lie down, to focus her attention on his two fingers and she was already deeply in trance. Nothing else was needed. Memories were there. He suggested to her that when waking up, she would remember. She woke up elatedly. Chertok met with her for some sessions and practised hypnosis with her several times so as to help her with her conflicts. But most of the work had been done in the first session without interpretation, without elaboration.

To whom should Chertok talk, who would listen and take into consideration this incredible experience? Chertok decided to give a paper in 1953 at the Société Médico-Psychologique; he discovered that it was the first on hypnosis for 64 years (Montassut, Chertok and Gachkel, 1953).

At that time, he was having didactic psychoanalysis sessions with Lacan. He mentioned the story while Lacan was drinking his tea and continued to drink his tea, without lifting a finger. Although developing a certain hate towards Lacan, 'the master', who was putting his disciples in a collective trance, Chertok was in an intricate/complicated position: there was no way to leave Lacan; he was having didactic psychoanalysis sessions with him.

Léon Chertok, a 'heretic', as he called himself, became more and more involved with hypnosis even though he was rejected and never recognized by the Société Psychanalytique de Paris. He gave up fighting the psychoanalysts and defined himself as an 'activator', an inspiring actor, so that hypnosis regained some interest, regained its patent letters of nobility among the world of therapists.

So far, as a psychiatrist in a hospital and at the Faculty of Medicine Lariboisière-Saint-Louis in Paris, he managed to demonstrate that hypnosis could succeed where some other approaches failed, more especially in the treatment of pain. Didier Michaux, psychologist, after having been confronted with the healing rituals of the *Wolof* in Senegal (interview with D. Michaux, July 2007) met with him to question him about trance states. Chertok was then in the process of founding a research team and included the newcomer. For 10 years, Didier Michaux conducted research in an American manner in the Laboratoire d'Hypnose de l'Elan Retrouvé. Michaux first made his doctoral thesis on hypnosis (*Aspects Expérimentaux et Cliniques de l'Hypnose*, 1982). Then he integrated with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), but he focused on and took into account what the patient experienced. Conflicts and fights followed within the CNRS where hypnosis was not considered suitable for scientific research. He left.

Léon Chertok wrote profusely. His books in which he developed his views of the resources of the patient, on the body–mind interaction inside the patient, on how physicians should be more attuned to what the patient brings, were not very well received.

L'hypnose, Théorie, Pratique et Technique (1959) was published at his own expense but was reissued in 1961, 1963 and 1965 by Payot in a modified version, and then reissued again in a new, revised, more thorough edition in 1989. *Vers une Autre Médecine, Espoirs de Formation Psychologique des Futurs Médecins*, written with Odile Bourguignon in 1977, was ignored by the public.

In spite of all these rejections, hypnosis regained interest slowly, very slowly, among therapists.

Léon Chertok and Didier Michaux continued to work in the field of hypnosis and started to give training sessions in hypnosis. In 1980 they established the Groupement d'Etudes pour les Applications Médicales de l'Hypnose (GEAMH) with the goal to provide a framework for research and training. From 1993, the GEAMH organized congresses in Paris. Proceedings of each congress were published in books:

- Trance and hypnosis in 1993 (Michaux, 1995)
- Hypnosis, language and communication in 1996 (Michaux, 1998)
- Hypnosis, pain and suffering in 2000 (Michaux, 2002)
- Hypnosis and dissociation in 2004 (Michaux, 2006)
- Hypnosis and magical thinking in 2006 (in press)

Didier Michaux created the Institut Français d'Hypnose (IFH) in 1990 with the goal of organizing different research and workshops linked with the therapeutic practice of hypnosis and to give training in hypnosis approaches to health care professionals: physicians, psychiatrists, anaesthetists, psychologists, dentists, physical therapists, etc.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, a New World to be brought back to France

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, another key figure in hypnosis had become recognized and gained followers. Milton H. Erickson, an American psychiatrist, had engaged himself for many years in a hypnosis practice with no interest in creating, founding a new model of, or even referring to, a theory. In his practice the patient could rely on his benevolent unconscious mind so far as it was a reservoir of resources; the patient could use those resources to deal with the difficulties he/she was confronted with and to resolve his/her problems and conflicts.

Chertok met with Erickson and had the experience of being hypnotized by him. Chertok considered Erickson as 'almost diabolic' and didn't believe for one moment in the idea of a benevolent unconscious mind.

So hypnosis came back on the French scene again – from North America! Parallel and jointed moves.

Jean Godin (1930–2002) and Jacques Antoine Malarewicz (1950–) both psychiatrists, brought Ericksonian hypnosis back to France. In 1983 they established the first Milton H. Erickson Institute of Paris in order to promote the ideas of Milton H. Erickson in hypnosis and in therapy through workshops, trainings and conferences, and to regroup qualified practitioners in Ericksonian hypnosis. The Institute was very active in inviting the explorers of the first generation to give trainings or lectures, such as Ernest Rossi, Sydney Rosen, Jeffrey Zeig, Jay Haley, Herbert Lustig, Joseph Barber and some others such as Paul Watzlawicz and André Weitzenhoffer. And progressively, they invited other hypnotherapists of the second generation from Europe and Canada. Jean Godin made hypnosis move from Ericksonian hypnosis towards a 'new hypnosis'.

It took 10 years before the two next Milton H. Erickson Institutes were established and several more subsequently followed:

The French Milton H. Erickson Institutes	
1990	IMHE Avignon-Provence, Patrick Bellet
1990	IMHE Normandie, Yves Halfon
1993	IMHE Nord de la France, Bruno Fengler
1995	IMHE Toulon-Marseille, Dominique Megglé
1998	IMHE Nice-Côte d'Azur, Francine-Hélène Samak
2000	IMHE Nantes, Thierry Servillat
2003	IMHE Centre-France, Christine Guilloux
2004	IMHE Rennes-Bretagne, Claude Viot
2005	IMHE Rhône, Bruno Delcombel

Ericksonian hypnosis progressively grew and spread among therapists. More and more therapists became interested, went into training and used it in their practice, in their toolbox, in their 'reservoir of resources'.

In 1985 the Société Française d'Hypnose (SFH) was created by Jeannot Hoareau (1950–), a psychiatrist, and some other therapists to regroup hypnotherapists of the different approaches to hypnosis (classical, semi-traditional, Ericksonian, 'new hypnosis') with the idea to promote research on clinical applications of hypnosis and essentially to demystify hypnosis with the general public.

Little by little, gradually, hypnosis took its place and received more and more recognition as an efficient tool, a performative approach to help patients and clients in a better way.

Another outsider along the way

François Roustang (1923–), after studying philosophy, theology and psychopathology, went into psychoanalysis. He became a member of the Ecole Freudienne de Paris. He became interested in hypnosis and was lured into the pool of hypnosis. He developed a philosophical approach to hypnosis in relation to the teachings of the oriental school of wisdom. Since 1991 he has written voraciously, mainly on hypnosis, and is now an appreciated, discussed and renowned hypnotherapist emeritus. He questions the mechanisms of hypnosis and change, the art and the patience of the hypnotherapist: quite often the client is not sure he/she wants what he/she asks for; more often the client looks for an agreement and a validation of his/her project to change. Secondary gains appear then as primary gains.

Openings, gathering, regrouping: a confederation

More institutes and associations arrived to give training sessions and to promote hypnosis at the same time as other linked approaches were developed, such as the brief therapy model of Palo Alto which has been declined in different forms of family therapy. Bateson and Erickson have worked in the same way, or at least with the same basis, on how to get to the patient's world, to consider that the patient has their own resources and to rely on those resources to solve their problems.

In 1997, Patrick Bellet (1953–), a physician and acupuncturist and one of the pioneers, founded the Confédération Francophone d'Hypnose et de Thérapies Brèves (CFHTB) in

order to gather together the Milton H. Erickson Institutes and some other associations of practitioners that work in the field of hypnosis and brief therapies. In 2007 there are 21 affiliated organizations totalling about 3000 practitioners in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Québec.

Thierry Servillat states in the last Forum that ‘the time has come for a certain calm humility’. Simultaneously new attitudes and new ways of working are emerging in psychiatry, in palliative care, in maternity wards, in general medicine, in restoration of motor function, in algology, with children and with couples.

Congresses are regularly organized and hosted in various places, depending on the current president’s Institute:

Forums of the CFHTB

- 1st Forum ‘Art et Méthodes’ in Vaison-la-Romaine, 1997;
- 2nd Forum ‘Arts et Méthodes’ in Vaison-la-Romaine, 2000;
- 3rd Forum ‘La note bleue’ in Sanary-sur-Mer, 2003;
- 4th Forum ‘Vers une écologie de la thérapie’ in Saint Malo, 2005;
- 5th Forum ‘Créativité, Hypnose et Thérapies Brèves’, in Liège, Belgium, 2007.

The CFHTB opened itself to the international world in 2006 and became affiliated with the European Society of Hypnosis and with the International Society of Hypnosis.

Along the way, journals to disseminate the approaches of hypnosis

1989–2002 Phoenix

With enthusiasm, the first French pioneers and transmitters of Ericksonian hypnosis – Jean Godin, Patrick Bellet and Jacques-Antoine Malarewicz – developed a journal so as to disseminate the ideas of Milton H. Erickson, with reviews of workshops and trainings given by the explorers of the first generation, and to provide an open space and a tribune for clinical applications of hypnosis, for case presentations and for examples of scripts. When Jean Godin left the MHI of Paris in 1992, some kind of a split appeared from the pioneers. Unfortunately, the journal progressively fell apart. Too many hypnosis organizations? A lack of interest in the developments the pioneers have made? Pioneers behaving as veterans?

1996: Hypnoses

Another attempt to share ideas, concepts, questions, clinical applications and experiments was made by the Société Française d’Hypnose in 1996. But only one interesting issue was published which has not been followed by others! It represented an attempt to illustrate the creativity of therapists, and to help hypnosis gain recognition without the weight of its past and without ambiguity.

2006: Hypnose et Thérapies Brèves

Is it difficult to encourage therapists to write articles? There was a need. Jean-Pierre Joly (1934–2006), physician and president of the SFH, initiated the idea of a new journal in 2005, but died unexpectedly in the early days of 2006. Patrick Bellet, who already had experience in editing and organizing a journal, decided to give concrete expression to the idea and published the journal: *Hypnose et Thérapies Brèves*. In some ways, Patrick Bellet has kept his energy along the years to extend the knowledge about hypnosis and brief therapies among psychotherapists and health professionals.

Hypnosis and Thérapies Brèves has engendered great interest in the general public. It has the intention to provide and share techniques, information and updates that demonstrate how dynamic and effective these therapeutic methods and approaches can be. Articles cover a broad range of topics including working with varied populations, perspectives on historical figures and biographies of contemporary masters.

In conclusion

Evolutions, not revolutions. States of sleep, of numbness. Hypnosis as a ‘sleeping beauty’? France has in many ways been the cradle of hypnosis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is said so, or believed so. After a long silence of 70 years, under the impulse of Léon Chertok and the imports from Milton H. Erickson, hypnosis has regained some credibility among the professionals in the field of health care, and among some professionals in mental health care. In the health care world, in this French country known for its Cartesian spirit, the body–mind interaction seems to be recognized in talk but is not so much taken into account in practice. There is not so much sharing between therapists in the worlds of medicine and psychology. Nevertheless hypnosis has taken a sober place in applications such as pain management, anaesthesia for surgery, preparation for birth and the treatment of dermatology conditions.

Hypnosis is still hardly recognized in universities – two university programmes are now given this fall to physicians. Psychologists are still set aside from these trainings. The programmes are educative about hypnosis and the history of hypnosis, while practice is supposedly 50% of the programs. But how many physicians are involved? 40 to 70 a year?

Many more non-health care professional are trained in Ericksonian hypnosis and proclaim themselves experts in the field. Ericksonian hypnosis is in vogue and numerous self-help books for the general public are spread on the stalls of bookstores. This seems a worldwide phenomenon.

Is this a good or a bad thing? Some professionals, more often general physicians than psychologists, have a tendency to enter into the mould of miracles that are advertised in those trainings and into what I would call ‘fast hypnosis’ as opposed to ‘slow hypnosis’ practice. The legendary figure of Milton H. Erickson and the so-called ‘brief therapies’ have put a weight on their shoulders and they have to obtain results – otherwise they would be considered by some of their peers as bad therapists. But the general public is also looking for ‘fast hypnosis’. Bear in mind that the French population is said to be the leader in the personal use of psychotropic drugs. ‘Fast hypnosis’ as another option to Prozac? Extra-speed therapy? Should we take things as they come? The regrouping of professionals and of professional institutes and organizations in the CFHTB aims, in addition to gaining more expertise in the field of hypnosis and related approaches, at giving considerable impetus and at gaining, among the general public and health care professionals, more credibility for hypnosis and to make hypnosis an approved and proven field by professionals of health care. More credibility and legitimacy for hypnosis would also follow from encouraging research – but this is another story. The relatively recent brain research mainly from abroad seems to open a door for an attempt to gain more credibility and visibility for professionals.

Fast hypnosis, slow hypnosis. Hypnosis, as Chertok would say, is a mysterious phenomenon and we have to remain humble. Even though we do not know how hypnosis works or why it sometimes does not work, as Thierry Melchior states, hypnosis is a state in which the imaginary and reality are intricately interwoven. Hypnosis is not an industry

but an artistry. We still, now in the twenty-first century, have to plant seeds for hypnosis to grow into an efficient practice.

Notes

- 1 This was a keynote presentation at the 75th anniversary meeting of the Dutch Hypnosis Society meeting, Utrecht, April 2007.
- 2 The author is a psychologist-psychotherapist, coach, consultant and trainer, Paris, France. She has experienced and uses different therapy approaches such as Ericksonian Hypnosis, Brief Therapy (Palo Alto model), NLP, EMDR, EMI, Somatic Experiencing and TFT. She develops open views of the world, focusing on space and time, on reframing and experiencing, on healing rituals of passage, in an accompaniment on the way of life. She is the founder of the Institut Milton H. Erickson Centre-France; Vice-President of the Societe Francaise d'Hypnose; and a former member of the board of the Institut Milton H. Erickson of Paris (the first Milton H. Erickson Institute in France). She is a correspondent for the *Newsletter of the Milton H. Erickson Foundation*; a correspondent for the USA of the French-speaking Journal *Hypnose & Thérapies Brèves*; and a translator of abstracts for the *Journal of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis*. She is a member of the Reading Committee of *Jointure*, a French poetry journal.

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